

**The Poetics of Revolution:
Cultures, Practices, and Politics of Anti-Colonialism in Iraq, 1932-1960**

by

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**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(History)
in the University of Michigan
2013**

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*For Kate,
for your patience, your love, and your laugh*

Acknowledgements

I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to the Department of History and the University of Michigan not only for the critical resources that have allowed me to complete this project in a timely manner, but for shaping my understanding of academic and historical scholarship. Fellowship funding from the Horace H. Rackham School of Graduate Studies, the Eisenberg Institute for Historical Studies, and the Department of History allowed me to conduct extensive archival research and to devote my full attention to writing for several semesters. Lorna Altstetter, Diana Denney, and Kathleen King have provided immeasurable help in this process. Additional Arabic and Persian language study in Michigan, Wisconsin, Egypt, and Yemen was supported by a Critical Language Scholarship, two Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowships, and a fellowship from the Center for Arabic Studies Abroad. I am deeply grateful for the opportunities provided by all of these institutions, organizations, and programs.

My development as an historian and scholar of the modern Middle East was shaped by the incredibly community of scholars at the University of Michigan. I am particularly grateful to Kathryn Babayan, Michael Bonner, Juan Cole, Geoff Eley, Paul Johnson, Barbara Metcalf, Farina Mir, Gina Morantz-Sanchez, and Andrew Shryock for their roles in this process. I benefitted greatly from the tremendous intellectual community at the Eisenberg Institute. I was honored to participate in three different roundtable discussions at the Institute, and the thoughtful questions and advice that I received from faculty members and graduate students helped to strengthen the arguments of this dissertation. I am also grateful to the tremendous graduate student community in the Department of History, and particularly my fellow cohort members, for providing humor, advice, and insight throughout my years in Ann Arbor.

My dissertation committee members, Juan Cole, Geoff Eley, Farina Mir, and Andrew Shryock, have provided essential assistance in shaping this dissertation. Their advice at the earliest stages of this process ensured that this project would be both manageable and consequential. Without their encouragement I would have taken fewer risks and produced a less interesting dissertation. Their willingness to work through busy and conflicting schedules to meet deadlines, frequently on short notice, is a sacrifice for which I am truly grateful. Each one of their bodies of scholarship has served, in very different but equally significant ways, as a guide and inspiration for me in my own endeavors, and their questions and comments have helped me

to further develop and better express my own thoughts. It goes without saying that any flaws or shortcomings in this week are attributable to me alone.

I am incredibly fortunate to have enjoyed the support of a wonderful and loving network of family and friends. I owe my work ethic and commitment to my mother, Mary Jones. Though I may sometimes have tested the limits, her constant encouragement of my intellectual curiosity has taken me across the world and soon will send me back home again. Her love and support means everything to me. My older brother Colin, sister-in-law Kathy, and my beloved twin sister Kelly have provided constant inspiration, emotional support, and desperately needed humor through difficult years, and I could not have maintained my sanity without them. Though none of my grandparents have lived to see this project to completion, I owe a debt of gratitude to all four of them for their love and encouragement throughout the years. To my extended network of family members - Bill and Becky, Joe, Mike, Chris and Ann, Kurt, Kim and Hugh, Mary Anne, Bethany and Chad, Chris and Leah, Sean, Taylor, Cam, and Mia - I thank you for brightening my holidays and understanding my absences from family holiday celebrations, weddings, and funerals when my research took me beyond easy travelling distance.

The Woods and Shanahan families have treated me like a family member since the day that I met them. Jan Shanahan has given me humor, love, support, and meals since I started working on my dissertation. Robert Woods has been like a father to me, and I owe a great debt to him and Laura for helping to facilitate holiday travel and welcoming me into their home. Jessica and Charles have helped to make holidays both delicious and enjoyable. Colleen Woods has been a wonderful friend, colleague, and collaborator over the past seven years, and I cannot even begin to calculate my debt to her. Vince Messana, Noah Gardiner and Nancy Linthicum, Britt Newman, Andrew Ice, and Brad Wharton have all provided crucial friendship and support in academic or non-academic capacities. Harry and Ralphie have brought incalculable joy to my life, and I love them dearly.

Finally, I owe everything that I have achieved to Kate Woods, my best friend and true love. While the journeys of this long project have taken me away to Washington and Wisconsin, to London, to Egypt and to Yemen, Kate has remained by my side, even if from a distance. Her selfless devotion to the poor, underprivileged, and suffering people of Washtenaw County has been a tremendous inspiration to me on both an intellectual and a personal level. Kate has made incredible personal and professional sacrifices for the sake of my project and my career, and I

can only hope to repay that debt over the coming years. Her smile and laugh has made long and lonely Egyptian nights bearable, Ba‘thist poetry tolerable, and Michigan winters enjoyable. This work is dedicated to you, with love and affection.

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Abstract

This dissertation uses Iraqi poetry, memoirs, and newspapers alongside British and American archival documents to analyze the cultural dynamics of popular opposition to foreign political, economic, and cultural hegemony in the post-mandatory state. It argues that the varied instances of political, social, and cultural revolution during this period were rooted in a fundamental commitment to anti-colonialism and national liberation and illustrates the historical contingency of ideological conflict and sectarian commitments in nationalist narratives used by scholars to classify and categorize revolutionary movements as fragmentary expressions of local grievances and demonstrate the global dimensions of these revolutionary currents. By shifting attention from the domain of elite politics and the ideological debates of isolated intellectual circles toward the cultural arena of popular political poetry and the social dimensions of tribal disintegration, urban migration, and capitalist dislocation, the dissertation shows how popular poets appealed to diverse populations of peasants, workers, and students and helped to mobilize popular movements that transcended sectarian and class conflicts.

The dissertation shows that the Iraqi public overwhelmingly refused to consider colonialism as part of the historical past as long as power remained in the hands of foreign officials and the old colonial elite and virtually all revolutionary currents in this period were aimed at eradicating the vestiges of colonialism. It illustrates the ways in which social change and cultural politics contributed to the development of mass politics and the emergence of a public sphere and fundamentally shaped revolutionary anti-colonial movements and challenged competing loyalties to class, sect, and ideology. The dissertation analyzes the social role of popular poetry in shaping national political discourse and mobilizing mass political action and contends that the binary dichotomies of Iraqist and pan-Arabist nationalism or radical and reactionary social ideologies have obscured the national solidarities constructed through public protest and opposition to British and American policies in Iraq and the Arab world. By juxtaposing the testimony of immediate and retrospective historical texts, like poems and memoirs, the dissertation illustrates the extent to which these ideological narratives were applied retroactively to justify post-revolutionary political agendas.

INTRODUCTION

'FOR I AM THEIR DEATH'

On the morning of July 4, 1949, the celebrated Iraqi poet Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri (1899-1997) walked to the shop of his friend and comrade Ilyas, a prominent Armenian tailor in Baghdad, and asked him to sew a new suit. The unrivaled master of Iraqi poetry after the passing of Maʿruf al-Rusafi (1875-1945), Jawahiri had been invited to compose and deliver a lyrical ode to Hashim al-Witri, Dean of the College of Medicine, at a formal ceremony in Baghdad to honor the dean's acceptance of an honorary doctorate from the King's College School of Medicine in London. The ceremony would be attended by the political and social elite of Baghdad, including Crown Prince ʿAbd al-Ilah and then Prime Minister Nuri al-Saʿid, and Jawahiri wished to look as though he belonged. After Ilyas finished the poet's new suit, Jawahiri returned home and offered a tearful farewell to his wife and children before handing his wife the entirety of his financial savings, a sum large enough to sustain the family for more than three years. He then pocketed his ticket, an ostentatious object gilded with solid gold, and departed for the ceremony in a private car sent by the dean to collect and deliver him.¹

Jawahiri, who had already been arrested for political sedition on several different occasions, had good reason to make these arrangements with his family. He had, after all, politely declined the dean's request for some lines of verse, pleading his inability to recover emotionally from the death of his brother Jaʿfar, who was gunned down by Iraqi police alongside hundreds of other young Iraqi students on al-Maʿmun Bridge while protesting the Portsmouth Treaty signed between the British and Iraqi governments in January 1948. Jawahiri had agreed to attend the ceremony as a guest only, but unbeknownst to the dean and his political allies, he had in fact composed a poem for the event, though it resembled an ode only in poetic form and in its eponymous title, "Hashim al-Witri." Jawahiri planned to seize the stage in the middle of the ceremony and to throw the event into turmoil and chaos with an unprecedented public assault on the political establishment. Despite his strong personal and familial ties to several prominent members of the political elite, including the royal family, Jawahiri had good reason to once again expect arrest and indefinite imprisonment for political sedition.

¹ The entire episode is recounted in Jawahiri's memoirs. See Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrayati* (Damascus: Dar al-Rafidayn, 1991), 2:57-66.

As the guests chatted idly with one another, Jawahiri surreptitiously walked on stage, grabbed hold of the microphone, and silenced the crowd with the memorable opening to a now famous poem:

O Dean of the Hospital, a complaint from a friend
If I shout it will overflow, so permit me to whisper to a pal
I was informed that you have still been inquiring
About my presence, pleading and imploring here and there
And you say, how does such a dazzling star persist
In staying away from gilded gatherings filled with notables?
But now certainty has appeared and overwhelmed you
As the light of morning removes the darkness from your eyes
For indeed I silenced my sermons when I could not find
One who deserved even the echo of my anguished complaint
But you were acquainted with the harm done to the masses
Who poured forth, boasting and striving and gaining ground²

These opening verses brought the crowd to an uncomfortable silence as Jawahiri drew attention to the uneasy social dynamics of political collaboration with the Iraqi regime in the aftermath of the *wathba* massacres of January 1948. Hashim al-Witri had famously resigned from his post as Dean of the College of Medicine to protest the brutal slaughter of student demonstrators actions by state security forces on hospital grounds.

Witri, though, soon squandered his newfound popularity with the political opposition by returning to his post after the immediate political crisis had passed and the Iraqi regime had succeeded in reestablishing political control through the implementation of martial law. For Jawahiri and many others on the Iraqi Left, Witri's acceptance of the King College's honorary degree signified a political rehabilitation organized by Nuri al-Sa'id and his cronies and signified a disgraceful abdication of the moral claims forged in the streets of Baghdad during the *wathba* uprising. Jawahiri now turned to publically condemn Witri for this betrayal:

You went out and composed thousands of articles
On how they now respect the generation of the *wathba*
But while you worked with the obstinacy of a poet
The state destroyed our homes and suppressed our writers
And the rotten Thamesians who grip hold of the soul
Of this nation are treated as dear lovers and close relatives

² Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri, *Diwan al-Jawahiri* (Beirut: Bisan, 2000), 3:247-52. The translation of "Hashim al-Witri" and all subsequent poems are my own, unless otherwise noted.

For these tyrants bestow their bliss upon the white man
While leaving the poor brown one confined in the stable

The stunned crowd sat in silence before this tidal wave of poetic fury, with politicians and state dignitaries paralyzed by the dilemma of either suffering through public humiliation or exposing the naked oppression of their dictatorship and disaffected students astonished by this new expression of political dissent. As the poem wound to its end, meandering from the initial condemnation of the dean to a frontal assault on the state's blatant subservience to neo-colonial power, Jawahiri directed his final lines at the political elite, warning them that the power and fury of his verse could not be suppressed by ordinary means:

They boast that their towering tyrannical wave
Has obstructed from us every outlet and escape
But they lie, for my verses fill the mouth of time
Penetrating in perpetuity from the east to the west
Tearing them from their youth and dropping them
To their fate while destroying their grandeur of lies
For I am their death, bringing their houses down upon them
And inciting even the doorman and the baby to curse their names

When he finished reciting the poem, Jawahiri stepped away from the microphone, defiantly ripped his notes into shreds and allowed the scraps to flutter to the ground, and then walked out of the garden.

Jawahiri returned to his home after this spectacular act of public dissidence, apparently stunned that his exit had been unimpeded by security forces. He waited at home for three full days before police finally showed up at his house to demand a copy of the poem. Feigning surprise, Jawahiri calmly explained that he only had one copy, which he had very publicly destroyed, and that he couldn't recall much of the verse. Despite the stifling nature of censorship and repression in the country, Iraq remained at least nominally a constitutional monarchy with an independent judiciary, and the state was reluctant to pursue a high profile legal case against the poet without convincing evidence. Unfortunately for the poet, several of the medical students at the ceremony had managed to gather the scraps of paper from the ground and piece them back together. These young admirers of Jawahiri sent the reconstructed poem to a newspaper in Beirut, which enthusiastically published the poem and promoted the new political scandal. Jawahiri was arrested immediately after the poem's publication and detained for several weeks at

the Ministry of Defense. As Jawahiri has recalled, the state's efforts to intimidate him into silence were handicapped from the outset by the effusive praise heaped upon him by his interrogators. One particularly enthusiastic official offered the poet any room in the entire compound to use as his personal holding cell and apologized with considerable embarrassment for having to imprison him in the first place. Even Bahjat al-‘Attiyah, the notorious head of Iraqi secret police, privately apologized to Jawahiri for his arrest and detention, explaining that the order had come directly from Nuri al-Sa‘id and that he was powerless to overrule the directive. As the public clamor for his release intensified, however, Nuri relented and Jawahiri was released after barely a month in state custody.³

The "Hashim al-Witri" episode is neither the first nor the last example of the intimate connection between the poetic and the political in the history of modern Iraq. Several prominent poets were arrested and imprisoned for publicly supporting the Bakr Sidqi coup d'état of 1936, dozens were interned for endorsing the Rashid ‘Ali coup d'état of 1941, and several more were arrested and imprisoned for their role in the popular uprisings of 1948, 1952, and 1956. This particular political scandal, furthermore, was neither the most important nor the most dramatic instance of poetic interventions in the burgeoning public sphere. Jawahiri himself had already publicly attacked the legitimacy of the political elite on several prior occasions, though never with such scathingly violent language. More strikingly, Jawahiri and his comrade Muhammad Salih Bahr al-‘Ulum, a factory worker and union activist whose poetry was equally celebrated by dissident leftists and radical nationalists, had nearly succeeded in upending the old political order during the *wathba* protests just over a year before. Bahr al-‘Ulum, who directed the movements and stoked the emotions of ebullient crowds from atop the shoulders of local workers in the days leading up to the massacre on al-Ma‘mun Bride, was so brutally tortured for this activism by Bahjat al-‘Attiyah's secret police that he was unable to stand for months. Jawahiri's public eulogy for his fallen brother Ja‘far on the steps of the Haydarkhanah Mosque on al-Rashid Street in downtown Baghdad remains to this day the most emotional and memorable poem in the literary cannon of modern Iraq.

Jawahiri's act of public dissidence before Hashim al-Witri and the assembled Iraqi notables is instead most striking because of the historical context in which it emerged and the galvanizing effect of the ensuing public scandal on reawakening the dissident political currents

³ Jawahiri, *Dhikrayati*, 2:60-66.

then suppressed by the stifling political atmosphere that reigned in Baghdad. It is neither particularly incisive nor particularly controversial to note that modern Iraqi poets repeatedly challenged political authorities in the Hashemite period and lent their verses to support popular social movements and revolutionary political currents. The narrower question of the causal impact of these poetic interventions in the public sphere on popular mobilization, however, offers a more intriguing avenue for historical exploration and analysis. When Jawahiri grabbed the microphone and recited "Hashim al-Witri," Baghdad was still reeling from the brutal suppression of the *wathba* uprising, the disastrous collapse of the Arab resistance in Palestine, and the terrifying spectacle of the public executions of Comrade Fahd and other leaders of the Iraqi Communist Party. As Jawahiri later recalled, "terror reigned in the skies over the entire nation, but especially the capital Baghdad, pervading the streets and cafes and even the houses and their whispered words."⁴

The Palestinian poet and critic Salma Khadra Jayyusi broached the subject of this relationship in Jawahiri's own life and work in a passing comment on the poet's most important achievement:

The emotional sweep of his verse was the final liberating force in a poetry that had long suffered from emotional insincerity. It was also a liberating force for the spirit of the generation, and served as a catharsis for the suffocating undercurrents of Arab life. Al-Jawahiri's poetry may even have played an important part in preparing the Iraqi people emotionally for the advent and the eruption of revolution, but this is speculation beyond the direct purposes of this work.⁵

This dissertation is in large part an effort to take up this integral question from the vantage point of an historian, with a much broader examination of the role of popular Iraqi poets in general, rather than Jawahiri in particular. This exploration of the emotional catharsis provided by popular poetry in modern Iraq is deeply indebted to the historical concepts of social mobilization and moral economy. The project utilizes an integrative emphasis on the social and political context of cultural movements that makes poets and poetry the proper and deserving subjects of much broader historical dynamics. The political interventions of poets in the neo-colonial period of Iraqi history offer a critical revision of contemporary historical understandings of the period itself.

⁴ Jawahiri, *Dhikrayati*, 2:58-59.

⁵ Salma Khadra Jayyusi, *Trends and Movements in Modern Arabic Poetry*, Volume 1 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1977), 200.

The Problem of Anti-Colonialism in Iraq

The League of Nations' decision to terminate the British Mandate in Iraq on October 3, 1932 - some eighteen years before it was set to expire - signaled the formal end of colonial rule in Iraq and the dawn of a new era of national independence. Despite the considerable celebratory fanfare and self-congratulatory rhetoric of the Iraqi political elite in both Geneva and Baghdad, popular responses to the decision were decidedly more cynical and caustic. The young poet Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulum bitterly expressed the disaffection of many young Iraqis in his poem "The False Independence of the Mandate's Wake":

Oh dancers to the prospect of a new era
That contains all the old and ragged things
What is the difference between the Mandate
And its genitals on the body of Independence?⁶

Bahr al-'Ulum's political cynicism was certainly not unfounded. The early termination of the mandate had been carefully negotiated by British and Iraqi politicians several years earlier and codified in the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930, which was ratified by a carefully packed parliament in the face of massive public opposition. As in many other parts of the colonized world where colonial authority was not broken or decisively weakened by violent rebellion or sustained anti-colonial political campaigns,⁷ "national independence" in Iraq was a preemptive move to retain colonial privileges and protect colonial interests under the custodianship of reliable members of the national elite before such privileges and interests could be threatened by revolutionary political currents.⁸

As Samira Haj has noted, British colonial authorities developed local political institutions within a nominally constitutional framework that constrained popular sovereignty by preserving in perpetuity the political dominance of a "monarchic oligarchy." The Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930 guaranteed Britain's continual access to local military bases and codified abstract commitments to British supervision in foreign policy matters and Iraqi assistance to Britain under "threat of war" that would offer sufficient legal justification for virtually any future British

⁶ Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan Bahr al-'Ulum* (Baghdad: Matba'at Dar al-Tadamun, 1968), 1:59.

⁷ See, for example, Jost Dülffer and Marc Frey, eds., *Elites and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

⁸ Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation Building and a History Denied* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 5-42 and Susan Pedersen, "Getting Out of Iraq - in 1932: The League of Nations and the Road to Normative Statehood," *American Historical Review* 115:4 (2010), 975-1000.

intervention in Iraqi affairs. The institutional structures of electoral democracy in the post-mandatory state ensured that parliamentary representatives would not be elected by popular majorities, but rather would effectively be selected by the Crown through a two stage process in which secondary electors to cast the final and decisive ballots. The inherent corruption of this political system was most apparent in its rural manifestations, where tribal shaykhs enjoyed virtually unchecked control of the entire electoral process. Where institutional apparatuses failed to prevent the emergence of viable political alternatives, the state relied on both informal powers of intimidation and coercion and the formal authority of courts-martial in the frequent periods of martial law to dissuade, discipline, and punish political challengers. This consolidation of political authority was accompanied by a dramatic expansion of landowner rights during and after the colonial period, resulting in the emergence of semi-feudal living and working conditions for the peasantry of southern Iraq.⁹

The relative monopolization of power and capital by this "monarchic oligarchy" has at times been obscured by the notable political turmoil and ostensible instability of the Iraqi regime during the "neo-colonial" period (1932-1958). In the twenty-six year period between formal independence and the fall of the monarchy, forty-five different cabinets rose and fell, with an average duration of just eight months.¹⁰ At least eight of these cabinet changes occurred through the direct intervention of the Iraqi Army in the political arena. Yet this apparent instability masked the fundamentally cosmetic nature of political change in the old regime. The constant rise and fall of cabinets reflected internal disputes and rivalries between members of an entrenched political elite that British officials affectionately dubbed "the Old Gang." Nuri al-Sa'id himself headed fourteen different cabinets during the monarchy years and eleven other individuals headed multiple cabinets.¹¹ The vast majority of military interventions, furthermore, merely reflected the degree to which rival members of the political elite could count on the support of their allies in the military leadership to forcibly support their claim to power.¹² Iraqi

⁹ Samira Haj, *The Making of Iraq, 1900-1963: Capital, Power, and Ideology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 27-53.

¹⁰ Majid Khadduri, *Independent Iraq, 1932-1958: A Study in Iraqi Politics*, 2nd Edition (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 26-29.

¹¹ 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: Princeton University Press, 1978), 180-84.

¹² Before the July Revolution of 1958, which finally brought down the Hashemite monarchy, only the coup d'états of Bakr Sidqi in 1936 and Rashid 'Ali al-Kaylani in 1941 threatened the basic structure of the "monarchic oligarchy"

politics during the neo-colonial period, in short, was merely the political dalliance of the old colonial elite.

While the most prominent stalwarts of the literary and cultural intelligentsia had long since come to terms with the Hashemite monarchy established in the wake of the 1920 uprising, the younger generation of dissidents quickly concluded that Iraqi "independence" would not be complete without political revolution. Social democrats and leftist activists converged around the Ahali Group and the remnants of Ja'far Abu al-Timman's National Party and fatefully supported Bakr Sidqi's coup d'état of 1936 in the hope that a military regime would allow them to pursue an ambitious agenda of social and political reform.¹³ Radical nationalists, on the other hand, were contended that the liberation of neighboring Arab countries must take precedence over social and political reform and were instead drawn toward the aura of authoritarianism and militarism promoted by disaffected "Old Guard" politicians like Yasin al-Hashimi and Rashid 'Ali al-Kaylani. Both the socialists and the radical nationalists enthusiastically supported the Rashid 'Ali coup d'état of 1941 as a means of enacting their own domestic agendas, but the rapid collapse of the movement and the resumption of British military occupation laid bare the difficulties of achieving revolutionary aims by colluding with prominent politicians and military officers. Some of the older and wealthier supporters of the Rashid 'Ali movement, including notable individuals like Najj Shawkat, 'Ali Mahmud al-Shaykh 'Ali, Khalil Kenna, and Musa Shahbandar, opted to abandon their commitment to anti-colonial revolution in exchange for political rehabilitation and the assurance that their own financial interests would not be compromised by popular revolution. The support of most of the younger rank-and-file of the radical nationalist movement, however, coalesced around the new Istiqlal Party, which articulated a decidedly more populist agenda for social reform and actively forged political alliances with the leftist parties as part of a new anti-colonial "national front."¹⁴

The shifting landscape of national politics in Iraq in the post-war period fundamentally altered the nature of the demands and discourse of the anti-colonial movement. The

in any real sense. The threat posed by the first of these coup d'états evaporated after Bakr Sidqi and his political ally Hikmat Suleiman moved quickly to reassure the British Embassy, King Ghazi, and those member of the political elite who had not fled the country. The threat posed by the Rashid 'Ali coup d'état was promptly handled by a new British invasion and occupation of the country.

¹³ On the Ahali Group, see Mudhaffar 'Abd Allah al-Amin, *Jama'at al-Ahali: Munshu'ha, 'Aqidatuha, wa Dawruha fi al-Siyasah al-'Iraqiyah, 1932-1946* (Beirut: al-Mu'assassah al-'Arabiyah li al-Dirasat wa al-Nashr, 2001), 104-34.

¹⁴ Eric Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 82-108.

consolidation of state power in the aftermath of the Rashid 'Ali movement and the subsequent appropriation, elimination, or suppression of the variant political factions that questioned the nature of the independent state's relation to Britain forced both leftists and radical nationalists to reconsider the relationship between culture, society, and nation. The simultaneous defection of prominent political leaders from the anti-colonial to the pro-British camp and the emergence of new receptive audiences of peasants and workers displaced and disaffected by the social transformation of the countryside and the social alienation of capitalist expansion prompted many anti-colonial nationalists to reconsider their longstanding opposition toward the Iraqi Left. The political opposition movements of the late 1940s and 1950s increasingly insisted on drawing a strict dichotomy between collaborators and rebels. The old landed tribal shaykhs, alongside an emerging class of industrial capitalists who had once been courted by the rival currents of leftist and radical nationalist anti-colonialism, now joined Nuri al-Sa'id and the "Old Gang" as the principle symbols of neo-colonial hegemony in Iraq. The evolving discourse of anti-colonialism, which dramatically entered the public sphere with the emergence of urban mass politics and the popular uprisings of 1948, 1952, and 1956, was reconstituted as a revolutionary quest for popular democracy and social justice.¹⁵

The new affinities and solidarities forged between the Left and the Right during this period, however, were not strong enough to survive the definitive victory of the anti-colonial movement and the splintering of the national front into competing ideological camps dominated by the leftwing Iraqi Communist Party and the rightwing Ba'ath Party. After the immediate euphoria of the July 1958 Revolution began to fade and the new radical government of 'Abd al-Karim Qasim began to run out of convenient political targets equally loathed by both Left and Right for the carnivalesque show trials of the Mahdawi Court, the two factions suddenly turned against one another in early 1959. While the moderate wings of each side struggled to resist the rising tide of rhetorical animosity and political violence, the enmity between the Communists and the Ba'athists would not be contained. Leftists now denounced the radical nationalists as reactionary obstacles to the realization of social justice and the radical nationalists increasingly attacked leftists as tools of the new Soviet imperialism. More alarming for the prospect of the nation's future, radical nationalists began to frame the conflict as a product of sectarian

¹⁵ Orit Bashkin, *The Other Iraq: Pluralism and Culture in Hashemite Iraq* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 87-121.

attachments and cultural perversions that threatened their fundamental national identity. While it was the televised execution of 'Abd al-Karim Qasim and the subsequent massacre of several thousand communists and communist sympathizers by Ba'athist officers and operatives in early February 1963 that permanently and definitively destroyed the tenuous national unity forged through decades of anti-colonial struggle, the transformation of ideological cleavages into social antagonisms was already apparent and irreversible by 1960, which is where this dissertation concludes.

Despite the relatively rapid collapse and fragmentation of the anti-colonial movement in the post-revolutionary period, it would be a grave mistake to conclude that the solidarities of national front politics were superficial and designed to fail. In a grotesque irony of history, the very popularity of the Ba'ath Party among both Sunnis and Shi'a in the 1950s and 1960s is a testament to the basic strength of these new discourses of national unity. The emerging Ba'athist ideology in Iraq was in many ways a compromise between the radical nationalism of the 1930s and 1940s and the socialist impulse of the Iraqi Left. In rejecting both the reactionary social interests of the older generation of pan-Arabists and the internationalist agenda of the Iraqi Communist Party, the Ba'athists sought to consummate a totalizing anti-colonial victory that promised national liberation from imperialism, capitalism, and communism.¹⁶ This deep yearning for a revolutionary catharsis was fueled by the increasingly nebulous nature of colonialism in local Iraqi experiences.¹⁷ Popular disaffection with the state's subservience to imperialist demands and dictates prompted many Iraqis to identify the state itself as an apparatus of colonial power, and the repeated failures of the anti-colonial movement to bring down the state fueled an ever increasing effort to identify the collaborators and traitors responsible for its perseverance.

Historiographical Survey

The historiography on modern Iraq has evolved significantly over the last several decades as historians have uncovered additional and unconventional archives and to apply new analytical and theoretical tools to entrenched historical narratives. Two recent works on British colonialism

¹⁶ This defiant discourse of complete national liberation is particularly apparent than in the series of editorials penned by the Iraqi poet Badr Shakir al-Sayyab for *al-Hurriyah* in 1959 to explain his defection from the Iraqi Communist Party to the Ba'ath Party. Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, *Kuntu Shuyu'iyān* (Cologne: Manshurat al-Jamal, 2007).

¹⁷ Anne McClintock's rumination on the problem of "the pastness of colonialism" offers a useful reminder that the chronological divisions between colonialism, neo-colonialism, and post-colonialism remain obscure. Anne McClintock, "The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term 'Post-Colonialism,'" *Social Text* 31/32 (1992), 84-98.

and neo-colonialism have built upon the foundational historical narratives of Majid Khadduri and Peter Sluglett.¹⁸ Toby Dodge has effectively demonstrated the importance of ideology in shaping colonial policy and underscored the influence of Orientalist conceptions of Ottoman despotism and tribal romanticism in guiding the radical transformation of the Iraqi social landscape during the colonial period.¹⁹ Matthew Elliot, on the other hand, has elaborated on the British role in shaping the political institutions of the electoral process and the parliamentary system in the neo-colonial period of "national independence."²⁰ While Elliot's casual dismissal of Iraqi sources as less authoritative than colonial archival records and committed defense of British policy as the responsible stewardship of the "peaceful evolution" of the Iraqi monarchy compromise the historical value of his work, his empirical research convincingly establishes the extent and limitations of neo-colonial power in the period of formal independence.

While there is still no authoritative history of Iraqi culture, politics, and society during the period of the British Mandate, two recent works on the history of the Iraqi Shi'a during this period have complemented the historical narratives of colonial policy and ideology introduced by Sluglett and Dodge in a critically important manner. These works have provided a critical and definitive intervention in the broader historical debates about the nature of religious sectarianism and the strength of theocratic impulses in the colonial period.²¹ Yitzhak Nakash and Pierre-Jean Luizard have produced incisive historical studies of the Iraqi Shi'a and highlighted both the oppositional and collaborative nature of interactions between the colonial state and the 'ulama.²² Both works stand out, in particular, for their ability to build upon essential archival evidence with innovative local sources that broaden historical narratives previously confined to the experiences of the political elite.

By far the most important historical intervention in the ongoing effort to reframe the focus of modern Iraqi history from elite politics toward a more comprehensive analysis of culture and society, however, is Hanna Batatu's *magnum opus* on class, social change, and revolutionary

¹⁸ Khadduri, *Independent Iraq* and Peter Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq, 1914-1932* (London: Ithaca Press, 1976).

¹⁹ Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*.

²⁰ Matthew Elliot, *'Independent Iraq': The Monarchy and British Influence, 1941-58* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1996).

²¹ For the earlier formulations of this debate, see particularly Elie Kedourie, "Reflexions sur l'histoire du Royaume d'Irak (1921-1958)," *Orient* 11:3 (1959), 55-79 and Amal Vinogradov, "The 1920 Revolt in Iraq Reconsidered: The Role of Tribes in National Politics," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 3:2 (1972), 123-39.

²² Pierre-Jean Luizard, *La Formation de l'Irak Contemporain: Le Rôle Politique des Ulémas Chiïtes à la Fin de a Domination Ottomane et au Moment de la Création de l'État Irakien* (Paris: CRNIS Editions, 1991) and Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

political movements in modern Iraq.²³ Batatu's work remains unrivalled, both for the breadth of its historical research and the scope of its critical inquiry, and no other historian of modern Iraq has managed to gain access to the secret Iraqi police files and documents of the Iraqi Communist Party utilized by Batatu or to replicate his integration of oral interviews and historical narrative.²⁴ Since the publication of Batatu's twelve hundred page tome, only Samira Haj has been brave enough to offer a new intervention in Iraqi social history.²⁵ Haj responded to the daunting challenge of building upon Batatu's achievements by proposing a departure from Batatu's empiricism and "fetish for facts" and instead attempting a synthesis of data and documents into a coherent theoretical framework that situates capitalist expansion in Iraq within a broader global context. While the paucity of historical evidence for many of the book's argument weakens the book's impact, Haj's intervention raises critical questions about the insularity of much scholarship on modern Iraq.

The general reluctance of contemporary scholars to deal directly with the empirical challenges of contesting or complementing Batatu's arguments about social transformations and class consciousness in modern Iraq led many to take up the comparatively less daunting task of elaborating upon Batatu's speculative suggestions about the formation of national identity. Reeva Simon and Peter Wien have explored the ideological foundations of Iraqi nationalism in the period before World War II and reached opposing conclusions about the comparative strength of fascist ideologies during the war years. Simon contends that fascism was in fact a formidable ideological influence on the military officers, politicians, and intellectuals who supported the Rashid 'Ali coup d'état of April 1941 and subsequent alliance with Nazi Germany and points to the shared cultural and ideological roots of both Nazism and Sati' al-Husri's brand of pan-Arabism in the romantic nationalism of Herder, Fichte, and Arndt.²⁶ Wien, in contrast, argues

²³ Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 180-84.

²⁴ Perhaps the most telling evidence of the work's continued influence is the amusing, though certainly deserved, articulations of reverence by other historians wishing to make critical qualifications. Matthew Elliot, for example, who clearly loathes Batatu's political agenda and vehemently disputes Batatu's depiction of the Iraqi Communist Party's popularity in the 1950's, nevertheless acknowledges the book as an "outstanding account." Samira Haj, on the other hand, who deeply admires Batatu's historical achievement, notes at one point that "even Hanna Batatu, whose writing marks a radical departure from 'traditional' orientalist historiography, can sometimes be faulted for relying on this essentialist notion when analyzing the 'tribes.'" See Elliot, *Independent Iraq*, 2 and Haj, *The Making of Iraq*, 15.

²⁵ Haj, *The Making of Iraq*.

²⁶ Reeva S. Simon, *Iraq Between the Two World Wars: The Creation and Implementation of a Nationalist Ideology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

that the Iraqi adoption of "fascist imagery" was a superficial expression of shared geo-political interests in the destruction of the British and French empires and that the popularity of authoritarian political movements in this period reflected a stronger identification with the politics and policies of Mustafa Kemal and Reza Shah than with Hitler or Mussolini.²⁷

Several other scholars *have* moved beyond this narrow chronological and thematic focus to discuss more broadly the ideological competition between romantic pan-Arab nationalism and cosmopolitan Iraqist nationalism. Drawing on Benedict Anderson's notion of imagined communities, Sami Zubaida builds upon Batatu's tentative thesis and argues forcefully that while pan-Arabism retained divisive elements of authoritarianism, communalism, and racialism, "Iraqism" developed as a leftist, secular, and anti-communitarian movement that allowed Iraq to be "imagined as a nation of all of its communities."²⁸ Eric Davis takes up this argument in his own manuscript in order to illustrate the effect of these ideological divisions on the political movements of modern Iraq and, most importantly, to explain how the Iraqists failed to effectively challenge the pan-Arabist appropriation of nationalist imagery and historical memory.²⁹ More recently, Orit Bashkin has used the political struggles of the 'Abd al-Karim Qasim era (1958-1963) as a case study of the cultural politics at work in the ideological contestations of pan-Arabists and Iraqists.³⁰

While the turn towards nationalism as an ideological framework for the ethnic and sectarian tensions and social conflicts that emerged during the monarchical period significantly expanded the scope of political subjectivity represented in the historiography of modern Iraq, the structural limitations of nationalist political discourse ensured that these discussions would largely remain confined to an intellectual history of a particular class. Recent interventions in the cultural and literary history of modern Iraq by Muhsin al-Musawi and Orit Bashkin have helped to address this deficiency by exploring and analyzing the response of Iraqi artists, intellectuals, and politicians to the critical issues of imperialism and modernity.³¹ Both works broaden our

²⁷ Peter Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism: Authoritarian, Totalitarian, and Pro-Fascist Inclinations, 1932-1941* (London: Routledge, 2006).

²⁸ Sami Zubaida, "The Fragments Imagine the Nation: The Case of Iraq," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34:2 (2002), 205-15.

²⁹ Davis, *Memories of State*.

³⁰ Orit Bashkin, "Hybrid Nationalisms: Watani and Qawmi Visions in Iraq under 'Abd al-Karim Qasim, 1958-61," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43:2 (2011), 293-312.

³¹ Muhsin J. al-Musawi, *Reading Iraq: Culture and Power in Conflict* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006) and Bashkin, *The Other Iraq*.

understanding of intellectual debates about memory and identity by moving beyond the narrow range of nationalist politics to incorporate new discussions about colonialism, capitalism, tribalism, art, education, and gender. These interventions offer a new horizon for an historical inquiry that seeks to integrate discussions of cultural politics and social history.

The path forward in forging ever more complex, complete, and critical histories of modern Iraq, however, must reflect not only on the tremendous achievements of past and present scholars and the new avenues of exploration opened by their insights and questions but also the comparative analysis of other bodies of historical literature that might better reflect the particular deficiencies of the historiography of modern Iraq. This dissertation draws influence from five such bodies of literature in an effort to construct a more sophisticated and less insular narrative of the anti-colonial movement in modern Iraq. First, a growing body of historical literature analyzing anti-colonial discourses and the politics of anti-Westernism in the colonized world underscores the need for similarly complex and sophisticated analyses of local responses to colonialism and neo-colonialism in Iraq. The most obvious basis of this scholarship has been the heated ideological debates about Orientalism and the "Clash of Civilizations" that emphasize the singularity of Western colonialism and Islamic nativism.³² More recent theoretical work on the subject has moved beyond these arguments about cultural singularity toward an epistemological analysis of how Western categories of rationality and modernity have shaped and constrained historical analysis of the colonized world.³³ At the empirical level, several scholars have taken up the challenge posed by the critics of Edward Said and, drawing upon Sadiq al-'Azm's conception of "Orientalism in Reverse," have begun to document the historical dynamics of anti-colonialism

³² While this body of literature has gradually blurred the lines between academic and non-academic writing and in the process grown far too expansive to comprehensively catalogue, several works stand out as unique, if problematic, contributions to the debate. On the thesis of Islamic nativism and the problem of modernity in the Islamic world, see Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong?: Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) and Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004). On the thesis of Orientalism, see Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), Sadiq Jalal al-'Azm, "Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse," in *Khamsin* 8 (1981), 5-26, Aijaz Ahmad, "Orientalism and After: Ambivalence and Metropolitan Location in the Work of Edward Said," *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1992), 159-220, and Daniel Martin Varisco, *Reading Orientalism: Said and the Unsaid* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007).

³³ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), Peter Gran, *Beyond Eurocentricism* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1996), Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), and Couze Venn, *Occidentalism: Modernity and Subjectivity* (London: Sage Publications, 2000).

and anti-Westernism in the Middle East.³⁴ These new contributions to the historical debate about colonialism in the Middle East have notably centered upon the dynamics of anti-Westernism in Iran and Turkey, perhaps because the ambiguous and indirect nature of the "colonial encounter" in those countries offered a more fertile ground for moving beyond the superficial documentation of anti-colonial politics and violence in the colonized Arab world. Recent scholarship on anti-colonial and anti-Western discourse in Iraq and Egypt, respectively, by Muhsin al-Musawi and Robbert Woltering, however, have underscored the relevance of these discussions in the Arab world by highlighting the complexity and sophistication of local responses to colonial and neo-colonial discourse.³⁵ These new critical interventions underscore the need for more integrative analysis of anti-colonial politics in the Arab world that foreground historical and social context and take into account cultural critiques of the hegemonic onslaught of Western capitalism and modernity.

The continued constraint of these academic interrogations of anti-colonialism by the contours and boundaries of political and intellectual history demands a more innovative approach that engages more directly with social history. Here, the significant body of historical literature affiliated with or influenced by the subaltern studies collective's writings on South Asia constitutes the second major source of intellectual inspiration for this dissertation project. Because anti-colonialism in the Arab world has been studied largely from the vantage points of Islamic studies and political histories, little attempt has been made to explore the popular dimensions of anti-colonial movements and ideas.³⁶ Batatu's discussion of popular opposition to colonialism and neo-colonialism in Iraq and the role of anti-colonialism in fueling the radical political movements of the political underground has inspired numerous scholars to complement his work by focusing on the development of anti-colonial discourse and thought among Iraqi

³⁴ See Mehrzad Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996), Ali Gheissari, *Iranian Intellectuals in the 20th Century* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), Ali Mirsepassi, *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization: Negotiating Modernity in Iran* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and Historiography* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), Meltem Ahiska, *Occidentalism in Turkey: Questions of Modernity and National Identity in Turkish Radio Broadcasting* (London, I.B. Tauris, 2010), and Pankaj Mishra, *From the Ruins of Empire: The Intellectuals Who Remade Asia* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012).

³⁵ al-Musawi, *Reading Iraq* and Robbert Woltering, *Occidentalisms in the Arab World: Ideology and Images of the West in the Egyptian Media* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2011).

³⁶ Bobby S. Sayyid, *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism and the Emergence of Islamism* (London: Zed Books, 1997).

intellectuals. What remains to be done, however, is to explain how these intellectual engagements with and critiques of colonialism, capitalism, and Western modernity directly influenced (or, in some cases, failed to influence) the social movements of subaltern political actors. Since Batatu's pioneering achievements, there have, in fact, been virtually no academic attempts to address subaltern political movements in Iraq from beyond the vantage point of intellectual representations of subaltern culture and society.³⁷ The pioneering work of the subaltern studies collective in excavating and analyzing the overlooked history of subaltern political movements through the critical interrogation of colonial archives and incorporation of unique and unconventional historical sources offers an essential theoretical framework and grounding for a project that analyzes anti-colonial movements in Iraq in a manner that treats popular poetry, tribal rebellions, union strikes, and mass protests on the same plane as nationalist oratory and elite political programs.³⁸ This theoretical and analytical grounding is perhaps most suggestive of a new approach to tribal and peasant politics in Iraq.

Recent scholarship on colonialism and tribalism in the Middle East and broader Islamic world has highlighted both the new horizons of academic inquiry and the recurrent obstacles to comprehensive integrations of tribal and national histories. Historians of the British Empire have highlighted the severity of tribal resistance to colonial incursions and the colonial resort to air power in order to quell resistance in a manner that suggests the basic centrality of the tribal experience to any serious discussion of anti-colonial politics.³⁹ Contemporary scholarship on the exploitations and deconstructions of tribal identities and clan loyalties in the Central Asian republics of the Soviet Union has underscored the uneven results of state-sponsored efforts at detribalization in a way that hints at the more singular experience of the colonial encounter by

³⁷ These discussions of intellectual representations of tribes, peasants, and other subaltern groups have, however, been tremendously interesting and informing. See particularly Orit Bashkin's discussion of the "rural problem" by Iraqi intellectuals in the 1950s in Bashkin, *The Other Iraq*, 194-228.

³⁸ In addition to Ranajit Guha's theoretical essays, "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India" and "The Prose of Counter-Insurgency," Stephen Henningham's "Quit India in Bihar and the Eastern United Provinces: The Dual Revolt," Shahid Amin's "Gandhi as Mahatma: Gorakhpur District, Eastern UP, 1921-2," Tanika Sarkar's "Jitu Santal's Movement in Malda, 1924-1932," Gautamn Bhadra's "Four Rebels of Eighteen-Fifty-Seven" have been particularly helpful and inspirational. See *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, vols. 1-8 (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982-89).

³⁹ Dodge, *Inventing Iraq* and "The Social Ontology of Late Colonialism: Tribes and the Mandated State in Iraq" in *Tribes and Power: Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Middle East*, edited by Faleh A. Jabar and Hosham Dawood (London: Saqi Books, 2003), 257-82, Rudi Lindner, "What Was a Nomadic Tribe?," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 24:4 (1982), 689-711, and David Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control: Royal Air Force, 1919-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990).

tribal groups.⁴⁰ Several scholars have ignited a passionate academic debate in the past decade surrounding the role the colonial state in constructing and deconstructing tribal identities in Jordan that suggests a need for broader discussions about the place of tribes in both local and imperial constructions of modernity and supplemental account of these historical dynamics in other parts of the Arab world.⁴¹ Finally, a small number of scholars have turned their attention toward the political agency of tribes in modern Iraq and pointed to a certain resilience of tribal structures that belies Batatu's suggestion that colonialism inadvertently destroyed tribalism in Iraq.⁴² The work of the subaltern studies collective provides a new avenue for building upon these discussions in a manner that critically integrates the tribal uprisings of Iraq with the national narrative of anti-colonialism in Iraq. Such an approach would move beyond the narrative of the tribal elite by focusing on violence and dissent within tribal confederations, particularly peasant challenges to the authority of tribal shaykhs and to the social legitimacy of tribal structures and organizations of rural life.

The interventions of the subaltern studies collective point more broadly to the need for a theoretical framework and foundation for further discussion of the relationship between politics and culture. Eric Davis has drawn heavily from the Gramscian conception of hegemony in his analysis of the state sponsorship of "organic intellectuals" in shaping and producing historical memory in modern Iraq. While this work constitutes an important intervention in recent intellectual debates about the collapse of secular cosmopolitanism and the dominance of an authoritarian and chauvinist vision of Ba'athist nationalism in Iraq, the invocation of Gramscian concepts also points toward the possibility of future interventions that foreground the role of culture in producing politics.⁴³ Gramsci's influence on the theoretical formulations of cultural

⁴⁰ Adrienne Edgar Lynn, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004) and Edward Schatz, *Modern Clan Politics: The Power of "Blood" in Kazakhstan and Beyond* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004).

⁴¹ Yoav Alon, *The Making of Jordan: Tribes, Colonialism and the Modern State* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), Joseph A. Massad, *Colonial Effects: The Making of National Identity in Jordan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), and Andrew Shryock, *Nationalism and the Genealogical Imagination: Oral History and Textual Authority in Tribal Jordan* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997).

⁴² See Hosham Dawood, "The 'State-ization' of the Tribe and the Tribalization of the State: The Case of Iraq," and Thair Karim, "Tribes and Nationalism: Tribal Political Culture and Behaviour in Iraq, 1914-1920," in *Tribes and Power: Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Middle East*, edited by Faleh A. Jabar and Hosham Dawood (London: Saqi Books, 2003), 110-35 and 283-310, and Vinogradov, "The 1920 Revolt Reconsidered."

⁴³ Gramsci's discussion of "spontaneity and conscious leadership" is particularly instructive in offering a framework for conceptualizing mass politics from below. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 196-200.

politics and cultural studies by the principle intellectuals of the Birmingham School offers the third major body of academic literature shaping and guiding this research project.⁴⁴ The influence of these and other contributions suggests a new horizon for thinking about cultural and social history as a discursive dynamic.⁴⁵ Several recent historical studies on popular and mass culture in the Arab world suggest a viable model for carrying this project through in the study of modern Iraq.⁴⁶

The fourth body of historical literature that informs this dissertation is constituted by several older and more recent social histories of the Arab Middle East that underscore the viability of combining social and cultural analysis of the dynamics of anti-colonialism. The work of Joel Beinin and Zachary Lockman on the Egyptian working class points to the deep solidarities forged between nationalist political movements and working class social movements in an integrative manner that has yet to be taken up by scholars of other Arab countries.⁴⁷ Juan Cole's study of the 'Urabi movement in late-nineteenth century Egypt offers a new template for the analysis of colonialism and anti-colonial movements that moves beyond the singular perspectives of the colonial state and the national political elite and instead constructs a broader picture of subaltern cultural responses to colonial domination.⁴⁸ Robert Vitalis' study of ARAMCO produces an important new paradigm for thinking about the social histories of local resistance to imperialism in the neo-colonial period and brings a new understanding of racial dynamics and cultural resentments into the study of capitalist expansion in the era of Arab oil.⁴⁹ Keith David Watenpaugh, finally, brings the Arab middle class into these new discussions of

⁴⁴ Particularly influential in this respect have been Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780-1950*, 2nd Edition, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983) and *The Long Revolution* (Orchard Park: Broadview Press, 2001) and Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working Class Life* (London: Penguin, 2009).

⁴⁵ Equally important here are the efforts of prominent social historians to take culture seriously alongside class and capital as a driving force of history: E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966) and *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978) and Geoff Eley, *A Crooked Line: From Cultural History to the History of Society* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

⁴⁶ See especially Walter Armbrust, *Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Rebecca L. Stein and Ted Swedenburg, eds., *Palestine, Israel, and the Politics of Popular Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), Ziad Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians: Creating the Modern Nation through Popular Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), Keith David Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

⁴⁷ Joel Beinin and Zachary Lockman, *Workers on the Nile: Nationalism, Communism, Islam, and the Egyptian Working Class, 1882-1954* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989)

⁴⁸ Juan R. I. Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East: Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt's 'Urabi Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

⁴⁹ Robert Vitalis, *America's Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

local responses to colonialism and, in the process, critically challenges earlier understandings of Arab modernities. The cumulative effect of these innovative and original historical studies is to point to a notable gap in the historiography of modern Iraq and to suggest an opening for the reconsideration of Batatu's brilliant narrative of social change that incorporates new ways of thinking about nationalism, class consciousness, and popular culture.

The body of historical writing on Iraq in Arabic constitutes the fifth and final body of work that shapes this dissertation. This valuable and underutilized corpus of scholarship underscores the extent to which particular individuals, events, and themes in the history of modern Iraq have drawn the concerted attention of Iraqi historians while eluding those scholars writing in French and English. In an incisive collection of essays framed as historical reflections, the late Sa'udi-Iraqi novelist 'Abd al-Rahman Munif effectively challenges the hegemonic historical narrative drawn from colonial archives by instead emphasizing the role of tribes, peasants, workers, and students.⁵⁰ This project of reconstructing what Munif terms "the margins of history and resistance" provides an obvious parallel to Dipesh Chakrabarty's project of "provincializing Europe." Also influential have been the works of 'Abd al-Amir Hadi 'Akkam, Mudhaffar al-Amin, and 'Abdullah al-Jizani on the histories of the middle class opposition parties, which point toward the utility of extending elements of Watenpaugh's project to Iraq.⁵¹ While Iraqi and Arab historians have also generally lacked access to Iraqi state archives for political reasons - and, in fact, have seen this problem compounded by the problem of finding funding to access colonial archives - they have more effectively supplemented their use of the colonial archives with newspapers, memoirs, and poetry. It is this latter category of poetry that provides the single most important source for my own project.

Poetry, Archives, and History

Iraqi scholars have long seized upon the unique position of poetry as public culture in both Iraq and the broader Arab world in order to shape and give substance to critical arguments about social developments and cultural politics in the modern era. A brief venture through the thematic discussions of poetry in history by contemporary Iraqi critics underscores the tremendous scope of popular poetry as an arena for social and cultural criticism. Ibrahim Wa'ili

⁵⁰ 'Abd al-Rahman Munif, *al-'Iraq: Hawamish min al-Ta'rikh wa al-Muqawamah* (Casablanca, al-Markaz al-Thaqafi al-'Arabi, 2004).

⁵¹ 'Abd al-Amir Hadi al-'Akkam, *Ta'rikh Hizb al-Istiqlal al-'Iraqi, 1946-1958* (Baghdad: Dar al-Rashid li al-Nashr, 1980), h al-Amin, *Jama'at al-Ahali*, and 'Abdullah al-Jizani, *Hizb al-Istiqlal al-'Iraqi, 1946-1958: al-Tajribah al-Fikriyah wa al-Mumarasah al-Siyasiyah* (Baghdad: 1994).

and 'Abd al-Husayn Mubarak have pointed to the utility of poetry as both a tool for social mobilization and a venue for anti-colonial discourse in the Great Iraqi Revolution of 1920.⁵² Ra'uf al-Wa'iz and Majid Ahmad al-Samarra'i have both analyzed the dimensions of nationalist thought in modern Iraqi poetry as a means of elucidating the cultural and political dynamics of the ideological conflicts between pan-Arabists and Iraqist nationalists.⁵³ Yusuf 'Izz al-Din and Hilal Naji have explored poetic discourse on contemporary social problems and the development of socialist thought in modern Iraqi poetry.⁵⁴ 'Izz al-Din, indeed, has gone even further in several comprehensive surveys of modern Iraqi poetry that foreground the political and historical context of poetic production and consumption.⁵⁵ There are, needless to say, countless other works that explore these and other themes in the work of individual poets.

The mere fact of poetry's popularity as an object of intellectual exploration and critical analysis, of course, is insufficient grounds for promoting its utility as a primary source of history. I argue instead that five distinct aspects of poetry as cultural production, political performance, and historical artifact attest to the viability, and in fact the necessity, of treating poetry seriously as an historical source. First, poetry represents the pinnacle of high culture in the Arab world and the symbolic significance of poetry as an art form provides the poet the unique opportunity to shape elite public opinion. Muhammad Badawi has noted that "the Arabs have always prided themselves on their poetry, which they regard as their greatest and most congenial mode of literary expression."⁵⁶ Poetry in the modern Arab world, however, was not just a celebrated form of literary expression and achievement but also a symbol of social achievement, and this

⁵² Ibrahim Wa'ili, *Thawrat al-'Ishrin fi al-Shi'r al-'Iraqi* (Baghdad: Matba'at al-Iman, 1968) and 'Abd al-Husayn Mubarak, *Thawrat Alf wa Tisa' Mi'ah wa 'Ishrin fi al-Shi'r al-'Iraqi* (Baghdad: Dar al-Basri, 1970). This theme is echoed in al-Musawi, *Reading Iraq*, 37-71.

⁵³ Ra'uf al-Wa'iz, *al-Ittijahat al-Wataniyah fi al-Shi'r al-'Iraqi al-Hadith, 1914-1941* (Baghdad: Wizarat al-'Ilam al-Jumhuriyah al-'Iraqiyah, 1974) and Majid Ahmad al-Samarra'i, *al-Tayyar al-Qawmi fi al-Shi'r al-'Iraq al-Hadith mundhu al-Harb al-'Alamiyah al-Thaniyah 1931 hatta Naksat Haziran 1967* (Baghdad: al-Jumhuriyah al-'Iraqiyah, 1981). While Eric Davis and Orit Bashkin have pointed to the problematic nature of this scholarship as a tool of Ba'thist propaganda, both interventions highlight the extent to which poetry can be mobilized or exploited for ideological purposes. See Davis, *Memories of State*, 208-12 and Bashkin, *The Other Iraq*, 123.

⁵⁴ Yusuf 'Izz al-Din, *al-Shi'r al-'Iraqi al-Hadith wa Athar al-Tiyarat al-Siyasiyah wa al-Ijtima'iyah fihi* (Cairo: al-Dar al-Qawmiyah li Tiba'ah wa al-Nashr, 1965) and *al-Ishtirakiyah wa al-Qawmiyah wa Atharuhuma fi al-Adab al-Hadith* (Cairo: Jami'at al-Duwwal al-'Arabiyyah, 1968) and Hilal Naji, *Jinayat al-Shuyu'iyin 'ala al-Adab al-'Iraqi* (Cairo: Dar al-Karnak li al-Nashr, n.d.).

⁵⁵ Yusuf 'Izz al-Din, *Shu'ara' al-'Iraq fi al-Qarn al-'Ishrin* (Baghdad: Maktabat al-As'ad, 1969) and *al-Shi'r al-Siyasi al-Hadith fi al-'Iraq: Dirasah Adabiyah Tarikhiyah* (Cairo: Markaz al-Hadarah al-'Arabiyyah, 2003).

⁵⁶ Muhammad. M. Badawi, *A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 14.

achievement brought with it tangible political rewards. The two most prominent Iraqi poets of the late Ottoman and early colonial period, Jamil Sidqi al-Zahawi and Ma'rif al-Rusafi, held parliamentary positions and enjoyed tremendous social stature, which they used not infrequently to endorse progressive positions on women's rights and other basic issues of social justice. The same could be said of the next generation of poets to rise to national prominence, as Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri, Muhammad Ridha al-Shabibi, and 'Ali al-Sharqi all enjoyed prominent positions in government at various times in the monarchical period in direct recognition of their poetic achievements. There were certainly exceptions to this, and the consolidation of state dictatorship in the 1950s helped to ensure that the new generation of poetic giants - most notably 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati, Nazik al-Mala'ika, and Badr Shakir al-Sayyab - belonged more properly to the class of avant-garde intellectuals and political radicals than to the social elite, but the official apparatus of state repression could scarcely tarnish the social significance of even this generation. The history of Iraqi poetry throughout much of this period, in short, is intimately bound to the history of the Iraqi state, and this connection needs to be noted in the contemporary historical record.

Second, poetry functions as the single most important register of popular culture in the history of modern Iraq and effectively bridges the gap between the intellectual elite and the masses in a manner that was virtually impossible for any other category of cultural production. In a warm and sympathetic reconsideration of Hanna Batatu's monumental historical achievement upon the advent of a new edition published some twenty-five years after the original, Peter Sluglett gently criticizes Batatu for his tendency to "overestimate the direct relationship between poverty and hardship and revolutionary consciousness."⁵⁷ While this is certainly a valid critique of Batatu's argument, Sluglett's own explanation, which centers on the ability of communist leaders and ideologues like Fahd and Salam 'Adil to successfully "merge the national with the social question in a unique manner," is scarcely more convincing. Both Fahd and 'Adil were doctrinaire Stalinists and their writings read as loose translations of Soviet propaganda adapted for a local Iraqi context. The suggestion that these rather crude political tracts, published in underground newspapers that had to be smuggled from town to town, were principally responsible for the formation and development of revolutionary consciousness fails to take into

⁵⁷ Peter Sluglett, "Review of Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, Ba'thists, and Free Officers* (London: Saqi Books, 2004)," *Democratīya* 4 (Spring 2006), 7-19.

consideration the considerable obstacles impeding the dissemination of ideas in an era of widespread illiteracy.

The appeal of political poetry, which frequently embraced the ideological formulations of Fahd, 'Adil, and other communist leaders, offers a much more convincing explanation for the spread of revolutionary consciousness. Poetry depended on neither mass literacy nor the technologies of production and transportation necessary to evade state censorship. Popular poems were frequently published on the front page of newspapers - in fact, the poems themselves were often the chief selling point for newspaper vendors - and could then be read aloud to wider (and largely illiterate) audiences in public cafes. Even the most incendiary political poems, which could not be openly published without provoking state security forces, could be easily memorized by those in the audience at the initial recitation due to the memorial rhythms and rhymes of verse poetry and then transmitted orally to much wider audiences.⁵⁸ While the neo-classical poetry produced by the most prominent poets of this period would eventually be supplanted by the Free Verse poetry popularized in the 1950s and later by colloquial poetry, it was still consumed and appreciated by diverse audiences that included both highly educated intellectuals and officials and illiterate peasants and workers.⁵⁹ Poetry in many ways constituted an indigenous form of mass culture long before the technologies of capitalist modernity emerged in full force.

Third, the public performance of poetry offered a crucial venue for poets to move beyond the shaping of political and cultural mentalities and to influence the trajectory of social protest movements. This is an absolutely essential component of my own historical argument and constitutes the most explicit evidence of poetry's utility as a driving force of social history. As Muhsin al-Musawi has noted, Jawahiri's notorious acts of public political dissidence revolutionized the social role of popular poets in modern Iraq.⁶⁰ In the post-war period, Jawahiri dramatically and repeatedly denounced the tyrannical forces of colonialism, capitalism, and

⁵⁸ Jawahiri's famous poem "Hashim al-Witri," cited at the beginning of this introduction, was transmitted in precisely this manner before its publication in Beirut.

⁵⁹ I argue, in fact, that neo-classical poetry was significantly more representative of "popular culture" than the later Free Verse poetry, which drew upon avant-garde techniques and themes largely inspired by the modernist poetry of prominent European poets like T.S. Eliot. Coupled with the alterations of rhythm and rhyme that made this new poetry less useful as a tool for the mobilization of large crowds, the Free Verse movement actually signaled a shift away from the singularity of modern Arabic poetry.

⁶⁰ Muhsin al-Musawi, "Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri (1901-1997)," in *Essays in Arabic Literary Biography*, Vol. 3, edited by Roger Allen (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010), 166-75.

dictatorship in front of massive public gatherings. His attacks upon the politically and socially disengaged intellectuals milling about in cafés helped to inspire thousands of admiring youth to make the transition from revolutionary consciousness to revolutionary action. No less important in this respect was the role of Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulum, a factory worker, labor activist, and celebrated nationalist poet whose own revolutionary brand of poetic dissidence resulted in numerous arrests. Bahr al-'Ulum, surprisingly, was the most visible leader of the popular protests in the early days of the *wathba* uprising of January 1948. As Batatu relates, the poet was carried atop the shoulders of cheering throngs of workers, stopping occasionally to recite some pithy verses against colonial authorities and their local puppets before his eventual apprehension, detention, and severe torture at the hands of state security forces.⁶¹ These and dozens of other tales underscore the fact that dissident political poetry in this period was not merely an artistic representation of revolution and revolutionary mentalities but in fact an act of revolution in and of itself.

Fourth, poetry offered a unique opportunity for the subversion of colonial repression and neo-colonial regimes of censorship. In a brilliant exposition of anti-colonial discourse in modern Arabic poetry, Hussein Kadhim has argued that the neo-classical *qasidah*, the primary poetic form considered in this study, took up the discourse of anti-colonialism in both its contrapuntal and "re-presentative" forms. The contrapuntal poem, according to Kadhim, was "argumentative, engaged, and times polemical," offering a perpetually unrequited discursive engagement with colonial arguments and justifications in a public forum. The "re-presentative" poem, on the other hand, was "largely demonstrative; it seeks to set forth the oppressiveness of colonial rule and the consequences thereof on the subject populace."⁶² Both formats offered poets the opportunity to directly tackle, satirize, and subvert colonial discourse in a manner rendered either impossible or impractical to other intellectuals due to the political dynamics of colonial and neo-colonial censorship and surveillance. The subtlety, complexity, and frequent inscrutability - particularly in the case of Jawahiri - of Iraqi poetry functioned to impede the apprehension and comprehension of highly public forms of political dissidence.

While the British Embassy carefully monitored the Iraqi press, preparing daily press summaries that catalogued local criticism of British policy in Iraq and the broader Middle East

⁶¹ Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 552-53.

⁶² Hussein N. Kadhim, *The Poetics of Anti-Colonialism in the Arabic Qasidah* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), x-xi.

and recommended official demands for censorship and retributive punishment when this criticism surpassed acceptable boundaries, the solitary official responsible for these reports couldn't possibly read and translate published poems as part of his morning work, even if he were capable of performing such a task from a linguistic standpoint. Iraqi poets were therefore to attack Britain in any manner that they pleased, so long as they selected a sufficiently subtle or obscure title and employed clever enough pseudonyms and euphemisms to pass the cursory perusal of the British censor.⁶³ The end result of this subversive possibility was to create an amusing mirror image of British and Iraqi approaches to the problem of press censorship. While British authorities vehemently protested at any serious criticism of British policy in Iraqi newspaper editorials and articles, demanding immediate fines, suspensions, and arrests, they entirely ignored far more incendiary poems. Iraqi authorities, on the other hand, largely dismissed serious criticism of the government's policies in editorials and articles with nominal warnings and fines but reacted viciously and vindictively to any substantial critique published in poetic verse. Assuming that the Iraqi government was better versed in the comparative dangers of poetry and prose than the British Embassy, this disparity in the regimes of censorship and retribution undoubtedly indicates an understudied capacity of popular poetry to shape popular opinion and mobilize revolutionary action.

Fifth and finally, as an historical source, poetry offers an invaluable window into the mentality of historical thought. Salma Jayyusi has argued that poetry, because of the historical circumstances of its development, symbolizes Arab cultural development more broadly and represents "the story of a resurrection and a thorough re-vitalization, of a gradual forging of links and of a steady evolution towards contemporaneousness within a comparatively short period of time."⁶⁴ The utility of this form of cultural production as an historical snapshot of identities and mentalities at a particular historical moment is particularly apparent in a comparison between political poetry and political memoirs. Historians of modern Iraq have in recent years begun to move away from an earlier reliance on colonial archives and to embrace political memoirs as an alternative means of acknowledging the historical agency of those voices silenced by the archive. While these new sources provide valuable new insight into the historical processes of social

⁶³ The absence of capital letters in Arab undoubtedly made this task all the more easy for the poet, as the non-native British reader could only scan the verses for common terms like "England," "Britain," and other variations. Still, Iraqi poets began to deploy the term "Thamesians" as a preferred euphemism for "the English," which was apparently never detected by British authorities.

⁶⁴ Jayyusi, *Trends and Movements*, 1:9.

transformation, they present new historical problems as well, as their most prominent proponents readily acknowledge.⁶⁵ Poetry bypasses these methodological limitations by providing documentation of ideas and mentalities in progress and formation.

Collections of poetry, particularly from the more prolific poets, functions more as journals and diaries, complete with chronological documentation, than autobiographies and memoirs from the standpoint of the historian. Nowhere is this basic utility of poetry as an historical source more apparent than in the case of the "poetry of occasion" that dominated the Iraqi literary scene for much of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. These poems constituted immediate and visceral responses to contemporary political developments and did so while bypassing the formal restrictions of newspaper editorials and other products of intellectual thought. Unlike political memoirs and other narrative forms of retrospective historical recollection, poetry provides historical documentation of moments in time that cannot be otherwise excavated without risking the taint of memory and revision. As an independent, if unconventional, form of archival documentation, published or recorded poems cannot be purged in the interests of suppressing unpopular political ideas. This is a particularly useful feature for historians interested in studying controversial and politically charged historical events. The poetic record relating to the Rashid 'Ali movement, for example, offers definitive documentation of the strength and popularity of Nazi and fascist ideologies in Iraq, authoritatively substantiating the defiant claims of innocence by some poets while undercutting the artful pleas of others.

Though poetry constitutes the major archival basis of this project, it is not the sole foundation of my analysis of anti-colonial political, social, and cultural movements in Iraq. Indeed, in some places, the nature of historical inquiry cannot be adequately and comprehensively addressed by poetic archives, and so poetry recedes to the background as archival documents, newspaper accounts, and political memoirs are pushed to the fore. The particularities of intellectual culture in neo-colonial Iraq, for example, encouraged the emigration of virtually all prominent rural poets to urban centers, and above all to Baghdad, in the 1940s and 1950s. This historical development, unfortunately, precludes an exhaustive cultural analysis of peasant responses to the social ruptures of economic development and the introduction of mechanized agricultural practices in the countryside and forces me instead to rely primarily upon

⁶⁵ See, for example Pierre-Jean Luizard, "Mémoires d'Irakiens: à la découverte d'une société vaincue...", *Monde arabe: Maghreb Machrek* 163 (1999), 5-23 and Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism*, 1-13.

traditional archival records and the representations of these social ruptures in the work of displaced rural poets. Numerous other deficiencies and difficulties emerged in the course of this historical excavation. Nevertheless, this project is founded upon the contention that the history of Iraqi poetry and the history of Iraqi society during the neo-colonial period cannot and should not be partitioned from one another and that poetry as cultural production is not merely a product of politics but in fact produces politics.

Chapter Outline

The first chapter, "The Tomb Stirs': Anti-Colonialism and the Poetics of Resistance, 1932-1938," analyzes the cultural politics of General Bakr Sidqi's coup d'état of 1936. While this coup d'état has generally been treated as the opening salvo of a persistent conflict between adherents of pan-Arabist and Iraqist nationalism, my discussion moves beyond this ideological framework and toward a new understanding of popular euphoria in support of the coup as an expression of the widespread desire to finally and definitively dismantle the structures and institutions of the colonial state and to reclaim popular sovereignty. Sidqi's coup was dubbed the "populist revolution" by both supporters and detractors due to the vocal support lent to the movement by a small circle of progressive politicians and intellectuals who espoused an organic brand of political populism.

This chapter begins by examining the post-colonial malaise experienced by many Iraqi poets, activists, and intellectuals in response to the persistence of political corruption and social injustice following the formal transfer of political sovereignty to the Iraqi government in 1932. The chapter then turns to the eruption and suppression of massive tribal rebellions in the spring of 1935, which led young leftist democrats and radicals to conclude that the colonial successor state could not be reformed without revolution. In my analysis of popular support and criticism of the Bakr Sidqi-Hikmat Suleiman regime, I contend that supporters and critics of the new administration were moved primarily by judgments about the viability of new challenges to neo-colonial power rather than ideological predilections in favor of Iraqist or pan-Arabist nationalism. The chapter closes with an examination of the populists' disenchantment with the leadership of the revolutionary government and their political marginalization in the wake of Bakr Sidqi's assassination and the return to power of the pan-Arab nationalists. The title refers to Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri's celebrated poem in praise of Bakr Sidqi's revolution, which pined for the destruction of the old colonial elite and the reawakening of the Iraqi nation.

Jawahiri would be bitterly disappointed by the trajectory of the revolutionary government and wound up imprisoned for his public criticism of the administration.

The second chapter, "'When Did Nazism Enter This Shop?': Contesting Fascism in World War II, 1939-1945," analyzes the Iraqi nationalist movement of Rashid 'Ali that led to the re-occupation of the country by British forces in 1941. My argument here demonstrates that historical analyses which interpret the movement as fascist or proto-fascist obscure the historical context of anti-British sentiment in Iraq and greatly exaggerate the popular influence of an isolated group of Nazi supporters. This chapter opens with an analysis of the resurgent politics of anti-colonialism in the years leading up to Rashid 'Ali's coup d'état and the eruption of war between Iraq and Britain. The rhetorical domain of poetry underscores the significance of Iraqi sympathy with anti-colonial movements in Palestine and Syria to the supporters of Rashid 'Ali. I demonstrate here that prominent supporters of the movement included not only pan-Arabist ideologues, as is commonly noted, but also prominent and vocal anti-fascist critics and poets on the Iraqi Left, including many former supporters of the Bakr Sidqi coup d'état. The chapter then examines the significance of this resurgent anti-colonialism to the nationalist movement of 1941. Eschewing historical paradigms that focus on the ideological similarities between the Iraqi nationalist leadership and their fascist allies in Europe, I argue that popular support for Rashid 'Ali in newspapers and poetry reflects the centrality of the anti-colonial politics of national liberation.

While most discussions of the Rashid 'Ali movement close with the movement's collapse at the climax of the Anglo-Iraqi War of 1941, I press forward with an analysis of British efforts to suppress former supporters of the movement by forcing public recantations, conducting public executions, and imprisoning prominent intellectuals in newly constructed internment camps. The chapter closes with an analysis of the efforts by progressive and leftist Iraqis to reclaim a vision of anti-colonial utopia in the aftermath of the nationalist failure and under the shadow of British occupation. In the historical context of the renewed British occupation and the entrance of the Soviet Union to the Allied camp, public support for the Soviets suddenly emerged as a viable venue for legally and openly articulating a progressive vision of national liberation. The chapter title refers to a satirical poem penned by the anti-fascist leftist poet Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulum, a prominent supporter of the Rashid 'Ali movement later interned for his poetry, who bitterly denounced British efforts to castigate anti-colonial nationalists as "Nazis." Bahr al-'Ulum

maintained a staunchly anti-Nazi stance during his years in the internment camps and emerged after the war as one of the most prominent and vocal supporters of the Soviet Union in Iraq.

The third chapter, "'A Horizon Lit With Blood': Public Poetry and Mass Politics, 1946-1952," analyzes the role of poetry in mobilizing social protest movements against the Anglo-Iraqi alliance. I show how the public interventions of prominent poets like Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulum and Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri helped to galvanize a disaffected population to rise against the oppressive apparatus of the increasingly dictatorial state. This chapter documents in detail the popular uprisings of 1948 and 1952 and the revolutionary appropriation and reconstruction of public space in the service of mass resistance to British and American mutual defense agreements. My analysis underscores the social developments of this period that paved the way for the emergence of mass political movements but contends that the eruption of popular revolt would have been far more difficult and far less successful without the critical intervention of poets.

I devote particular attention to the use of poetry in the public sphere during these cycles of protest and to the deployment of poetry as both an impetus for popular mobilization and a summation of popular demands. The title refers to a famous line from Jawahiri's poem "My Brother Ja'far," a eulogy for his brother, who was martyred along with hundreds of his compatriots while protesting the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty. Jawahiri recited the poem before a crowd of tens of thousands of Iraqi protestors on the steps of the Haydarkhanah Mosque on Rashid Street in downtown Baghdad. The poem remains a landmark in the cultural history of modern Iraq and the poem's vivid and violent imagery foreshadows the bloodshed that would follow in the wake of the state's repression of the popular protest movements.

The fourth chapter, "'Leave Your Fields and Throw Away Your Sickle': Urban Migration, 1932-1958," outlines the extent to which colonial policies transformed tribesmen into peasants and demonstrates that rural suspicion and opposition to U.S. economic development initiatives helped to propel the mass migration of landless peasants to urban areas in conjunction with noticeable shifts from peasant to worker and from village to city as symbols of the national anti-colonial struggle in popular poetry. This chapter opens with an analysis of the transition of tribes and tribal shaykhs from symbols of anti-colonial resistance to pillars of British interests in the post-colonial state in order to show how colonial manipulations contributed to the deterioration of the old tribal order. The chapter highlights the numerous tribal uprisings and rebellions of the

late 1940s and early 1950s and shows how direct colonial interference in the structures of tribal authority along with legal changes that dramatically enhanced the political power of tribal shaykhs between 1914 and 1932 contributed to the erosion of consent in the relationship between the shaykh and his tribal subject. My analysis shows that the massive rural exodus and urban migration movements of the late 1940s and early 1950s was a geographically and chronologically uneven process that cannot be fully explained by technological development, urban industrialization, or the alienation of tribal land. I argue that social justice was an essential concern of peasant laborers seeking to flee the despotism of tribal society for a sometimes even more insecure existence in the urban landscape.

These processes of social disintegration were instead contingent on the cultural transformations of tribal life and the symbolic positioning of tribal shaykhs as anti-colonial rebels and colonial clients and collaborators. The most rebellious tribes, which suffered the brunt of government repression, proved most resilient to the allure of the cities due to the shaykh's ability to maintain the consensus of leadership through his sponsorship of resistance movements. Ultimately, though, the peasant experience of economic exploitation and social alienation as a result of colonial policies led to the startling collapse of tribal organizations in rural Iraq. When the theoretically incoherent and administratively incompetent introduction of U.S. development initiatives began to replicate the worst features of British colonial policy, hundreds of thousands of tribal peasants simply moved to the cities. My analysis demonstrates the crucial role of popular poetry in underscoring and emphasizing the nefarious connections between colonialism and feudalism and the seductive allure of urban working class resistance to colonial authority that ultimately pushed many peasants toward emigration. The chapter title comes from a poem by Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulum urging peasants to abandon their exploitative conditions of feudal labor and to join the worker vanguard of the anti-colonial movement now centered in Baghdad.

The fifth and final chapter, "'This Is the Crowing of the Roosters': Culture, Ideology, and the Construction of Sectarian Politics, 1952-1960," analyzes the events preceding and following the military coup d'état of 'Abd al-Karim Qasim that overthrew the Iraqi monarchy in 1958. This chapter serves as a post-mortem for the anti-colonial movement, using the conflicts of cultural politics waged in national newspapers, courtrooms, and in the public sphere, to illustrate the retroactive ideological and cultural maneuvers used by Communists and pan-Arabists to

construct one another as national traitors and to politicize, moralize, and sexualize personal and ideological disputes. I analyze popular participation in the revolutionary movement and its aftermath in order to show the extent to which demands for a clean break from the colonial and neo-colonial past animated Iraqi antipathy toward the old regime and helped to shape the course of the post-revolutionary era. More importantly, I argue that the eruption of new conflicts in cultural politics points toward the fundamental deficiencies and failings of the anti-colonial movement in Iraq.

The chapter begins by analyzing the ways in which national campaigns against Zionism and in support of oil nationalization helped to shape the mutual transformation of Anglo-American and Iraqi Leftist policy in the context of the global Cold War. The partition of Palestine and the catastrophic collapse of Palestinian resistance in 1948 and the nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company in 1951 both functioned as crucial demarcations of a newly expansive anti-colonialism that brought together opposition political parties from both the Left and the Right in a "national front" political coalition. I show that popular poetry helped to build popular support for both the Iraqi Communist Party and the Ba'ath Party by constructing a new revolutionary poetics that integrated national and social concerns. This new cultural discourse was fueled by popular disaffection stemming from the rising tide of economic inequality that accompanied ballooning oil revenues and the stories of economic exploitation, racial discrimination, and cultural humiliation of workers in both the petroleum fields and other industrial sectors controlled by foreign capital. This chapter also draws heavily from the memoirs of popular poets to illustrate the cultural dynamics that forced the rupture of the old anti-colonial "national front." Particularly instructive here is a series of articles penned by Badr Shakir al-Sayyab explaining his conversion from Communist to Ba'athist in a language that foregrounds the new emergence of sectarian politics and constructs a vision of national sovereignty and cultural authenticity as part of a highly gendered moral discourse. The chapter title refers to a line from Sayyab's famous poem "Return to Jaykur," which conveys the sense of both revival and terror that dominated the post-revolutionary landscape.

This dissertation underscore the centrality of poetic discourse and poetic interventions to the construction of an Iraqi public sphere and the evolution of a radical brand of anti-colonial politics that transformed the basic contours of cultural politics in the country. Collectively, these five chapter studies illustrate the interconnectivity of poetry and politics in modern Iraqi history.

On the one hand, poetry constituted a critical cultural domain for the translation and dissemination of radical political ideas to mass audiences. Iraqi poetry, whether published or unpublished, thus serves as an invaluable archive that significantly alters contemporary historical conceptions of political thought and conflict in this period. On the other hand, the movement of radical poets into public spaces and their dramatic endorsement of revolutionary political stances, coupled with the corresponding efforts of an increasingly unpopular and dictatorial ruling class to silence their voices, highlights the contributions of poets as political agents to radical social movements. Iraqi poetry is not merely a documentary archive of political attitudes and the discourse of cultural politics at a particularly historical moment, but rather functions as a social text that documents the interplay between people and politics in the modern era.

CHAPTER ONE

‘THE TOMB STIRS’ ANTI-COLONIALISM AND THE POETICS OF RESISTANCE, 1932-38

On October 3, 1932, the League of Nations voted unanimously to terminate the British Mandate and to formally recognize Iraq as an independent member state. While the vote marked the end of the colonial period in Iraqi history, it neither recognized nor precipitated an essential historical rupture nor inspired the political and cultural illusions of national liberation that have characterized the "post-mandatory condition."¹ British control of Iraqi foreign policy and military affairs was formally enshrined in the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930, a necessary precondition for the early termination of the mandate, and informal British control over Iraqi political and economic affairs was assured by a carefully managed political transition that centralized power in the hands of a pro-British oligarchy. It was instead the military coup d'état conducted by General Bakr Sidqi on October 29, 1936, with the crucial political support of Hikmat Sulayman and the social democrats of the Ahali Group, that marked a fundamental shift in the social and political landscape. The coup fractured the relative unity of the national political elite, heretofore primarily focused on the twin objectives of appropriating colonial power, privilege, and prestige and consolidating government authority over the rebellious tribes and the recalcitrant Assyrian and Kurdish communities. After the coup, Iraqi politics were dominated by sectarian and ideological factionalism as competing parties waged an increasingly caustic and violent struggle against one another over questions of political legitimacy, national identity, social justice, and cultural authenticity.

Contemporary historical analyses have tended to situate the coup within a teleological narrative foreshadowing political crisis and social conflict and illuminating the historical tragedies of post-mandatory Iraq. Majid Khadduri argues that coup d'état "introduced the army as a new factor in politics and tended to transform the Government into a military dictatorship,"

¹ Anne McClintock's critique of "post-colonialism" and "neo-colonialism" as analytic categories offers an instructive overview of the inherent terminological problems of post-mandatory theory. Since most Iraqis regarded formal independence as a "false" independence that did more to obscure the dynamics of a persistent colonialism and to presage a transition from "colonial" to "post-colonial," I have chosen to describe the new chronological period as "post-mandatory." In a similar vein, since the Arabic term for "colonialism" (*isti'mar*) does not distinguish between "colonialism" and "imperialism," I have chosen to describe the opposition discourse as "anti-colonial" in order to reflect the spirit of enduring struggle. See Anne McClintock, "The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term 'Post-Colonialism,'" *Social Text* 31/32 (1992), 84-98.

setting a precedent that "became impossible to stop" until British military intervention restored some semblance of constitutional order.² Hanna Batatu contends that the episode symbolized the overly cautious tactics of the Left, noting that "the Communists had exaggerated the popular character of the army officers who were the real backbone of the new regime" and that the People's Reformists failed to adequately defend their social agenda as "counsels of supineness ultimately prevailed."³ Eric Davis chides the Iraqi intellectuals who supported the coup d'état for their failure to properly counter their pan-Arabist opponents and to articulate their own ideological commitment to a cosmopolitan nationalism.⁴ Orit Bashkin, finally, has noted the irony of the Ahali Group's support for the coup d'état in light of its general commitment to social democracy, contending that this collaboration "turned ineffective and eventually destructive, as Sidqi and Sulayman manipulated the political vocabulary popularized in the group's newspaper to justify their seizure of power without accomplishing the democratic goals that the Ahali group aspired to achieve."⁵

These historical narratives share the common assumption that the decision of social democrats to support the coup d'état was a tactical mistake or ideological error. The Ahali Group misjudged the political convictions of Hikmat Sulayman and Bakr Sidqi, betrayed their own ideological commitment to constitutional democracy, failed to adequately articulate and defend their motives, and unwittingly provided ammunition for pan-Arabist assaults on the national loyalty of progressive parties and entire ethnic communities.⁶ While the obvious interest of liberal reformers and leftist radicals in supporting a political regime ostensibly committed to social reform has been duly noted and analyzed, significantly less attention has been paid to the historical factors that compelled these groups to abandon an apparently sincere commitment to democracy. This relative inattention to political motivation can be largely explained by two

² Majid Khadduri, *Independent Iraq, 1932-1958: A Study in Iraqi Politics*, 2nd Edition (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 124-25.

³ 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'athists and Free Officers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 99-119.

⁴ Eric Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 67-68.

⁵ Orit Bashkin, *The Other Iraq: Pluralism and Culture in Hashemite Iraq* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 72.

⁶ These sectarian tensions were of course present from the establishment of the modern nation-state, as Sami Zubaida and others have shown. It was not until after the Bakr Sidqi coup d'état, however, that sectarianism emerged as a significant feature of national political discourse. See Sami Zubaida, "The Fragments Imagine the Nation: The Case of Iraq," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34:2 (2002), 205-15

crucial features of the primary source material available to contemporary historians. First, the historical memoirs of the primary participants in these events have been dominated by blanket disavowals rather than apologetics for the decision to support the coup d'état, offering historians little incentive to continue probing incentives and motivations.⁷ Second, contemporaneous evidence of Ahali Group motives has been circumscribed by the fact that British attention during the period preceding the coup d'état was overwhelmingly focused on elite and tribal politics and the decision of the Yasin al-Hashimi regime to shut down all opposition newspapers, which has led to the general absence of relevant archival records. These factors have contributed to the production of an historical narrative that begins with the coup d'état and proceeds to trace its consequences.

The central problem with this historical ontology, which assumes the existence of ideological conflict between the supporters and opponents of the coup d'état rather than tracing its origins, is that it allows consequences and retrospectives to fundamentally shape an understanding of past events. An expansion of both the chronological and methodological scope of historical inquiry provides sufficient grounds for the reinterpretation of these historical events beyond the traditional binary framework of nationalist conflict. The relative unity of the anti-colonial nationalist movement was not fractured by the emergence of a pivotal ideological conflict between Iraqi social democrats and pan-Arabist conservatives. Instead, the central division between the two camps emerged as a consequence of practical and tactical disputes about the most effective means of eradicating the vestiges of colonial power in the post-mandatory state. The ideological dimensions of this dispute emerged retrospectively in a conservative pan-Arabist discourse designed to tarnish the political reputation of the Iraqi Left and to diminish the possibility of an effective and vibrant political opposition.⁸

The cultural dimensions of political conflict in this period are dramatically enhanced by the interrogation of popular poetry as an undiscovered historical archive. Poets played a central role in the political history of modern Iraq, helping to inspire, organize, and lead the national resistance to the British invasion in 1914 and the national uprising of 1920, serving as respected parliamentarians, journalists, and political advisors, and later played outsized roles in political

⁷ For the two most prominent examples of this disavowal, see Jawahiri, *Dhikrayati* (Damascus: Dar al-Rafidayn, 1988), 1:325-51 and Kamil al-Chadirchi, *Mudhakkirat Kamil al-Chadirchi wa Tarikh al-Hizb al-Watani al-Dimuqrati* (Beirut: Dar al-Tali'a, 1970), 42-48.

⁸ As Eric Davis has argued, the Left "failed to mount an effective 'war of position,'" in this struggle over historical memory. See Davis, *Memories of State*, 55-81.

protests and opposition politics.⁹ Perhaps more importantly from the standpoint of the historian, the most prominent poets left behind an archival record of poetry replete with dates of composition that intervened directly in the major political and cultural debates of the period.¹⁰ As the poet, novelist, and critic Jabra Ibrahim Jabra has written, modern Arabic poetry was public and political, "oratorical, militant, and of an instantaneous effect." Jabra rejected the contention of Amin al-Rihani, an early theorist of Arab nationalism and advocate of pan-Arab national unity, that he "would willingly barter the poetry of the East for the planes of the West":

Poetry might be condemned as too weak a toy against guns, but in actual fact it was often as good as dynamite. It gave point to a whole nation's suffering and wrath. It crystallized political positions in telling lines which, memorised by old and young, stiffened popular resistance and provided rallying slogans. Arabi's revolt in Egypt, Palestine's continual revolt from 1919 on, Syria's Battle of Maysalun, Iraq's struggle for independence in the twenties were all made vivid in the minds of Arabs everywhere by unforgettable poems that no guns could suppress.¹¹

In the context of the Bakr Sidqi coup d'état, the use of poetry as an historical archive provides evidence of shifting cultural attitudes beyond the domain of elite politics.

Independence and Disaffection: The Persistence of Colonialism

The Kingdom of Iraq attained formal independence on October 3, 1932, when the League of Nations voted unanimously to recognize the nation as a member state. 'Ali al-Ya'qubi hailed

⁹ Yusuf 'Izz al-Din, *al-Shi'r al-'Iraqi al-Hadith wa Athar al-Tiyarat al-Siyasiyah wa al-Ijtima'iyah fihi* (al-Qahira: al-Dar al-Qawmiyah li al-Tiba'ah wa al-Nashr, 1965), *Shu'ara' al-'Iraq fi al-Qarn al-'Ishrin* (Baghdad: Matba'at As'ad, 1969), and *al-Shi'r al-Siyasi al-Hadith fi al-'Iraq: Dirasah Adabiyah Tarikhiyah* (Dimashq: Dar al-Mada' li al-Thaqafah wa al-Nashr, 2008), Ibrahim al-Wa'ili, *Thawrat al-'Ishrin fi al-Shi'r al-'Iraqi* (Baghdad: Matba'at al-Iman, 1968), Ra'uf al-Wa'iz, *al-Ittijahat al-Wataniyah fi al-Shi'r al-'Iraqi al-Hadith, 1914-1941* (Baghdad: Wizarat al-'Ilam al-Jumhuriyah al-'Iraqiyah, 1974).

¹⁰ In this sense, neither Fredric Jameson's notion of third world texts as "national allegories" nor Partha Chatterjee's conception of anti-colonialism as the "spiritual" or "inner" domain of national culture are sufficient for conceptualizing the Arab poet's role in the cultures and politics of anti-colonialism. As Wa'il Hassan has argued, poetry constituted a "powerful form of public discourse in which the poet assumed the role of spokesman for the community." Anti-colonial poetry in the Arab world was contrapuntal rather than allegorical and public and political rather than private and spiritual. See Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 3-13, Wa'il S. Hassan, "Postcolonial Theory and Modern Arabic Literature: Horizons of Application," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 33:1 (2002), 45-64, Frederic Jameson, "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (1986), 65-88.

¹¹ Jabra I. Jabra, "The Rebels, the Committed and the Others: Transitions in Arabic Poetry Today," in *Critical Perspectives on Modern Arabic Literature*, edited by Issa J. Boullata (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1980), 191-205.

the achievements in a poem, "Faysal and His Efforts for the Arabs," recited in front of the king at a celebratory banquet in Najaf:

Aspirations distracted her for a while
Like the mirage beckons the thirsty
But today Iraq has triumphed by your effort
Coupled with the assistance of the Divine
You liberated her from slavery to another
And unfastened the chains of her imprisonment
A victory for the voice and name of Arabism
And the noble deeds that brought joy to our eyes
So rise before your people when you desire
For they are at the service of your command¹²

Ya'qubi's poem heralded independence as the end of one era and the dawn of a new one. This sentiment was echoed by Mahmud al-Habbubi, who recited his own poem, "Faysal the Great," at the same banquet:

The Arab nation has rejoiced since the victory
And upon you lie the pride and hopes of the Arabs
So rise to unite them and to gather her citizens
As your father gathered his lost and roving sons¹³

Habbubi's invocation of Faysal's father recalls the mythology of the Arab Revolt led by the Sharif Husayn to liberate the Arab nation from the yoke of Turkish imperialism. Like Ya'qubi, he describes independence as a victory for the entire Arab nation. Both poets looked forward to the liberation of Palestine and Syria and saw Faysal and Iraq at the vanguard of that struggle.

For all of the jubilation of the celebratory banquets and speeches that greeted Faysal in Geneva, London, and Baghdad, the League of Nations vote was little more than a symbolic gesture acknowledging the end of mandatory rule negotiated between Britain and Iraq under the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930. The British decision to prematurely terminate the mandate awarded to Britain in 1920 and later extended for an additional twenty-five years as a condition of the concession of Mosul to Iraq in 1925 was motivated by both domestic and imperial concerns. The Labour Party, which came to power in the general election of 1929, was eager to mollify public

¹² Muhammad 'Ali al-Ya'qubi, *Diwan Muhammad 'Ali al-Ya'qubi* (al-Najaf: Matba'at al-Nu'man, 1957) and al-Wa'iz, *al-Ittijahat al-Wataniyah*, 183.

¹³ Mahmud al-Habbubi, *Diwan al-Habbubi* (al-Najaf: Matba'at Dar al-Nashr wa al-Ta'lif, 1948), 70 and al-Wa'iz, *al-Ittijahat al-Wataniyah*, 184-185.

disenchantment with the financial burdens of empire by reducing the administrative apparatus and military presence in Iraq to minimal levels. That this goal could be achieved by declaring the civilizing processes of the mandates system a success and granting early independence only strengthened the British position in Iraq. By preemptively awarding the Iraqis the coveted prize of formal independence, Britain could forestall the radical nationalist demands that generally accompanied anti-colonial movements and secure far more favorable terms for imperial interests inside of Iraq.¹⁴

While Britain was confident enough in the loyalty of Iraqi leadership to justify sacrificing formal authority, the decision provoked resistance from other colonial powers, who feared that the abbreviation of imperial rule would lead to demands for similar arrangements from their own colonies.¹⁵ For most Iraqis, of course, the twelve year duration of the mandate was twelve years too long, and the generosity of the British gesture was neither recognized nor appreciated.¹⁶ Ja'far al-'Askari, who followed Faysal from Damascus to Baghdad, warned Gertrude Bell in 1920 that "complete independence is never given – always taken."¹⁷ Ja'far's stark appraisal of the requirements of national liberation would prove prescient, although he himself would abandon the goal of complete liberation in exchange for the seductive allure of a share in the spoils of power. By the time that Ja'far was assassinated by forces loyal to General Bakr Sidqi in the desert outside of Baghdad, he was widely reviled along with his brother-in-law Nuri al-Sa'id as Britain's principle collaborators in Iraq.¹⁸ For the next quarter of a century, internal power struggles and popular protest movements in Iraq would be increasingly defined by the opposition's central demand for the complete independence that they felt was denied by the terms of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930.

¹⁴ Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation Building and a History Denied* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 30-41.

¹⁵ Susan Pederson, "Getting Out of Iraq – in 1932: The League of Nations and the Road to Normative Statehood," *The American Historical Review* 115:4 (October 2010), 975-1000.

¹⁶ The contentions of Daniel Silverfarb and Yitzhak Nakash that "probably most of the Shiite community" wanted the British to stay and that the Shi'a attempted during the last years of the mandate "to draw the British into resuming direct rule over Iraq" are based on official British accounts of discussions with a handful of prominent tribal shaykhs and religious leaders and should not be taken as representative. Daniel Silverfarb, *Britain's Informal Empire in the Middle East: A Case Study of Iraq, 1929-1941* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 11-22 and Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 109-120.

¹⁷ Cited in Liora Lukitz, *Quest in the Middle East: Gertrude Bell and the Making of Modern Iraq* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008), 139.

¹⁸ Private and Personal Dispatch from Air Vice Marshal W.G.S. Mitchell, November 3, 1936, AIR 20/596

Independence did not fundamentally alter the nature of the Anglo-Iraqi alliance but instead merely traded formal imperial authority for informal hegemony backed by a permanent military presence. The British Air Ministry was reluctant to abandon airbases at Mosul, Hinaidi, and Shaybah that they viewed as essential to the defense of imperial interests in India, Egypt, and Iran. In the end, Britain maintained the base at Shaybah but agreed to give up the one at Hinaidi, which lay a mere five miles from Baghdad and loomed as a vivid reminder of the specter of colonialism, in exchange for a much larger tract of land at Lake Habbaniyah, some fifty miles west of Baghdad.¹⁹ British military officials did not coordinate or share plans to suppress internal disorder or external invasion but instead sought to reconcile the natives by "molding Iraqi military thought on the lines of our schemes."²⁰ The retention of military bases and presence of foreign troops would goad Iraqi nationalists for the next decade, until Rashid 'Ali's attempt to circumscribe the movement of British troops in 1941 became the *casus belli* for the British invasion of the country.²¹

In addition to the permanent military presence in Iraq, the parliamentary system inherited by the "monarchic-oligarchic" post-mandatory state proved a reliable instrument for enforcing the more ambiguous provisions of the treaty that privileged the British position in Iraq.²² The Iraqi parliament was packed with obsequious tribal shaykhs and other loyalists who owed their position to their support for Britain during the national uprising of 1920 and the electoral boycott of 1924.²³ The tortured and convoluted nature of the electoral system, which entailed multiple phases each susceptible to fraud, virtually ensured the victory of the government's chosen candidates, thus limiting the potential for radical reform. The two-year period between the ratification of the treaty and the formal acknowledgement of independence by the League of Nations provided a sufficient opportunity for Britain to manage the transition to the post-mandatory era by supporting the efforts of Nuri and Ja'far, then Prime Minister and Minister of

¹⁹ Silverfarb, *Britain's Informal Empire*, 23-32.

²⁰ Air Staff to General Sir Archibald Montgomery, Massingberd, War Office, October, 1934, AIR 9/14

²¹ Isma'il Yaghi Ahmad, *Harakat Rashid 'Ali al-Kaylani: Dirasah fi Tatawwur al-Harakah al-Wataniyah al-'Iraqiyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Tal'iah, 1974) and Mahmud al-Durrah, *al-Harb al-'Iraqiyah al-Britaniyah, 1941* (Beirut: Dar al-Tal'iah, 1969).

²² Samira Haj, *The Making of Iraq, 1900-1963: Capital, Power and Ideology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 9-39.

²³ 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: Princeton University Press, 1979), 99-119 and Haj, *The Making of Iraq*, 32-33.

Defense, to rig elections and "purify" government ministries of anti-British agitators.²⁴ The dissident poet Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulum was blunt in his assessment of this transition in "The False Independence after the Mandate":

I disrobed the Mandate and it returned to me
Disguised in my cap and headband
It astonished me that my eyes were deceived
By it like a rain cloud from a mirage
Oh dancers to the prospect of a new era
That contains all the old and ragged things
What is the difference between the Mandate
And its genitals on the body of Independence?²⁵

Formal independence, to Bahr al-'Ulum as to so many of his compatriots, was meaningless so long as sovereignty remained in the same hands.

Both Britain and her clients had an interest in obscuring the extent of collaboration in the transition to national independence, and press criticism of Britain was duly monitored and censored. Repeat offenders were penalized with fines and suspensions, which led the papers to change titles and apply new licenses, sometimes repeating the process to comical effect. The daily newspaper *al-Ahali* received a ten-day suspension in March 1933 for criticizing Britain, rechristened itself *Sawt al-Ahali* and continued to attack Britain, which provoked a second intervention by the British Ambassador and a stern warning from the foreign ministry in April. When the paper refused to modify its tone, the Iraqi government suspended its license for one year, but the paper once again reemerged under the name *al-Hali*, only to be suspended again in September.²⁶ The Assyrian uprising in 1933 provoked a particularly virulent campaign against Britain in the Iraqi press, as many Iraqis resented the role played by Assyrians as a mercenary militia in the Iraqi Levies.²⁷ The nationalist paper *al-Istiqlal* provoked the ire of Britain by attacking the presence of foreign spies, whom the paper accused of distributing money among the tribes and urban mobs in order to provoke riots and embarrass the Iraqi government.²⁸

The brunt of the anti-colonial assault in the early post-mandatory era did not, however, fall upon the British military presence or the provisions of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty but was instead

²⁴ Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 335-36.

²⁵ Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan Bahr al-'Ulum* (Baghdad: Matba'at Dar al-Tadamun, 1968), 1:59.

²⁶ Iraq: Annual Report for 1934, FO 371/18951 E 940/940/93.

²⁷ Iraq: Annual Report for 1933, FO 371/17871 E 2204/2204/93 and Silverfarb, *Britain's Informal Empire*, 33-55.

²⁸ *Al-Istiqlal*, September 6, 1933 and "RAF Intelligence in Iraq, December 4, 1933," AIR 2/1196

directed towards the national politicians and institutions seen as responsible for circumscribing national liberation. The remarkably fluid transition from colonialism to independence underscored the unrealized hopes and aspirations of the anti-colonial movement. The self-congratulatory declarations and celebrations of victory by those who took the place of the foreigners infuriated those who found themselves no better off than before. Mahmud al-Habbubi, who had earlier feted Faysal's glorious achievement, took a much bleaker view of post-mandatory Iraq several months later. In "Baghdad as I Saw Her," he bitterly noted the unrealized dreams of independence and castigated those Iraqis who replicated colonial exploitation:

Baghdad, it pains us to see the rabble throng
 Inside of you without avenging or dispersing...
Noble Arabs are left standing at the doors
 While hated infidels sit upon the throne
Every pulsing and inflamed jugular vein seethes
 Ignorant, careless and by the people despised
The traitor who knows nothing of his office
 Except how to attain the object of his desires²⁹

For the next twenty-six years, the military coup d'états, national uprisings, local rebellions, and demonstrations that roiled Iraqi politics were organized around a shared opposition to the empty nationalism of the local leadership bequeathed to them by the colonial state.

It was no coincidence that all of the major political parties and organizations that played significant roles in the enduring anti-colonial struggle, from the pan-Arabist Muthanna Club to the social democratic Ahali Group to the Iraqi Communist Party, emerged from Ja'far Abu al-Timman's National Party (*al-Hizb al-Watani*), which never accepted the legitimacy of the post-mandatory state.³⁰ Abu al-Timman, a merchant from Baghdad whom Batatu credits for bringing Sunnis and Shi'is together in the national uprising of 1920, refused an overture from Ayatollah Muhammad Husayn Kashif al-Ghita to head the government in the mandatory period and chose instead to labor in opposition until national liberation was realized.³¹ He remained the leader of the nationalist opposition for a full year after independence until he finally despaired of the corruption and hypocrisy permeating the post-mandatory state and announced his retirement

²⁹ al-Habbubi, *Diwan al-Habbubi*, 22-23 and al-Wa'iz, *al-Ittijahat al-Wataniyah*, 184-186.

³⁰ Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 296-97 and al-Musawi, *Reading Iraq*, 68.

³¹ Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 294-95.

from politics.³² The editors of *al-Ahali* lauded the decision and denounced "those who exploited nationalist slogans and party platforms to achieve personal gain while they in truth served foreign interests and enforced colonial projects."³³

The political frustrations of Abu al-Timman and his supporters found eloquent expression in the work of Iraqi poets Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulum and Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri. Both poets were political dissidents who hailed from conservative clerical backgrounds. Bahr al-'Ulum left the seminary to work in a cigarette factory in Baghdad, where his involvement with the labor movement and poetic diatribes against the state landed him in prison repeatedly, the first time as a teenager in 1928.³⁴ Jawahiri, on the other hand, endured a much more public fall from grace, losing his teaching position in 1926 after a public spat with Sati' al-Husri, the Minister of Education and nationalist ideologue, who accused Jawahiri of "expressing Persian inclinations" and disparaging the Arab nation in his poem "The Coldness of Exile." The influence of Muhammad al-Sadr, a nationalist icon with close ties to Jawahiri's family, helped land the poet a position at the royal palace, but Jawahiri was dismissed after composing a poem that included a thinly veiled attack on Faysal's close relationship with Britain.³⁵

The most obvious object of criticism of the post-mandatory state was the role played by Britain in guiding the political transition to independence. While the principled refusal of Abu al-Timman and the National Party to participate in the machinery of colonial governance was widely respected and admired, the often-oppositional engagement of Yasin al-Hashimi and other nationalist politicians with the colonial state was not necessarily derided and dismissed as collaboration. The servile support lent to colonial authorities by Nuri and Ja'far, on the other hand, was widely denounced. Bahr al-'Ulum denounced the very nature of the state bequeathed to Iraq by the colonial state in "The Prelude":

An administration nominated by the occupation
But the craftsmen erred in its formation
Is there a symmetry to the warped torso

³² *Al-Ahali*, November 2 and November 8, 1933 and Khalid al-Tamimi, *Muhammad Ja'far Abu al-Timman: Dirasah fi al-Zi'amah al-Siyasiyah al-'Iraqiyah* (Damascus, Dar al-Warraq, 1996), 334-42.

³³ *Al-Ahali*, November 27, 1933.

³⁴ Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan*, 1:9-22 and Silvia Naef, "Shi'i-Shuyu'i Or: How to Become a Communist in a Holy City," in *The Twelver Shia in Modern Times*, edited by Rainer Brunner and Werner Ende (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 258-67.

³⁵ Sulayman Jubran, *Majma' al-'Addad: Dirasah fi Sirat al-Jawahiri wa Shi'rihi* (Beirut: al-Mu'assasah al-'Arabiyah li al-Dirasat wa al-Nashr, 2003), 10-51 and al-Musawi, *Reading Iraq*, 15 and 74.

Or did he leave the dinner table hungry?³⁶

This depiction of the post-mandatory state as deformed, deficient, and thus perpetually reliant on imperial assistance for sustenance, symbolizes the poet's radical stance towards the state. Bahr al-'Ulum directs his anger at those responsible for betraying the utopian vision of national liberation:

Where is this new era today, with
Wisdom gone, succeeded by injustice and evil
These are the sins of Nuri al-Sa'id
Who inflicted the people with all kinds of misery³⁷

As the title of the poem indicates, Bahr al-'Ulum did not view the promise of a new era as lost and gone forever, but instead saw this mangled and deformed state as a transient prelude to true national liberation.

Jawahiri, who at that time still harbored political ambitions despite his public quarrels with Faysal and Sati' al-Husri and who had not yet gravitated toward the militant leftwing politics of Bahr al-'Ulum, adopted the more oblique strategy of criticizing government policies and their effects on the poor in more general terms in "Game of Tribulations":

It is the regime that set up this game
That the wretched call tribulations
For a tribulation to the regime is the work of a functionary
But a tribulation to the people is an exegesis of a deputy³⁸

The "tribulations" that Jawahiri denounces refer to the new regime's land policies, which radically accelerated the colonial concentration of land among an oligarchy of tribal shaykhs and urban speculators after the passage of the Law of the Settlement of Land Rights in 1933.³⁹ He attacks the regime's blithe evasion of responsibility for the resulting poverty, which he contends is the logical product of the policy or the "exegesis of a deputy."

Jawahiri's bleak depiction of the struggles of the common people and especially the oppressive burden of regressive taxation in this poem highlights the gravity of the problem:

³⁶ Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan*, 1:58 and al-Wa'iz, *al-Ittijahat al-Wataniyah*, 190-91.

³⁷ Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan*, 1:58.

³⁸ Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri, *Diwan al-Jawahiri* (Bayrut: Bisan, 2000), 2:221 and al-Wa'iz, *al-Ittijahat al-Wataniyah*, 211-213.

³⁹ Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 133 and Haj, *The Making of Iraq*, 33-34.

The people march, tired, weary, and weak
 Their backs overburdened with taxes and levies
Denied what lies between life and them
 The death that stands between the eye and the brow

His reference to taxes and levies alludes to the radical redistribution of the tax burden from the landowner to the peasant during this period. Land revenue, which produced as much as 27.6 percent of total state revenue during the mandatory period, never produced more than 10.5 percent of total revenue between 1933 and 1941, and the reduction of the tax on land ownership was exacerbated by the conversion of the land tax to a consumption tax, which passed the tax burden on to the consumer through higher prices.⁴⁰

Jawahiri maintained optimism that the state could be reformed and injustice effaced through critical engagement with the political establishment. He saw the poet as the voice and conscience of the nation and yet found that his colleagues were abandoning their social responsibilities for a share in the spoils of power:

From the darkness comes the verse of a poet
 To fix this condition, or the article of a writer
As long as the regime stands facing tribulation
 There is nothing for us to do but await the consequences
But the poets persist in quarreling and meddling
 And the writers are so often creatures of hardship
They call the "free" nation to fulfill their duties
 And not to reckon easy this fulfillment of duty
And not to reckon easy the building of institutions
 And signing of papers and distribution of salaries

Jawahiri demonstrates here his appreciation of the poetics of commitment by castigating those who have abandoned the responsibilities of their craft in order to serve as apologists for the state.

While Jawahiri clung at this stage in his career to a traditional model of political reform in which noble critics and virtuous poets could shame politicians into reform, Bahr al-'Ulum appealed directly to the people in the incendiary "Country of Knowledge and the Bell Button":

After the dedication of the martyrs of the Euphrates
 Will we be slaughtered by the tyrant and oppressor?
Or will the unshod workers of Iraq

⁴⁰ Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 105.

Be hauled back to their penal colony?
O People, Mercy upon our weariness with life
Under the power and might of this cruel ordeal
We complain to the constitution of the tyrant's oppression
For we were not deprived of attentive ears⁴¹

The poem's reference to the "dedication of the martyrs of the Euphrates" alludes to official commemorations of the 1920 uprising and the government's cynical appropriation of its legacy. The government ordered Bahr al-'Ulum's arrest after he recited the poem in public at Kufa on April 12, 1934 and a Najafi court quickly sentenced him to two months imprisonment at Hillah.

Popular demonstrations erupted in Hillah after the verdict was announced, with peasants surrounding the lorry transporting the poet from prison to his court hearing and shouting slogans in support of the poet and calling for the downfall of imperialists and traitors. An appellate court rescinded the sentence eighteen days later after a sustained protest by a delegation of some forty lawyers from Baghdad, Najaf, and Hillah. After his release, Bahr al-'Ulum joined the nationalist political opposition in agitating for the downfall of the regime.⁴² He inveighed against the tyranny and treachery of the state in the poem "The Wretched":

Where is the balance between the pans of the scale?
And are they who measure our rights blind to its visage?
For darkness spreads and justice is effaced
Deviance prevails and truth is oppressed
What is our national dignity in the hands of the traitor
Except for glass for his caprice to strike against⁴³

The glimmer of optimism for constitutional reform evinced at the end of "Country of Knowledge and the Bell Button" had now gone, and Bahr al-'Ulum made clear his absolute alienation from the state:

This Iraq and this state of tribulation
No regime can fix her condition
Her sons under the rule of base tyranny
Intruders among them rule in her name
The innocent are pursued by the guilty
And the righteous persecuted by the wicked
The desire of the individual is sanctified as law

⁴¹ Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan*, 1:87.

⁴² Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan*, 1:12.

⁴³ Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulum, *al-'Awatif* (al-Najaf: Matba'at al-Ra'i, 1937), 115-118.

In spite of us, the sacrosanct communities⁴⁴

An Alliance Betrayed: Yasin al-Hashimi and the Euphrates Rebellion

‘Ali Jawdat al-Ayyubi, an ex-Sharifian officer of relatively humble origin who had set aside his past agitation against the mandate and the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty in favor of more cordial relations with Britain, was invited by King Ghazi to head a new government on August 27, 1934.⁴⁵ ‘Ali Jawdat quickly succeeded in convincing Ghazi to approve his request to dissolve parliament and hold new elections, a concession that had been denied to Rashid ‘Ali al-Kaylani, a close ally of Yasin al-Hashimi in the National Brotherhood Party (*Hizb al-Ikha’’ al-Watani*) whose premiership had run aground in September 1933 in the face of stiff parliamentary opposition.⁴⁶ The new elections, which ‘Ali Jawdat claimed rather defensively had followed "the same procedure as in former elections," broke with past precedent by failing to concede a significant number of seats to leading members of the opposition. Of the eighty-eight representatives elected, just twelve were National Brotherhood members, while the remainder professed allegiance to ‘Ali Jawdat's Party of National Unity (*Hizb al-Wahda al-Watani*), which had no political platform except for loyalty to the cabinet.⁴⁷ Most deputies attained their positions by virtue of bribes, a practice which ‘Ali Jawdat continued to defend long after his resignation, describing it in a conversation to the historian ‘Abd al-Razzaq al-Hasani as a necessary measure to distinguish between the thousands of aspirants.⁴⁸ Bahr al-‘Ulum denounced this corruption in the poem "Thieves":

A country in which inferior men play their roles
And disguised sinners frolic and rejoice
Thieves of my decaying house publicly conspiring
And gathering to exterminate my right
If they strengthen my chains, my patience is thin
And if they tighten my prison, well my grave is wide⁴⁹

His defiant stance in the closing line of the poem would foreshadow the uprising to come.

⁴⁴ Bahr al-‘Ulum, *Diwan*, 1:97.

⁴⁵ Report on the Leading Personalities in Iraq, June 27, 1939, FO 406/77 E 4745/4745/93

⁴⁶ Jamil al-Midfai, who succeeded Rashid ‘Ali, did not engage in partisan politics and sought instead to buttress his position by appealing to allies and associates across party lines. See Majid Khadduri, *Independent Iraq, 1932-1958: A Study in Iraqi Politics* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 37-47.

⁴⁷ Iraq: Annual Report for 1934, FO 371/18951 E 940/940/93, ‘Abd al-Razzaq al-Hasani, *Tarikh al-Wizarat al-Iraqiyah* (Sidon: Matba‘at al-‘Urfan), 4:33, and Khadduri, *Independent Iraq*, 47-49.

⁴⁸ al-Hasani, *Tarikh al-Wizarat al-Iraqiyah*, 4:33.

⁴⁹ Bahr al-‘Ulum, *Diwan*, 1:104 and al-Wa‘iz, *al-Ittijahat al-Wataniyah*, 214-215.

Widespread public hostility to the terms of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty succeeded in uniting for the first time since 1920 the several disparate factions of the political opposition in Iraq. The oppositional bloc was led by the radical nationalists of the National Brotherhood Party.⁵⁰ The brand of pan-Arabism espoused by Yasin and his principle ally Rashid 'Ali al-Kaylani demanded the immediate liberation of Palestine and Syria and endorsed the authoritarian republicanism of Mustafa Kemal, which brought them into conflict with both the state and the monarchy. While 'Ali Jawdat sought to stifle dissent outside of parliamentary chambers by including the owners of the leading nationalist newspapers *al-Istiqlal*, *al-Bilad*, and *al-'Alam al-'Arabi* on his electoral slate, he could not prevent the spurned leaders of the National Brotherhood from coordinating political opposition with tribal and clerical leaders of the marginalized Shi'a of southern Iraq.⁵¹ As Ja'far Abu al-Timman noted with simplicity, "there are no supporters of this administration except for those 'elected' to parliament by prior arrangement."⁵² *Al-Ahali*, which had been complaining about the fraudulent electoral process since 1932, now openly denounced the system for transforming politicians from public servants to tools of the state.⁵³

The National Brotherhood leaders sent emissaries to the tribal and religious leadership of southern Iraq, where the Shi'i leadership of the anti-colonial uprising of 1920 had been largely excluded from power. Yasin and Rashid 'Ali managed to revive the unrealized promises of 1920, when urban nationalists secured the crucial support of tribal shaykhs and Shi'i clerics by promising them national unity and equality. Abu al-Timman, the essential link between urban nationalists and rural leaders in 1920, had bitterly broken with the National Brotherhood and announced his retirement from politics in 1933 after the National Brotherhood broke their promise to never recognize the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty. After several restless years outside of politics, he reluctantly decided to renew his alliance with Yasin.⁵⁴ Ja'far founded the daily newspaper *al-Mabda'* in early January 1935 and the paper quickly supplanted the suspended *al-Ahali* as the central organ of the Ahali Group (*Jama'at al-Ahali*).⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 200.

⁵¹ al-Hasani, *Tarikh al-Wizarat al-'Iraqiyah*, 4:25-53.

⁵² *Al-Mabda'*, February 10, 1935.

⁵³ *Al-Ahali*, April 22, 1932, June 28, 1933, and September 6, 1934, and Husayn Jamil, *al-Hayah al-Niyabiyah fi al-'Iraq, 1925-1946: Mawqaf Jama'at al-Ahali minha* (Baghdad: Maktabat al-Muthanna, 1983), 206.

⁵⁴ Al-Tamimi, *Muhammad Ja'far Abu al-Timman*, 334-51 and Khadduri, *Independent Iraq*, 37-39.

⁵⁵ Al-Tamimi, *Muhammad Ja'far Abu al-Timman*, 346-47.

The various factions of the opposition bloc were motivated to different degrees by distinct goals. The radical nationalists agitated for the disavowal of the Anglo-Iraqi treaty, the tribal shaykhs for a greater share in the spoils of power, and the progressive intellectuals for a more equitable distribution of political power and national wealth. They coalesced, however, around a shared sentiment that national liberation had been denied by the carefully planned transition that transferred political sovereignty to a coterie of loyalists who had privately pledged to safeguard British interests in the country. Just months before the eruption of the massive tribal rebellion that paralyzed the country, Mahmud al-Mallah published "The Obstacle" in the National Brotherhood's daily newspaper, *al-Ikha' al-Watani*:

A project established by the mandate
In a country they called mandated
They sowed rancor and spite in her soil
And made her taste its varieties of dust
Then they said here is your independence
And thanked God for what He granted
And so we threw a wedding feast
Devoid of all the stolen jewels
They bound our feet in shackles
And we reckoned them gilded anklets⁵⁶

Mallah's caustic metaphor for the Anglo-Iraqi alliance, which cast the conditions of the treaty as shackles in spite of the efforts of the post-mandatory leaders to depict them as "gilded anklets," blamed colonialism not only for the restrictions placed on Iraq's military, foreign policy and finances, but also for the internal social divisions that sprung from the "rancor and spite" bequeathed to the country by the colonial state.

Abu al-Timman echoed these themes in the editorials he penned for *al-Mabda'*. He attributed the rising sectarian strife to the institutions of the colonial state and the selfishness of Iraq's post-mandatory leadership and called instead for national unity and solidarity in the face of an oppressive regime. The paper debuted with a front-page editorial titled simply "A Declaration to the Iraqi People," in which Ja'far countered the government's allegations that the disaffected tribes, clerics, and political activists were merely sectarian opportunists by stressing equality over particular grievances.⁵⁷ One article, titled "The Subjugation of Iraq and the Tricks

⁵⁶ *Al-Ikha' al-Watani*, January 6, 1935

⁵⁷ *Al-Mabda'*, January 26, 1935.

of the Colonizers: A River of Blood in Search of a River of Oil," recast the history of the fall of Baghdad in World War I as a consequence of the collusion and collaboration of Iraqi elites with British forces in a bid to appropriate Ottoman power and privilege.⁵⁸ Ja'far denounced the state's failure to even address the governmental deficiencies, national divisions, and the moral void bequeathed by the colonial state in "Some of the Evils of the Present State." He accused political leaders of setting the people against one another in order to distract from their own power grab.⁵⁹ Ja'far attributed this failure of the state to the legacy of colonialism, arguing that colonial states everywhere left behind a "constitutional façade" that obscured the pursuit of self-interest by "England's men."⁶⁰

Yasin, Rashid 'Ali, and Hikmat Sulayman, the core leaders of the National Brotherhood, seized the opportunity presented by the release of electoral slates by 'Ali Jawdat in late 1934 to recruit those tribal shaykhs who found themselves excluded. Opposition conferences were convened first in Baghdad, Kadhimiyah, Karbala, and Najaf, and then spread across the Euphrates valley in December. The conferences pledged absolute loyalty to King Ghazi, devotion to the Iraqi constitution, commitment to the principle of customary law for the tribes, and opposition to any participation in the government without the approval of the alliance. In January, a delegation of tribal shaykhs meeting at the home of 'Abd al-Wahid composed an appeal to Kashif Al Ghita and other leading clerics, imploring the 'ulama to publicly call for the establishment of a new government that would benefit the entire nation.⁶¹ 'Abd al-Wahid quickly emerged as the locus of the movement, as his reputation as a hero of the 1920 uprising and leadership of the powerful Fatla tribes made him a particularly powerful symbol of those marginalized by the political favoritism of 'Ali Jawdat's government.⁶² Kashif al-Ghita responded to 'Abd al-Wahid's letter by convening a conference of tribal shaykhs in Najaf on January 11th, 1935, where they agreed to demand the immediate resignation of 'Ali Jawdat and the dissolution of Parliament.

When the government moved to prevent and disrupt these meetings of opposition figures, Abu al-Timman took on a leading role in defending the constitutional legitimacy of the gatherings. On February 9th he denounced the events under the headline "Violated Liberties."

⁵⁸ *Al-Mabda'*, January 26, 1935.

⁵⁹ *Al-Mabda'*, January 27, 1935.

⁶⁰ *Al-Mabda'*, February 1, 1935.

⁶¹ Al-Hasani, *Tarikh al-Wizarat al-'Iraqiyah*, 4:45-48.

⁶² Khadduri, *Independent Iraq*, 48.

This prompted the Minister of Interior to issue an official warning, which Ja‘far published in full two days later under the headline "Who is in Violation of the Law?" The article called on the Iraqi people to "defend their rights, even in the face of repression from those who seek to exploit this country."⁶³ When Ghazi still refused to meet the demands of the opposition, tribal war dances against the government spread throughout the Middle Euphrates region. ‘Ali Jawdat considered deploying the army against the tribes, but General Bakr Sidqi, a close friend and ally of Hikmat, refused to intervene. When more than half of the senators, who were not elected and therefore not comprised of political loyalists, began to boycott parliamentary sessions in support of the tribal leaders, ‘Ali Jawdat was compelled to resign.⁶⁴

Ghazi, still reluctant to meet the full demands of the insurgents, refused to dissolve the ‘Ali Jawdat Parliament and instead appointed Jamil al-Midfa‘i to lead a new government on March 4th. Midfa‘i appealed to the National Brotherhood for political conciliation, but the party leadership declined to denounce ‘Abd al-Wahid and his fellow insurgents. Abu al-Timman began to advance a more specific agenda beyond the dissolution of parliament, calling for the establishment of labor unions and peasant cooperatives, the formation of elected municipal assemblies, and the creation of a national industrial-agricultural bank to fund development.⁶⁵ Like his predecessor, Midfa‘i came to the conclusion that the problem could only be resolved with force and attempted to sidestep Bakr Sidqi and instead appeal directly to General Taha al-Hashimi. Taha, however, was Yasin’s brother, and also refused to intervene, arguing that the uprising was political rather than military in nature and should be dealt with accordingly. Midfa‘i was forced to admit defeat and resign on March 16. With no other recourse, Ghazi reluctantly appointed Yasin al-Hashimi to lead the new government.⁶⁶

When ‘Abd al-Wahid, the leader of the tribal rebellion and a National Brotherhood loyalist, regained his seat in parliament, he announced that the uprising had been successful and ended his opposition to the government. Bahr al-‘Ulum denounced this selfish hypocrisy in "The Danger of the Opportunists":

The opportunists are always more dangerous
Than others in their hypocrisy and fickleness...

⁶³ *Al-Mabda’*, February 9, 1935 and February 11, 1935 and al-Tamimi, *Muhammad Ja‘far Abu al-Timman*, 348.

⁶⁴ Iraq: Annual Report for 1935, FO 371/20010 E 851/851/93 and Khadduri, *Independent Iraq*, 49-51.

⁶⁵ *Al-Mabda’*, March 4, 1935, March 8, 1935, and March 13, 1935.

⁶⁶ Iraq: Annual Report for 1935, FO 371/20010 E 851/851/93 and Khadduri, *Independent Iraq*, 52-53.

For them there is no intellect or conscience
Or anything with a fixed countenance
Instead they are selfish when they catch sight
Of some sheep to pursue without shame⁶⁷

Indeed, once the genie of tribal rebellion was out of the bottle it could not be easily replaced, and rival shaykhs were quick to denounce ‘Abd al-Wahid as a hypocrite and traitor. Violence erupted at Rumaytha in early May when Shaykh Khawwam of the Banu Izrayj directed his tribe to destroy the railway line and various government buildings in the area.⁶⁸ Bakr Sidqi and Taha al-Hashimi, suddenly amenable to the idea of crushing the rebellion, declared martial law throughout much of southern Iraq and spent much of the early spring and late summer directing the work of military tribunals, which levied fines, confiscated weapons, imprisoned hundreds of rebels, and executed dozens of tribal leaders.⁶⁹ The Iraqi Royal Air Force made great use of the planes and bombs acquired from Britain, and Iraqi pilots dropped thousands of bombs during the course of the month long assault.⁷⁰ While British R.A.F. pilots did not participate in the bombing raids, they did conduct reconnaissance missions, and two British airmen were killed when their plane was shot down over Rumaytha. The British Ambassador did, however, refuse Yasin’s request for British demonstration flights over the disturbed areas to frighten the tribes into submission, explaining with sympathy that British forces could no longer be used to suppress internal disturbances.⁷¹

Government retribution only reinforced the disparities of power that had provoked the rebellion in the first place. The participation and abstention of particular tribal leaders and sections in the uprisings can be directly traced to their financial stake in preserving the status quo. Those tribal leaders like the Gharraf of the Muntafiq whose political connections had secured them the legal title to land refrained from participating in the rebellion, while the smaller shaykhs marginalized by these legal maneuvers took on leading roles among the rebels.⁷² The communal property of rebel tribes was confiscated and redistributed to rival members of the kin networks more amenable to accepting the legitimacy of governmental authority. These new leaders owed their power to the state and not to the tribe, and their willingness to exploit their

⁶⁷ Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan*, 1:104-105.

⁶⁸ Khadduri, *Independent Iraq*, 55-58.

⁶⁹ Iraq: Annual Report for 1935, FO 371/20010 E 851/851/93

⁷⁰ Quarterly Report on the Royal Iraqi Air Force, July 1, 1935, AIR 2/1343

⁷¹ Iraq: Annual Report for 1935, FO 371/20010 E 851/851/93

⁷² Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 118.

power further eroded the relationship of consent between tribe and shaykh. Those tribal leaders who sought to reclaim their land with the help of sympathetic tribesmen were arrested, imprisoned, and tortured.⁷³

While most of the fighting took place in May and June, violence persisted throughout the year. Frustrated by his inability to crush the protests, Yasin pursued a more conciliatory path by remitting the prison sentences of convicted rebels and issuing a general pardon to all those who took up arms against the government, including those who managed to evade capture in Kirkuk and Sulaymani.⁷⁴ These efforts did little more than demonstrate the government's weakness, and tribal unrest spread to the borders of the Qurna oil fields by September, resulting in the deaths of several hundred rebels.⁷⁵ The Iraqi government bombed the tribes again in the spring of 1936, targeting rebels but also villages, crops, and livestock. As always, British military officers provided thorough logistical advice and strategic intelligence to the Iraqi pilots conducting the raids.⁷⁶ Jamil Midfa'i and Hikmat Sulayman, the first forced to resign due to Yasin's collusion with the military and the second excluded from power after helping to orchestrate the uprising, led the parliamentary opposition to the violent repression of the tribes.⁷⁷

By the end of the year, Yasin had completed a total volte-face with respect to Britain and the imperial alliance. The old champion of the political opposition to the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty and fierce critic of Britain began this "happy transmutation" from the moment he accepted office. Archibald Clark Kerr, the British Ambassador in Baghdad, celebrated the change:

But of late a metamorphosis has taken him. It has been sudden and it seems to be complete. It has not only left him frank enough to confess, with some sadness, his old mistakes and to declare his faith in a hand-to-hand association of his country with ours; it has also brought with it something not far off confidence in the disinterestedness of the policy of His Majesty's Government, and, with all this, a growing freedom from black bile, indeed, a geniality and mellowness of temper which move me strongly to forget his past.⁷⁸

Yasin's principle opposition to the imperial alliance seems to have been the British failure to entrust him with its safekeeping, and his long rivalry with Nuri and Ja'far, whom he derided as

⁷³ Intelligence Reports on Rumaitha, October 25, 1935, AIR 5/1270.

⁷⁴ Iraq: Annual Report for 1935, FO 371/20010 E 851/851/93.

⁷⁵ "Qurna and Hadina Disturbances, September 20, 1935," AIR 5/1270

⁷⁶ "Quarterly Report on the Royal Iraqi Air Force, June 4, 1936," AIR 2, 1343

⁷⁷ Iraq: Annual Report for 1936, FO 371/20803 E 1055/1055/93.

⁷⁸ Iraq: Annual Report for 1935, FO 371/20010 E 851/851/93

collaborators and traitors, quickly evaporated when Clark Kerr suggested that he include the pair in his administration.

Yasin's betrayal infuriated those who had brought him to power, and the growing frustrations of these marginalized groups reflected residual anxiety over the betrayal of the last national uprising, the Great Iraqi Revolution of 1920. While the chief participants of that failed uprising endured political exile, imprisonment, and punitive financial measures meant to deter future involvement in politics, Faysal and his followers eagerly wrapped themselves in its mantle and appropriated its legacy. While the majority of the rebels were left outside of the machinery of power under the monarchy, the Hashemite interlopers embraced both pro-British tribal shaykhs and select rebels, mostly Sunni Arabs like Jamil al-Madfa'i, who was responsible for the ambush and slaughter of a British unit at Tal 'Afar in 1920.⁷⁹ The new political elite lost no time in appropriating the spoils of power, enriching themselves with expensive houses and automobiles while buying the loyalty of tribal shaykhs with massive grants of state land. Nuri constructed an opulent palace in the capital with state money, and the National Brotherhood followed his example when they too came to power. Yasin, for example, acquired over 1,500,000 acres of state land and Rashid 'Ali secured substantial land tracts and monetary considerations by appointing himself trustee of the Kaylani family *waqf*.⁸⁰

Abu al-Timman grew increasingly disillusioned with the political establishment with which he had fitfully and unsuccessfully engaged for nearly a decade. Hikmat, who had helped to orchestrate the tribal rebellions, was inexplicably excluded from Yasin's administration and joined the opposition. Bahr al-'Ulum lead a delegation from Najaf to Baghdad after Midfa'i's resignation to warn Ghazi against permitting Yasin's administration to remain in power without instituting real reform:

We have not come here to congratulate or bless, for this is the job of people other than us. We have instead come to appeal to you of the necessity of dealing with these rotten conditions that the people can longer no bear. If you do well by the people, then we shall be with you, but if not, we will hold you to account more strongly than others. We represent the nation who wishes to live a happy life, and it is not possible for any power to obstruct her or her venerable wishes.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Mackereth to Foreign Office, October 31, 1936, FO 371/20013 E 6819/1419/93

⁸⁰ Clark Kerr to Foreign Office, November 21, 1936, FO 371/20014 E 7624/1419/93

⁸¹ Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan*, 1:12-13.

It was, however, possible for Yasin to order his arrest and to arrange for a military court to sentence him to death. While awaiting his execution, Bahr al-'Ulum composed "A Revolution since My Creation":

Do not request from me tranquility for I
Cannot reckon a day when I was tranquil
I am a revolution since my creation and my revolution
Is like a fire that burns the cities of tyrants
In my own view and those of my supporters
Honor lies in not making peace with a traitor⁸²

Yasin, the traitor, was unmoved by the poet's militant stance but popular pressure again secured his freedom. The capital sentence was soon commuted to twenty years hard labor, and the poet would eventually be released under the weight of popular opposition after serving just five months.

Jawahiri was particularly affected by the failed uprising and raged against both the nationalist leaders who abandoned the tribes they had incited to rebellion and shaykhs like 'Abd al-Wahid who "rented out for slaughter scores of their sons for the gratification of the ruling class and the satiation of their appetites."⁸³ After learning of the mass execution of the defeated rebels and the destruction of tribal villages across the south, Jawahiri denounced the cynical manipulation of the tribes by the nationalist politicians for their own ends as part of a broader historical claim about the cynical appropriation of popular resistance movements:

It was natural for the tribes to dread
For even their nature had been polluted
They had been merely a weapon for us but
Became a weapon against us every now and then⁸⁴

The last lines cast an allusion to the appropriation of the political dividends and historical memory of the national uprising of 1920.⁸⁵ Jawahiri closes the poem with a thinly veiled attack on Yasin:

⁸² Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan*, 1:109.

⁸³ Jawahiri, *Dhikrayati* (Damascus: Dar al-Rafidayn, 1988), 1:310.

⁸⁴ Jawahiri, *Diwan*, 2:247-49.

⁸⁵ For an account of the tribes' lingering resentment of this betrayal by a direct participant in the uprising, see Fariq al-Muzhir Al Fir'awn, *al-Haq'iq al-Nasi'ah fi al-Thawrah al-'Iraqiyah Sanat 1920 wa Nata'ijiha* (Baghdad: Matba'at al-Nijah, 1952), 551-594.

Are you deep in your loins a true leader
Empowered by the nation after these crimes
For what to you are those losses to loot and spoil
From the people who risked everything and dared
Turn to face to this life that sated your temptations
And do not savor from her the seat of the coward
How grotesque that you advance and surmount
The encompassing evil replete with hypocrisy

The poem was published on the front page of *al-Islah* on October 12, 1935 and infuriated Yasin, who ordered the immediate suspension of the paper's license for one year and Jawahiri's expulsion from his teaching position.

Jawahiri's disillusionment with the political establishment was largely personal; in spite of his well-publicized disputes with Sati' al-Husri and Faysal, his social and political connections with well-placed Shi'i politicians like Rustam Haydar and Muhammad al-Sadr enabled him to continue dreaming of political office. When Jawahiri was finally offered a parliamentary seat by Yasin, under the condition of not causing any more trouble, Salih Jabr, a young protégé of Nuri al-Sa'id, thwarted his election at the last minute. As Jawahiri later recounted, the episode permanently poisoned his attitude towards the political order and the fraudulent electoral process and led him to support "a coup or revolution or *wathba* or *intifada* or any of their other synonyms" as a means of destroying the corrupt post-mandatory state. He would eventually come to consider the episode a blessing in disguise because his distance from official office enabled him to remain close to the masses.⁸⁶ Like Bahr al-'Ulum, Jawahiri remained bitterly resentful at Yasin's betrayal and ready to support any revolution.

The Bakr Sidqi Coup and the Populist Moment in Iraq

Iraqi airplanes flew over Baghdad on the morning on October 29, 1936, dropping leaflets signed by General Bakr Sidqi announcing that he had been "called upon" to overthrow Yasin's government. Hikmat Sulayman, who had abandoned the National Brotherhood after Yasin excluded him from the new administration, appeared at the palace shortly afterwards with a letter signed by Bakr that carried an ultimatum for King Ghazi to dismiss Yasin's government within three hours and allow Hikmat to form the successor administration or to face the prospect of an army advance on the capital.⁸⁷ Yasin was taken completely by surprise, largely because he had

⁸⁶ Jawahiri, *Dhikrayati*, 1:309-24.

⁸⁷ Clark Kerr to Foreign Office, October 29, 1936, FO 371/20013 E 6783/1419/93

been plotting his own military intervention to establish a republic.⁸⁸ The poet Nu‘man Mahir al-Kan‘ani celebrated the coup as the end of an era in "The Revelation of the Revolution," published just three weeks later:

A coterie of despots ruled our people
Following the method of the brutal tyrant
Their aim to live a salubrious life
Unconcerned with the great misfortunes

Kan‘ani reflected the views of many Iraqis who believed that the coup d’état was not merely another rotation of political power but instead heralded the dawn of a new era:

Justice appeared and broke forth, smiling mouths
Proclaiming in the wilderness the end of injustice
The clouds of deception were dispelled and pursued
For the cunning light of truth launched its attack

The poet’s exuberance for the revolution and his optimism for the future it foreshadowed attest to an overwhelming confidence that the moment of national liberation had finally arrived:

How lovely the moment when tyranny fell
Thrown bloody to the ground without resistance
So praise life, O People of Iraq, and enjoy
For justice has arrived and righteousness is coming⁸⁹

Bakr Sidqi’s intervention came as the culmination of a series of secret meetings of the Ahali Group, which had recruited the disgruntled Ja‘far Abu al-Timman and Hikmat Sulayman in 1935.⁹⁰ The group’s decision to suspend their commitment to democracy provoked an onslaught of criticism from the group’s opponents for years afterward. Kamil al-Chadirchi, an Ahali intellectual, defended the decision by contending that the resort to violence became necessary when "people confront the obstruction of all democratic methods."⁹¹ Hikmat likewise argued that constitutional opposition was meaningless, "for parliament is a creation of the

⁸⁸ Rendel to Foreign Office, December 23, 1936, FO 371/20795 E 7766/1419/93. British intelligence reports also indicate that Nuri and Ja‘far were planning their own coup d’état, which makes three concurrent attempts.

⁸⁹ *Al-Haras*, November 21, 1936 and al-Wa‘iz, *al-Ittijahat al-Wataniyah*, 266-68.

⁹⁰ Mudhaffar ‘Abd Allah al-Amin, *Jama‘at al-Ahali: Munshu‘ha, ‘Aqidatuha, wa Dawruha fi al-Siyasah al-Iraqiyah, 1932-1946* (Beirut: al-Mu‘assassah al-‘Arabiyah li al-Dirasat wa al-Nashr, 2001), 104-34.

⁹¹ Kamil al-Chadirchi, *Mudhakkirat Kamil al-Chadirchi wa Tarikh al-Hizb al-Watani al-Dimuqrati* (Beirut: Dar al-Tali‘a, 1970), 42-43 and 210.

administration, fashioned from the ranks of confidants, partisans, and protégés." He also pointed out that military intervention was not exactly unprecedented, for "in less than two years, the army has been involved in six revolutions in Iraq," but reminded his critics that "the army is also part of the nation and soldiers are brothers of the millions of wronged and persecuted citizens."⁹²

The ideological diversity of the Ahali members, who ranged from liberals to social democrats to Communists, led them to embrace the principles of "populism" (*sha 'biyyah*). 'Abd al-Fattah Ibrahim, the intellectual leader of the group, defined populism as "a social and political movement that believes in the power of democracy to improve the general conditions of the population and that seeks to attain some form of national power that will insure the realization of Iraq's national and economic liberation."⁹³ Husayn Jamil, a Baghdadi lawyer, emphasized that the "national liberation" sought by the group was a democratic emancipation from both colonialism and feudalism. The populist platform articulated a desire for "total liberation" that was predicated on a shared opposition to colonialism and feudalism and a vague aspiration for democracy, modernity, and social justice.⁹⁴

Hikmat's platform reflected the influence of this populist doctrine and was specifically designed to appeal to the interests of the marginalized peasants and workers. He called for the division of large estates and the distribution of reclaimed land to the peasantry. Britain strenuously objected to the proposals, with one official opining that "this sort of advanced agrarianism is unnecessary in Iraq and foreign to the traditional Iraqi mentality" and another noting that the proposals were "so rich in promise of antagonism from vested interests that the very programme itself might well be the undoing of Hikmat." Nevertheless, the ambassador concluded that support for Hikmat was "our only present hope of escaping a military dictatorship," and admitted that the populist agenda enjoyed tremendous popular support with the "air of spontaneous enthusiasm."⁹⁵ The revolution did indeed enjoy considerable popular support, particularly in the poorer neighborhoods of Baghdad like Bab al-Shaykh and Shaykh 'Amr.⁹⁶ Huge street demonstrations of peasants and workers were lead by the poet Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri and labor leader Muhammad Salih al-Qazzaz from al-Haydarkhanah mosque

⁹² *Al-Haras*, November 27, 1936.

⁹³ al-Amin, *Jama'at al-Ahali*, 82.

⁹⁴ al-Amin, *Jama'at al-Ahali*, 83.

⁹⁵ Iraq: Annual Report for 1936, FO 371/20803 E 1055/1055/93, Clark Kerr to Foreign Office, October 31, 1936, FO 371/20013 E 6906/1419/93, and Clark Kerr to Foreign Office, November 4, 1936, FO 371/20014 E 7147/1419/93.

⁹⁶ Fu'ad Husayn al-Wakil, *Jama'at al-Ahali fi al-'Iraq, 1932-1937* (Baghdad: Dar al-Rashid li al-Nashr, 1979), 285.

on November 2nd and November 3rd, 1936, with the crowds banging drums and chanting, "Long Live the People's Administration!"⁹⁷ When the crowds approached the homes of Yasin and Rashid 'Ali on Rashid Street, they began to chant instead, "Death to Fascism!," "Bread for the Hungry!," and "Land for the Peasants!"⁹⁸ Bahr al-'Ulum penned "The Revolution of the Coup D'état," to express his optimism that the military intervention would introduce radical reform:

If evil grows rampant within the nation
 Open for her benefit a thousand doors
These the sins of hundreds of years
 Will beget for the people righteousness
If not for the swell of the tyrant's insolence
 Inducing our souls to anxiety and agitation
When the wrath of the rebels burst forth
 The revolution of the coup d'état would not erupt⁹⁹

The poem writes the nation into the clandestine revolution, simultaneously asserting the significance of popular support and reminding the new government of its power.

The popular enthusiasm for the revolution was driven largely by public support for the populist platform of the Ahali Group. Hikmat rewarded the group's support by including three of their number in his new administration: Abu al-Timman became Minister of Finance, Chadirchi became Minister of Economics and Communication, and Yusuf 'Izz al-Din Ibrahim became Minister of Education. Abu al-Timman contended that the old regime had transgressed all legal and constitutional boundaries: "They disdained the blood that they shed and became experts in the persecution of liberties, they strangled free newspaper before they could publish and pursued the free sons of the nation wherever they tread. An era passed over this country, the likes of which had not been seen before, an era of martial law that filled the prisons with the sons of the country, your brothers, for but the slightest suspicion." Ja'far points to the venal pursuit of self-interest and the manipulation of the machinery of government to transfer wealth and power to political patrons and clients as the proximate cause for the "increase in general indignation and the resentment of the Iraqi masses and the acceleration of the hour of eruption and rupture."¹⁰⁰ The poet 'Abd al-Qadir al-Zahawi alluded to this indignation in the poem "O Self":

⁹⁷ Al-Tamimi, *Muhammad Ja'far Abu al-Timman*, 398-99.

⁹⁸ Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 440.

⁹⁹ Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan*, 1:125 and al-Wa'iz, *al-Ittijahat al-Wataniyah*, 263.

¹⁰⁰ *Al-Ahali*, November 7, 1936.

With the sword of justice the heavens appointed
 An avenger for every enemy and pharaoh
He is the leader whose decree dictates
 A noble end to previous sanctioned assault
As well as the tax collector's excessive demands
 Which have mired the people in their mud and clay
He generously declines all lofty effects
 For his essence exceeds all estimation¹⁰¹

The poet's praise for Bakr Sidqi's reputed asceticism offers a pointed contrast to the corruption of the political class and underscores the optimistic portrayal of the general as national savior.

British officials, shaken from the outset by the unprecedented violence of the coup, which included the murder of their close ally Ja'far al-'Askari, and the radical tenor of its supporters, who expressed a desire to go beyond "the usual 'rotativist' re-casting of the Cabinet," were further disturbed by the inclusion of several figures in the new government drawn from beyond the sphere of those associated with the British Empire.¹⁰² Abu al-Timman, who "has had a long record of unscrupulous and selfish nationalist intrigue," and Chadirchi, "a young man of extreme nationalist tendency," were seen by Clark Kerr as particularly pernicious influences.¹⁰³ Yusuf Ibrahim, on the other hand was generally ignored, as Britain showed little interest in the Iraqi education system until the end of decade when it became apparent that the pan-Arabists were cultivating an anti-British curriculum.¹⁰⁴ This initial uncertainty and distrust of the intentions of the new government caused the British War Office to order two infantry battalions in Cairo to stand by in case British military intervention was deemed necessary. Just two days later, however, Clark Kerr had received private assurances from Hikmat to the effect that the new regime, in spite of the more radical statements of its partisans, intended no harm towards British interests in Iraq.¹⁰⁵ Bakr Sidqi likewise lost no time in privately assuring the British Military Mission that he was not anti-British and sought no change in Anglo-Iraqi relations.¹⁰⁶

The partisans of the revolution lost no time in establishing a new political society, called the Popular Reform League, which promoted the Ahali Group's populist ideas. Chadirchi headed

¹⁰¹ *Al-Inqilab*, March 17, 1937 and *al-Wa'iz, al-Ittijahat al-Wataniyah*, 262.

¹⁰² Clark Kerr to Foreign Office, October 29, 1936, FO 371/20013 E 6784/1419/93

¹⁰³ Clark Kerr to Foreign Office, October 29, 1936, FO 371/20013 E 6796/1419/93

¹⁰⁴ Jamil, *al-Hayah al-Niyabiyah*, 261.

¹⁰⁵ Ward to Foreign Office, October 30, 1936, FO 371/20013 E 6825/1419/93 and War Office to Foreign Office, November 3, 1936, FO 371/20013 E 6900/1419/93.

¹⁰⁶ Clark Kerr to Foreign Office, November 17, 1935, FO 371/20014 E 7437/1419/93.

the group, which included more radical figures like the labor activist Muhammad Salih al-Qazzaz, already considered a dangerous radical by Britain because of his efforts to organize workers at British companies, the Communist activist ‘Abd al-Qadir Isma‘il, as well as radical poets like Bahr al-‘Ulam. Abu al-Timman joined the group as well, but opted not to publicly announce his affiliation lest he give the impression that the group constituted an official political party.¹⁰⁷ While the Popular Reform League avoided publicly denouncing imperialism so as to prevent British intervention, its platform savaged the professional politicians, tribal shaykhs, and capitalists who had benefitted most from the imperial alliance. The party also called for massive land reform and the legalization of trade unions and peasant organizations, in addition to a more subtle call for relations with foreign powers "on the basis of mutual equality."¹⁰⁸

The hesitance of the Ahali Group and the Popular Reform League to fully and forcefully condemn the colonial legacy in Iraq may have prevented British intervention, but it would also open the door to attacks from the right as the economic populism of the revolution began to lose steam. In any case, the supporters of the revolution made no secret of their own appreciation of the anti-colonial implications of the revolution. In the poem "Memory of a Blackened Past," Muhammad Ridha al-Khatib decries the exploitation of the country's wealth by foreign interests:

The people denied a share in the country's blessing
 Her wealth consecrated and dedicated to the foreigners
 The Tigris and Euphrates shower their bliss upon them
 And as for our share from them, a torrent of misfortunes
 Our government, a home whose structure we built up
 We entrusted her protection to belligerent enemies¹⁰⁹

The poet directs his ire at the national political elite whom he holds responsible for this submission to imperialism and betrayal of the nationalist legacy:

The senators and parliamentary deputies say
 They work for the people's right in every task
 But when we test them we discover a farce
 Like a doll or a toy in the paw of a playful cat

¹⁰⁷ Al-Tamimi, *Muhammad Ja'far Abu al-Timman*, 407.

¹⁰⁸ Clark Kerr to Foreign Office, November 20, 1935, FO 371/20014 E 7851/1419/93.

¹⁰⁹ *Al-Inqilab*, January 7, 1937 and *al-Wa'iz, al-Ittijahat al-Wataniyah*, 268-270.

After presenting a vision of redress and retribution that promised divine justice to those who thought they had escaped notice and consequence, Khatib compares Yasin to Genghis Khan and arguing that his rule was more oppressive than that of some of the great tyrants of Islamic history, like al-Hajjaj and Ibn Ziyad:

What are you but an affliction on the people
Or rather an archer raining arrows of affliction
Killing and burning and exiling and accusing
And scattering their wealth with no accounting
The great defender stuffing his belly full of treasure
And what is left over goes to the appropriate relative

Khatib, like many others, saw the populists as national saviors from this degradation and exploitation.

Writing from exile in Damascus, Ahmad al-Safi al-Najafi likewise condemned both Britain and her client regime in "A Country on the Ruins of the Past," which closed with the poet's expression of his desire to throw off the yoke of imperialism and to liberate the country politically and intellectually.¹¹⁰ Safi al-Najafi condemns Yasin and his allies for throwing themselves and their country's resources into the lap of the imperialists with a metaphorical allusion to national regeneration:

She craved the medicine of the West to recover
But they fed her poison and she reckoned it honey...
The drugs of Western medicine destroy her foundations
So that nothing remained except bone bereft of its skin
More becoming of this medicine's weakness is death
And more becoming than servility is an early grave¹¹¹

Iraq, Safi al-Najafi argues, has suffered from the disease of colonialism and yet her leaders continue to seek the cure from the colonizers. He denounces the enervation of the nation and urges the path of resistance even if it leads to early death.

These poems did not arouse fear or suspicion from the British Embassy, where officials had neither the time nor the expertise to pay serious attention to poetry, even when it appeared on the front page of newspapers. Officials were, however, concerned with the economic platform of the populists, and Clark Kerr noted with some trepidation the "noticeably Red tinge" of the

¹¹⁰ Al-Wa'iz, *al-Ittijahat al-Wataniyah*, 262, 268-270, 271-272.

¹¹¹ *Al-Haras*, November 18, 1936 and al-Wa'iz, *al-Ittijahat al-Wataniyah*, 271-72.

group's leadership and platform but noted that the party's support of the government did not necessarily entail the government's devotion to the party line. Indeed, Hikmat's private assurances to the ambassador that land reform would initially be limited to a small area around the Abu Ghraib Canal seemed to indicate that the populist agenda would play a relatively marginal role in the policies of the new administration.¹¹² The supporters of the populist agenda, however, continued to dream of social revolution. Bahr al-'Ulum offered a striking defense of land reform in the poem "The Lord of the Palace in His Sleep":

The lord of the castle prolongs his sleep
 In order to dream of a return to parliament
The dog and the peasant are at his door
 Until the break of dawn they do not sleep
The one is barking at all his guests
 While the other cries for his trifled right
Perhaps justice pretends not to see the deputy
 Relieved of representing the Land of the Two Rivers¹¹³

While the poet's cautious optimism that justice had finally turned its back on the tyrants and feudalists reflects his fundamental confidence in the new regime, the poem underscores the essential fragility of revolution. The peasant has not gained his rightful share but instead remains deprived in the figurative darkness, and the feudal lord has been neither punished nor dispossessed but remains to dream of redemption.

Like his predecessors, Hikmat convinced Ghazi to dissolve parliament and permit new elections in light of the dramatic changes in the national situation. The Ahali Group threw itself into supporting the new elections, advocating for direct elections and urging candidates to publish their platforms. The latter call was particularly significant given the notable absence of political platforms, or for that matter anything resembling political campaigns in prior elections, and signaled the group's support for "making the elections run on the basis of principles instead of personalities." The editors of *al-Ahali* noted that most Iraqis regarded participation in the electoral process as "wasted effort" but urged them to take advantage of the "relative freedom" of the new elections.¹¹⁴ This call was seconded by *al-Haras*, which denounced the electoral fraud of the previous fourteen years and announced that Iraq had entered a "new era," calling on voters to

¹¹² Clark Kerr to Foreign Office, November 20, 1936, FO 371/20014 E 7351/1419/93

¹¹³ Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan*, 1:125-26 and al-Wa'iz, *al-Ittijahat al-Wataniyah*, 264.

¹¹⁴ *Al-Ahali*, December 2, 1936, January 21, 1937, and January 25, 1937.

"shame" politicians into conducting open and honest elections devoid of fraud.¹¹⁵ Bahr al-'Ulum likewise hoped that the new elections would fulfill the hitherto unrealized promise of democracy, as he wrote in "A Law for Repairing Ideas":

The parliamentary era offered the means
To silence the appointed and convince another
The very idea of elections in its entirety
Was meant to enforce a law for repairing ideas
Indeed these administrations spared no effort
In removing lords, inhibition and conscience
Have they left among the seats just one seat
For honoring artists and esteeming artisans?¹¹⁶

The last line presents a challenge to Hikmat's administration to offer artists and craftsmen, the social conscience of the nation a voice among the technocrats, bureaucrats, and professional politicians.

Less than a month after Hikmat assumed office, Jawahiri founded *al-Inqilab*, a newspaper that aimed to support the radical demands of the populist agenda and to counter the criticisms directed against it.¹¹⁷ Jawahiri's support for the revolution was largely based on his assessment of the character of its partisans and foes; he defended his support of the revolution based on his belief in the "good intentions of its members" and castigated the former regime as "opportunists" who clung to power by "stirring up bitter feelings" between the various ethnic groups and religious sects of Iraq.¹¹⁸ The only poem that Jawahiri composed in praise of the revolution, "The Grave Stirs," celebrates the end of an era and the dawn of a new one:

Leave to the void what fate has brought forth
And greet your day with determination and haste
Trust the herald of the boon of this inversion
And aid him so perhaps the news will prove true
Do not permit despair to plunge into your souls
Nor languor and impotence to take you to the depths...
Remember yesterday and be inspired by its evil
For perhaps there is enclosed for you a warning

¹¹⁵ *Al-Haras*, January 22, 1937.

¹¹⁶ Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan*, 1:126 and al-Wa'iz, *al-Ittijahat al-Wataniyah*, 264.

¹¹⁷ al-Wa'iz, *al-Ittijahat al-Wataniyah*, 253-260. The newspaper's title (literally "the revolution") underscores Jawahiri's own belief in the radical transformative potential of the new regime.

¹¹⁸ *Al-Inqilab*, January 16, 1937 and January 19, 1937.

Cognizant of attempts by the deposed politicians and their supporters to disrupt the course of the revolution, Jawahiri reminds his audience that danger still looms and calls upon Hikmat to deal firmly – violently if necessary – with the opponents of the populist agenda:

So tighten the rope and pull taught around their necks
For perhaps your error was in permitting it to fall slack

Yet despite this foreboding sense of the danger to come, Jawahiri remains optimistic in the promise of the revolution as the poem concludes:

I have taking to warning people expressing
Their fear of seeing these hopes effaced
The grave stirs and bursting forth restored
The shrouds of a nation we thought was interred¹¹⁹

This vision of a nation raised from the dead paralleled the romantic nationalism of pan-Arabism and its utopian promise of an idyllic past restored.¹²⁰

Like Jawahiri, Bahr al-'Ulum wavered between optimism and pessimism, affirming his hope in the promise of the revolution while warning of lurking danger and the work to be done. This theme of an incomplete revolution is echoed in "Rural Dawn," which opens with a metaphorical ode to nature that underscores the celebratory inauguration of a new era:

The beauty of the rural dawn is a gospel
Urging and exhorting all creatures to unveil
The east wind spreads it, wordy by word
And the fields of flowers eagerly drink it in
The birds sing with joy and glee so as to cast
On the listeners the extolment of the birds
If I could only attain a hut in the countryside
I would erect some gallows in the palaces¹²¹

The startling conclusion to the poem shatters the blithe optimism of its opening refrain, calling for vengeance and retribution rather than passive celebration as a means to preserve the gains achieved by revolution and realize the promise the new era.

¹¹⁹ *Al-Inqilab*, January 19, 1937 and al-Jawahiri, *Diwan*, 1:289-290.

¹²⁰ Bassam Tibi even notes that Michel 'Aflaq's writing "sounds like poetry" when he pines for "that future in which the Arab soul is reborn." See Tibi, *Arab Nationalism: Between Islam and the Nation-State* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 207.

¹²¹ Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan*, 1:126 and al-Wa'iz, *al-Ittijahat al-Wataniyah*, 264-65.

Marginalization of the Populists

The utopian promises of the new regime began to unravel rather quickly, and Hikmat's second thoughts about the populist platform of the Popular Reform League became apparent when the government finally published its official platform on December 9th, 1936. The partisans of the new regime were divided from the beginning into two competing factions, an authoritarian rightwing bloc led by Bakr Sidqi and supported by Minister of Interior 'Abd al-Latif Nuri and Minister of Justice Salih Jabr and a progressive leftwing bloc led by Abu al-Timman, the Ahali Group, and the partisans of the Popular Reform League. For his part, Hikmat remained uncomfortably in between the two factions, though his admiration of Mustafa Kemal led him to side increasingly with the authoritarian wing in spite of his relatively progressive policy inclinations. Despite the fact that Bakr Sidqi and his fellow officers 'Abd al-Latif Nuri, Baha al-Din Nuri, and Shakir al-Wadi had, at least according to what Hikmat informed his collaborators among the Ahali Group, sworn an oath to rule the country in accordance with the principles of Ahali's populism, the military officers quickly moved to distance themselves from the group and their ideological position.¹²²

In spite of the push by the Ahali Group and the Popular Reform League for direct elections, their initiative was blocked and the elections were held according to tradition in late February 1937. In accordance with the electoral law shaped by Britain in 1924, the elections were divided into stages that entailed indirect votes liable to the usual fraud. Thirteen members of the populist bloc were elected, a number that was not insignificant but certainly did not afford the progressives the opportunity to make a real legislative impact in a parliamentary body consisting of 105 members, particularly after Ja'far Abu al-Timman, elected as a deputy from Baghdad, was appointed to the Senate, thereby reducing the number of partisans in the House of Representatives to twelve.¹²³

Those marginalized by the revolution never lost sight of the stakes of the fight and immediately embarked on a plan to minimize the damage threatened by the ambitious program of social reform outlined by Hikmat and the Popular Reform League. From his exile in Beirut, Yasin al-Hashimi told one British official that the text of the government's platform had convinced him that it was the work of Kamil al-Chadirchi, whom he called "somewhat of a

¹²² Al-Chadirchi, *Mudhakkirat*, 31-32 and 44-45 and Jamil, *al-Hayah al-Niyabiyah*, 272-75.

¹²³ Jamil, *al-Hayah al-Niyabiyah*, 271-77.

Communist,"¹²⁴ and declared that the entire plan "was pure bunk, where it was not out and out communism." Yasin was in private contact with Hikmat and urged the Prime Minister to dispense with the progressive advice offered by Chadirchi and Abu al-Timman and to instead hew a more moderate line.¹²⁵ Nationalist politicians like Salman al-Shaykh Da'ud, 'Arif Qaftan, Mustafa 'Ali, Rafa'il Butti, and 'Ali Mahmud al-Shaykh 'Ali persistently lobbied Hikmat and Bakr to abandon the populist agenda and pledged their support if the administration would purge the Ahali members.¹²⁶

While Hikmat had fulfilled his promise to promote freedom of the press in Iraq by immediately voiding all newspaper suspensions issued by the last regime, the new policy of tolerance lasted less than three weeks before the government ordered a ten day suspension of the pan-Arabist paper *al-Istiqlal* in response to the paper's spirited defense of the Yasin administration and open criticism of Hikmat's government.¹²⁷ As the populists were gradually marginalized, though, *al-Istiqlal* was allowed to publish freely and took a much more favorable line towards the government.¹²⁸ This was in spite of the fact that Hikmat was growing noticeably closer to Britain, the ostensible enemy of the pan-Arabists. The government abandoned the call for an Anglo-Iraqi relationship based on "mutual equality" and instead announced simply the intention to "strengthen co-operation" between the two countries, while the ambitious plans for land reform were watered down to a vague call for a settlement based "on principles of equity and public interest," with only uncultivated land subject to prospective redistribution.¹²⁹ Under pressure from Britain, Hikmat reluctantly announced that none of the land wrested from the state by previous ministers would be confiscated.¹³⁰ The British Ambassador, one year after delightedly recounting Yasin's "happy transmutation" from anti-colonial agitator to pro-British stalwart, was even more satisfied with Hikmat, observing that he "seemed to wish to give things a new shape and to put into his relationship with ourselves an eagerness which was as gratifying as it was novel." He noted with obvious approval that unlike Yasin, who consulted frequently

¹²⁴ Chadirchi was absolutely not a Communist, but rather influenced by British Fabianism and one of the more moderate members of the Ahali Bloc. He would later become a particular target of Fahd and the Iraqi Communist Party for his moderation.

¹²⁵ Clark Kerr to Foreign Office, December 9, 1936, FO 371/20015 E 7917/1419/93

¹²⁶ Khadduri, *Independent Iraq*, 109-10.

¹²⁷ Clark Kerr to Foreign Office, November 23, 1936, FO 371/20014 E 7599/1419/93

¹²⁸ Rafa'il Butti, *Dhakirah 'Iraqiyah, 1900-1956* (Damascus: al-Mada, 2000), 1:259-302.

¹²⁹ Clark Kerr to Foreign Office, December 11, 1936, FO 371/20015 E 7808/1419/93

¹³⁰ Clark Kerr to Foreign Office, December 8, 1936, FO 371/20015 E 7654/1419/93

with the ambassador but tended to ignore the advice of British advisers, Hikmat engaged directly with both.¹³¹

Undeterred by the counterrevolutionary attempts to derail the populist agenda, the progressive ministers and deputies set about their work. Ja'far Abu al-Timman, Minister of Finance, sought to obtain a loan of three million sterling pounds from abroad to fund public works projects and an ambitious program of industrialization. Ja'far first sought financial assistance from Britain, offering future revenue from Iraqi oil as collateral for the loan, but the Iraqi Petroleum Company refused to back the proposal unless it was rewarded with a concession for the southern oil fields.¹³² Insulted by the suggestion, Ja'far sought the assistance of Germany, but soon found that the political conditions of the Nazi government were even more onerous than those stipulated by Britain. His entreaties to foreign countries infuriated British officials, who saw the maneuver as an attempt to escape complete economic dependence on the imperial alliance.¹³³ Depressed, Ja'far concluded that there was little hope of a financial solution as long as British political influence prevented the opening of serious economic relations with foreign countries and obstructed the attempt at industrialization.¹³⁴ Denied the necessary foreign loans to finance economic reforms and development, Ja'far attempted to raise internal revenue by introducing a progressive income and estate tax, but when Hikmat and Bakr withheld support for the measure it was voted down by parliament.¹³⁵

The populist deputies fared little better in advancing their agenda in parliament, but nevertheless took advantage of the opportunity to publicly state their case. Muhammad Hadid denounced the abject poverty suffered by so many Iraqis in both urban and rural areas since the end of the colonial era. 'Aziz Sharif called for fundamental reforms that would introduce the "tools of modernity" to the Iraqi countryside, which was largely bereft of electricity, clean water, and medical centers. 'Abd al-Qadir Isma'il pushed for a general works program as part of an economic stimulus measure that would fight illiteracy, ignorance, poverty, and disease, arguing that the revolution must continue and reminding the administration of its earlier radical

¹³¹ Iraq: Annual Report for 1936, FO 371/20803 E 1055/1055/93.

¹³² Clark-Kerr to Eden, April 21, 1937, FO 371/20798 E 2416/47/93 and Clark-Kerr to Eden, June 27, 1937, FO 371/20798 E 3474/47/93.

¹³³ Clark-Kerr to Eden, November 26, 1936, FO 371/20010 E 7506/973/93 and Clark-Kerr to Eden, November 27, 1936, FO 371/20010 E 7754/973/93.

¹³⁴ Al-Tamimi, *Muhammad Ja'far Abu al-Timman*, 415-18.

¹³⁵ Al-Tamimi, *Muhammad Ja'far Abu al-Timman*, 421.

statements. Sadiq Kammunah called for special attention to the educational system in the countryside, where illiteracy was rampant. Makki Jamil complained bitterly that Hikmat's administration failed to increase funding to combat illiteracy, in spite of his earlier promise to do so. Hadid demanded tax reform, denouncing the government's reliance on indirect excise taxes on commercial products like sugar, coffee, tea, and cotton textiles, which he argued, "were levied upon the poor classes not according to their ability to pay, but instead according to their consumption of these essentials."¹³⁶

While calls for eradicating illiteracy and alleviating poverty aroused little opposition from the conservative opponents of the populists, who were confident that the reforms would not be implemented, the subject of land reform provoked angry and violent resistance. Some fifty percent of Iraqis were directly engaged in agricultural work, and nearly eighty percent of the country's inhabitants were financially dependent on agricultural production either directly or indirectly.¹³⁷ Immediately after taking office, Ja'far Abu al-Timman called for the redistribution of state-owned land to landless peasants.¹³⁸ Hikmat, though, dismissed suggestions to transfer land from feudal landholders to peasants as "out of the question," though he did promise in March to void the massive transfers of tribal land to urban landlords conducted by Yasin's administration. 'Aziz Sharif drew parliament's attention back to the problem of "the hut and the palace," and the danger posed to the nation by the massive inequalities in the distribution of land and wealth. Sadiq Kammunah argued for the introduction of collective farms, which provoked an immediate attack from Salman al-Shaykh Da'ud accusing Kammunah of endorsing communism.¹³⁹

The calls for land reform drew Bakr Sidqi and the conservative opposition closer together, and the conservatives were delighted when Bakr Sidqi denounced the populists as Communists and tools of foreign powers.¹⁴⁰ The campaign to denigrate the populist agenda as "Communist" was led by Muhsin Abu Tabikh, a wealthy landlord who controlled vast tracts of Khaza'il tribal land. Muhsin inherited the land from his father, who had attained the title deed from the Ottomans, and finally succeeded in convincing Britain to drive the tribesmen from the land in 1918. Muhsin gained another huge grant of land in Diwaniyah for supporting Yasin in

¹³⁶ Jamil, *al-Hayah al-Niyabiyah*, 281-85.

¹³⁷ Hashim Jawad, *Muqaddimah fi Kiyah al-'Iraq al-Ijtima'i* (Baghdad: Matba'at al-Ma'arif, 1946), 28-29.

¹³⁸ *Al-Ahali*, November 7, 1936.

¹³⁹ Jamil, *al-Hayah al-Niyabiyah*, 294-96 and 319-320.

¹⁴⁰ Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 442 and al-Tamimi, *Muhammad Ja'far Abu al-Timman*, 420.

1935 and deeply resented efforts to return control of that land to its inhabitants.¹⁴¹ In March, Bakr Sidqi declared that "the soil of Iraq is not suitable for communism... and those who try to implant communism in Iraqi soil are bound to fail just as those who try to implant the date palms of Basrah in the mountains of Norway."¹⁴² Ja'far denied the charges of communism but refused to relent in the campaign for social justice and equality: "If our efforts in reforming the country, helping the poor, and applying justice are Communist dictates, then I ask God the Almighty and All-Powerful to place us on the same level as communism."¹⁴³ Labor strikes in support of the populist agenda erupted across the country several days later, organized by Communist activists and encompassing as many as 20,000 workers, but the strikes fizzled out after the labor leader Qazzaz was banished to the north.¹⁴⁴

Chadirchi, always uncomfortable with the radical wing of the Ahali Group, contended that the backlash resulted from the irresponsible agitation of the radicals. He singled out for blame the "leftwing extremism" of 'Abd al-Qadir Isma'il, editor of *al-Ahali*, and Yusuf Matti, a junior member of the group and clandestine Communist who penned inflammatory articles for the paper under a pseudonym. These activities, Chadirchi argued, incited Bakr Sidqi, who was already preoccupied with Communist penetration in the army, against the Popular Reform League in particular and the progressives in general. Bakr Sidqi objected to the very idea of the Popular Reform League, arguing that the independent group should be converted into a general party supporting the government, and insisted on imposing one of his own loyalists on the group's central committee.¹⁴⁵

Chadirchi's frustration with the gradual marginalization of the populist bloc pushed him to draft a letter of resignation in the spring of 1937, but the intervention of Ja'far Abu al-Timman and others convinced him not to submit the letter to Hikmat. In the abandoned letter, Chadirchi recounted his motivation for participating in the movement for political reform and supporting the military intervention of Bakr Sidqi before complaining that "some six months have passed since the formation of the new regime, and these hopes have not been realized, nor has the

¹⁴¹ Muhsin Abu Tabikh, *Mudhakkirat al-Sayyid Muhsin Abu Tabikh, 1910-1960: Khamsun 'Amman min Tarikh al-'Iraq al-Siyasi al-Hadith* (Beirut: al-Mu'assasah al-'Arabiyah li al-Dirasat wa al-Nashr, 2001), 90. See also Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 165-66 and 194-95 and James Saumarez Mann, *An Administrator in the Making* (London: Longmans Green, 1921), 185-87.

¹⁴² *Al-Bilad*, March 18, 1937.

¹⁴³ *Al-Inqilab*, March 21, 1937 and March 22, 1937 and al-Tamimi, *Muhammad Ja'far Abu al-Timman*, 418-21.

¹⁴⁴ Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 443-44.

¹⁴⁵ Al-Chadirchi, *Mudhakkirat*, 45 and Jamil, *al-Hayah al-Niyabiyah*, 274.

previous state of chairs undergone a fundamental transformation." He denied that he was a naïve optimist who expected all of his efforts to bear immediate fruit but contended, "My hopes in the future would not be dashed in this respect if I found the prevailing trends proceeding towards an annihilation of past behavior and if I felt that we were on the verge of beginning our work." Rather sarcastically, he assured Hikmat that he bore him no ill will, for "perhaps your capacity for hope is what sustains your persistence in power."¹⁴⁶

The poets too soon fell afoul of the revolutionary government. Jawahiri angered Hikmat by publicly denouncing the Amin al-Rihani and provoking the anger of the Iraqi pan-Arabists. Rihani's account of Jawahiri's dispute with Sati' al-Husri in the book *Qalb al-'Iraq* supported Husri's depiction of Jawahiri as champion of a sectarian *fitna* and infuriated the poet. Jawahiri penned an attack on Rihani in *al-Inqilab* while the latter was visiting Baghdad, titled "A Dangerous Spy in the Tigris Palace Hotel." Husayn Jamil, Director of Propaganda and an Ahali stalwart, was forced to intervene when Rihani complained to the government that Jawahiri was repeatedly calling the hotel to taunt him. Shortly after the Rihani affair, Jawahiri allowed his paper to publish an unsigned article penned by Salih Shamsah that accused British intelligence officers of infiltrating several tribes in the Middle Euphrates valley. Hikmat summoned Jawahiri and explained that he was under British pressure to stifle the allegation but declined to punish the poet. Jawahiri shortly thereafter published the poem "After Six Months, What?," which alienated him further from the administration.¹⁴⁷

Jawahiri was eventually arrested on March 28th under the pretense of defaming the government by publishing an article titled "Kosher and Non-Kosher," which denounced the excessive tariffs that impoverished Iraqi Jews were forced to pay to kosher butchers. The poem provoked the Chief Rabbi of Baghdad to file a grievance against the government, and Jawahiri was found guilty of inciting the masses and sentenced to one month in prison, with an additional month tacked on for insulting the government.¹⁴⁸ His poem "In Prison" addressed the affair:

O Dalliance, for the good of the dear country and her safety
Dividing the faction of Jews and dishonoring the entire sect
What is it to you, "kosher and non-kosher," it's all beef and lamb

¹⁴⁶ Al-Chadirchi, *Mudhakkirat*, 45-46.

¹⁴⁷ Jawahiri, *Dhikrayati*, 1:327-31. Jawahiri says he only called once, saying, "Welcome Professor Amin al-Rihani. Do you know who is speaking to you? It is the man who was born in Iran, a Persian who composes poetry, in Persian of course. It is Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri!"

¹⁴⁸ Sulayman Jubran, *Majma' al-'Addad: Dirasah fi Sirat al-Jawahiri wa Shi'rihi* ('Amman: Maktab al-Nashr), 45-46.

It seems that the press is free, on the condition of liability¹⁴⁹

Other sources, however, allege that the kosher issue was merely a pretense to punish Jawahiri's intervention in the Middle Euphrates troubles.¹⁵⁰ Jawahiri's arrest divided the political supporters of the revolutionary regime. When a group of populist deputies protested the persecution of Jawahiri in parliament the remaining supporters of Hikmat and Bakr Sidqi attacked them with insults and abuse. The episode ended with Hikmat declaring that Jawahiri was merely "an agitator – nothing more and nothing less."¹⁵¹

The three Ahali deputies finally resigned on June 19th, 1938 in protest to the government's massacre of tribal forces at Samawah, a district of Diwaniyah, where rival clans played their role in the political rivalry between forces loyal to Hikmat and Yasin. Khawwam al-'Abbas, leader of the Bani Zurayj, had been dispossessed of his land as punishment for opposing Yasin in 1935. When Hikmat took power, Khawwam was pardoned and the land that had been transferred to his cousin Shanshul was ordered returned. Shanshul refused to return the land and was supported by 'Abd al-Wahid and Muhsin Abu Tabikh, both allies of Yasin and the National Brotherhood. The three rebel leaders were arrested at the end of April under the pretense of distributing weapons, and when fighting broke out in protest against the arrests, government forces massacred the rebel tribes, including large numbers of captive prisoners.¹⁵² The resignations of the Ahali ministers reflected their principled opposition to the politicization of tribal rivalries and their protest against Hikmat's hypocritical exploitation of the tactic. Not only were the arrested tribal shaykhs opponents of the revolutionary alliance from the outset, but Muhsin Abu Tabikh, at least, was a notorious reactionary and one of the fiercest critics of the populist agenda.¹⁵³

Abu al-Timman saw to the distribution of the resignation letter among the tribes of the Middle Euphrates and in the shrine cities of Najaf and Karbala. Together with Chadirchi, he sought to incite a general strike in the urban areas in order to bring down the government of Hikmat and Bakr.¹⁵⁴ Their efforts failed for several reasons, not least of which was the self-

¹⁴⁹ Jawahiri, *Diwan*, 2:295-93.

¹⁵⁰ Taha al-Hashimi, *Mudhakkirat Taha al-Hashimi, 1919-1943* (Beirut: Dar al-Tali'a, 1967), 201

¹⁵¹ Jawahiri, *Dhikrayati*, 1:336.

¹⁵² Iraq: Annual Report for 1937, FO 371/21856 E 794/794/93.

¹⁵³ Al-Hasani, *Tarikh al-Wizarat al-'Iraqiyah*, 283-84, Jamil, *al-Hayah al-Niyabiyah*, 241-43, and al-Tamimi, *Muhammad Ja'far Abu al-Timman*, 421-23.

¹⁵⁴ Clark-Kerr to Eden, FO 371/20795 E 4112/14/93.

interest of the tribes. The supporters of ‘Abd al-Wahid, Shanshul, and Muhsin Abu Tabikh may have pined for the fall of Hikmat and Bakr, but they were reactionaries who loathed the populist bloc, and while Khawwam and his supporters may have been sympathetic to the progressive ideals of the populists, they enjoyed the considerable political favor and economic benefit of their warm relations with the state. The Shi‘i clerics of Najaf and Karbala had come to rely on the tribal shaykhs as vehicles for political intervention and consequently became increasingly distant and divorced from anti-statist political movements. The Iraqi military, which had increased in size from just 7,500 men at the moment of independence to 19,500 by 1936, was much stronger than they had been when Ja‘far led an electoral boycott in 1924 and a national strike in 1930 and much more capable of intimidating the populace against resistance.¹⁵⁵ The Ahali Group and Popular Reform League were never able to organize their supporters after Jawahiri was imprisoned and Qazzaz banished.¹⁵⁶

When the Ahali minister resigned, their replacements, lead by ‘Ali Mahmud al-Shaykh ‘Ali, agreed to join Hikmat’s government on the condition that he pursue an Arab nationalist agenda in foreign affairs and an anti-Communist agenda in domestic matters.¹⁵⁷ That ‘Ali Mahmud could describe the Ahali agenda as "Communist" suggest the reactionary nature of the intended anti-Communist turn. Rafa‘il Butti, the editor of the nationalist paper *al-Istiqlal* and a parliamentary deputy from Mosul, denounced al-Ahali in front of parliament when the resignation of the Ahali ministers was announced, declaring that the populist movement "could only be described by one word, and that word is conspiracy."¹⁵⁸ Salman Shaykh Da‘ud, a deputy from Diwaniyah, seconded Butti’s accusations, declaring that the Ahali members, like leftists in every other country, were unwilling and incapable of constructive work in the interest of one nation, but instead insisted on "inciting the masses to chaos and rioting, and when they found no willing to riot, they rioted against themselves."¹⁵⁹

Seeing an opportunity to deal a fatal blow to the populist revolution and to continue pushing Hikmat and Bakr Sidqi in the direction of the conservative pan-Arabists, the nationalist newspapers began organizing a campaign to dissolve parliament and call for new elections. Butti’s paper *al-Istiqlal* demanded the dissolution of parliament in a front-page editorial, arguing

¹⁵⁵ Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 26-27.

¹⁵⁶ Al-Tamimi, *Muhammad Ja‘far Abu al-Timman*, 426-29.

¹⁵⁷ Al-Hashimi, *Mudhakkirat*, 220-23.

¹⁵⁸ Jamil, *al-Hayah al-Niyabiyah*, 343.

¹⁵⁹ Jamil, *al-Hayah al-Niyabiyah*, 343.

that the current chamber did not reflect the wishes of the nation, particularly after they demonstrated "animosity and aversion to no minor extent to the traditions of the country and its character and sacred things."¹⁶⁰ The editors of *al-'Alam al-'Arabi* argued that past elections were not conducted freely but instead were merely "the means for the destructive organizations to exploit this opportunity" to force their destructive and divisive ideas on the nation, later clarifying that the intended target of the barb was "that bloc dubbed the populist front."¹⁶¹

'Abd al-Qadir Isma'il and 'Abd al-Fattah Ibrahim, two of the most prominent and most radical members of the Ahali circle, rejected the legitimacy of the revolution and denounced the military's interference in political affairs. Ibrahim severed his relationship with his comrades, warning them that they would "pay a price" for facilitating the army's entry into the political arena.¹⁶² Bahr al-'Ulam too soon turned against the revolutionary government, blaming its failures on politicians like Hikmat whose lust for power caused them to abandon their ideals in his poem "In the Next Parliament":

I saw in the market some bulls being lead
Their destination offices and portfolios
I went to ask my comrades where their trough lay
And discovered that it was in the next parliament
Despair shattered the victory cup of their resolutions
Sediments of misgiving in some men of distinction
I ran to search for a grave to bury in it
What remained of my hopes and dreams¹⁶³

Triumph of the Counter-Revolution

Bakr Sidqi was assassinated by an Iraqi soldier at Mosul on August 11, 1937, just ten months after assuming power. Naji Shawkat and Taha al-Hashimi celebrated the news in Istanbul, convinced that Bakr's death would prevent any future attempt of wresting power from the "Old Guard."¹⁶⁴ Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulam, embittered by the betrayal of the revolution, celebrated the assassination, writing in "The Fate of the Tyrant":

Haughtily he oppressed and tyrannized

¹⁶⁰ *Al-Istiqlal*, August 5, 1937.

¹⁶¹ *Al-'Alam al-'Arabi*, August 7, 1937.

¹⁶² Al-Tamimi, *Muhammad Ja'far Abu al-Timman*, 397.

¹⁶³ Bahr al-'Ulam, *Diwan*, 1:126.

¹⁶⁴ Al-Hashimi, *Mudhakkirat*, 208-9.

His people, and so the reckoning has come
Death was poured for him in his chalice
The death of the idols, yes, this is the sanction
If the head is afflicted by the disease of conceit
There is nothing that can contain it except the earth
And whoever asks the people to worship him
In the pit of the grave will come the answer¹⁶⁵

Amin al-‘Umari, commander of the Mosul Forces, refused to transfer the ringleaders of the plot to Baghdad, and when his decision was supported by Sa‘id al-Tikriti, commander of Camp Washshash outside of Baghdad, Hikmat was forced to resign. Jamil al-Midfa‘i was invited by Ghazi to form a new government in hopes of restoring a reasonable compromise between the nationalist and progressive camps.

Midfa‘i heeded Hikmat’s departing advice, which warned him against including his old allies, Nuri al-Sa‘id and Taha al-Hashimi, in the new administration. Hikmat was ready to concede defeat but knew that Nuri would seek vengeance for the death of his brother-in-law Ja‘far al-‘Askari and that Taha would seek redress for the humiliation suffered by his late brother Yasin.¹⁶⁶ Midfa‘i announced the dissolution of parliament on August 26th, 1937. The Ahali members who had resigned their seats in protest against the right-wing turn of Hikmat’s administration refused to participate in the new elections, citing the blatant corruption of the electoral process. The nationalist press continued their campaign of posthumously exaggerating the transgressions of the populists, with *al-Istiqlal* alleging that the thirteen deputies from al-Ahali had sworn allegiance to communism and that some of their number had actively sought to replace religious feasts with nationalist holidays as part of a campaign to "abolish religions."¹⁶⁷

Midfa‘i’s policy of "closing the curtain" on the misdeeds of the past precluded the possibility of investigating and prosecuting the principle allies and associates of Hikmat and Bakr Sidqi. Hikmat’s government had issued a general pardon for all those involved in the coup d’état and rescinding the pardon would have threatened civil tranquility in the country. Those collaborators who remained in positions of power, like Lt. General ‘Abd al-Latif Nuri were

¹⁶⁵ Bahr al-‘Ulum, *Diwan*, 1:136.

¹⁶⁶ Al-Hasani, *Tarikh al-Wizarat al-‘Iraqiyah*, 5:5-7 and Khadduri, *Independent Iraq*, 118-24.

¹⁶⁷ *Al-Istiqlal*, August 31, 1937. Husayn Jamil explains that the editorial referred to a speech by ‘Aziz Sharif in which the Ahali deputy called for establishing a national holiday that would permit Yazidis, Sabeans, and Jews to celebrate their own religious celebrations alongside Iraqi Muslims and Christians. See Jamil, *al-Hayah al-Niyabiyah*, 347-53.

however quickly forced into retirement.¹⁶⁸ The Ahali Group's newspaper (*al-Ahali*), which was shut down by Hikmat's regime after the resignation of Abu al-Timman, Chadirchi, and Yusuf Ibrahim in June, 1937, would remain in a state of abeyance until the anti-fascist stance of the Iraqi left convinced British officials to renew the paper's license, this time under the name *Sawt al-Ahali*, in September, 1942.¹⁶⁹

Hikmat's regime had already begun to seek retribution from its erstwhile supporters and fiercest critics among the progressive bloc. In April, labor leader Muhammad Salih al-Qazzaz was banished to 'Anah in northwestern Iraq.¹⁷⁰ Kamil al-Chadirchi was exiled to Cyprus shortly after his resignation, and 'Abd al-Qadir Isma'il and his brother, who had already been sent off into foreign exile, were stripped of their citizenship on August 10th, 1938 because of their Indian origins.¹⁷¹ Even the remaining members of the progressive bloc, with Ja'far Abu al-Timman the most prominent, were forced to withdraw from public life in the face of relentless criticism from the pan-Arabists. Resurgent nationalist papers like *al-Istiqlal*, *al-Bilad*, *al-Difa'*, and *al-'Iqab* spearheaded attacks on the deposed progressives and refused to print Abu al-Timman's response. Chadirchi was allowed to return to the country some time after Bakr Sidqi's assassination and while he would remain removed from political life in the country until after the collapse of the Rashid 'Ali movement, he continued to meet weekly with Husayn Jamil, Muhammad Hadid and 'Abd al-Fattah Ibrahim at Ja'far's home in Baghdad to discuss politics and culture.¹⁷²

The Ahali members would face numerous queries and accusations regarding their support for the coup d'état. Ten years after the events, Chadirchi and Sami Shawkat, the former Director General of Education and a staunch supporter of the Rashid 'Ali movement, engaged in a fierce argument over the subject on the pages of *al-Ahali* and *al-Zaman*. After Chadirchi branded his opponent the "Oswald Mosley of Iraq," Shawkat retorted by deriding Ahali's hypocritical support for Bakr Sidqi in light of their ostensible commitment to democracy.¹⁷³ Chadirchi followed with a long justification that portrayed his support for the military coup as a failed attempt to disrupt the inexorable descent into fascism. He rejected the view that democracy was constrained by a commitment to non-violence and parliamentary elections, arguing instead that it

¹⁶⁸ Al-Hasani, *Tarikh al-Wizarat al-'Iraqiyah*, 5:13-14.

¹⁶⁹ Jamil, *al-Hayah al-Niyabiyah*, 354.

¹⁷⁰ Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 444.

¹⁷¹ Al-Tamimi, *Muhammad Ja'far Abu al-Timman*, 430-35.

¹⁷² al-Amin, *Jama'at al-Ahali*, 232-34.

¹⁷³ *Al-Zaman*, December 31, 1945 and *al-Ahali*, January 2, 1946.

not only permitted but indeed obligated revolutionary insurrection in the face of despotism. Chadirchi contended that the supporters of the revolution sought only the collapse of the dictatorial regime and that the subsequent developments were the result of the populists' marginalization.¹⁷⁴ His comrade, Husayn Jamil, justified the legality of revolution with reference to the writings of John Locke, the United States Declaration of Independence, the constitutions of the French First Republic and the French Fourth Republic, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.¹⁷⁵

These justifications, however, emerged decades later and only after the immediate danger of retribution had passed. In the immediate aftermath of their failure, the populists were not permitted to defend their position. Most of the poets who had previously supported Yasin's regime remained silent after Bakr Sidqi announced that Yasin's supporters had three days to leave the country.¹⁷⁶ After the fall of Bakr and Hikmat, however, those poets lost no time in expressing their disdain for the erstwhile revolutionaries and professing their loyalty to the late Yasin and his legacy. 'Ali al-Sharqi, a cousin of Jawahiri who did not share his enthusiasm for the revolution, wrote "The Tribulation of Loyalty" in the wake of Bakr Sidqi's assault on Baghdad and published soon after his assassination:

Where are the fellows of moral distinction
 To finally rid the world of these writhing snakes
 I feel sorry for the diver who found some pebbles
 The same size and shape of the pearl he sought
 An error of the notables whose echo multiplied
 Until the commoners resembled those notables
 O People, these loaves of barley will sustain you
 Misery will tussle with you over those same loaves
 Your role will come against the desperate tyrant
 Who wants to escape when it has grown too late¹⁷⁷

Like the diver who mistook some pebbles for pearls, Sharqi argues that the people have mistaken Bakr Sidqi for a national savior and that the mistakes of the ruling class have caused them to falsely reckon that they could be easily replaced. He warns his fellow nationals that their poverty

¹⁷⁴ *Al-Ahali*, January 21, 1946 and Jamil, *al-Hayah al-Niyabiyah*, 253-55.

¹⁷⁵ Jamil, *al-Hayah al-Niyabiyah*, 257-61.

¹⁷⁶ Al-Hasani, *Tarikh al-Wizarat al-'Iraqiyah*, 4:235.

¹⁷⁷ 'Ali al-Sharqi, *Diwan al-Sharqi* (Baghdad: Dar al-Rashid li al-Nashr, 1979), 232-35 and al-Wa'iz, *al-Ittijahat al-Wataniyah*, 279-82.

will only be exacerbated by the misery to come and confidently predicts their conversion by the time the moment of truth arrives.

Yet Sharqi was no conservative and he did not oppose the particulars of the populist agenda. As early as 1925, in the poem "The Peasant's Sickle," Sharqi had passionately argued for land reform and denounced the tax burden on the peasantry, which had only worsened since.¹⁷⁸ His animosity towards the revolution instead reflects, as the title indicates, his animosity towards the methods of the revolution and his feeling that the ruling class, whatever their faults and failures, deserved better. The poet reflects bitterly on the great wave of joy that erupted in the streets of Baghdad after Yasin's fall from power:

Baghdad bid farewell to the regime and its people
For the nation rushed to greet the regime of bullets
The founders and shepherds of the country shook
For relatives and kin were exchanged for strangers
The shaking of foundations was hard on the guards
And despair forbidden to the loyal and obedient
Where are the men who heed and obey
For I found their ranks devoid of members

This sentiment conveys Sharqi's sense of isolation and loneliness in the midst of the revolutionary fervor and again reflects his anger at the treachery and perfidy of the Iraqi people.

Not all of the opponents of the revolution, however, were as dismissive of the movement's popular support and the widespread opposition to the corruption of the political establishment as 'Ali al-Sharqi. Ma'ruf al-Rusafi, an older poet whose commitment to anti-colonial politics led him to defiantly support the Ottoman Empire until the moment of its demise, was neither politically conservative nor personally invested in the fortunes of the politicians deposed by the revolution. Rusafi's deep concern for the poor is attested by poems like "The Rich and the Poor," "The Orphan on the Day of the Festival," and "Poverty and Illness," his devotion to progressive social causes like the liberation of women in poems like "Women in the East," "Our Women," "Our Freedom of Marriage," and "Education and Mothers," and his political marginalization was so extreme that this "national poet" of Iraq, once a notable and a former parliamentary deputy, would eventually be reduced to selling cigarettes on the streets of

¹⁷⁸ Al-Sharqi, *Diwan*, 163-64 and Yusuf 'Izz al-Din, *al-Ishtirakiyah wa al-Qawmiyah wa Atharahuma fi al-Adab al-Hadith* (Cairo: Jami'at al-Duwwal al-'Arabiyyah, 1968), 106-8.

Baghdad in order to afford liquor.¹⁷⁹ Yet despite the apparent affinities between Rusafi and younger poets like Jawahiri and Bahr al-'Ulum, Rusafi passionately denounced the revolution in "The Day the al-Hashimi Cabinet Fell."

Typical of his frustration and disdain for those in power, Rusafi first denounced Yasin's regime for capitulating so quickly to the rebels:

This is the world and her sons
In our day and the bygone era
Useless are the efforts of the people
If the elders fall down stumbling

If he blamed Yasin for relinquishing power so easily and without a fight, though, he maintained a much harsher attitude towards Bakr Sidqi and his supporters. In a rather oblique passage, Rusafi writes:

If it were said to me that in the army
There is one ordered by his commander
I would say, ask in al-Karkh, his orders
Are there in that crafty department
For in Palestine and among her rebels
They have a hand well-known to Cairo
From there the conspiracy was hatched
Until it grew from them into darkness¹⁸⁰

These metaphors and allusions would have been clear to his Iraqi audience: al-Karkh refers to the western half of Baghdad; the "crafty department" refers to the British Embassy located there; the reference to Palestine alludes to the Arab Revolt that erupted just months prior; the pronoun "they" refers to Yasin and his well-known support for the Palestinian rebels; and "Cairo" refers to the Middle East Office in Cairo that served as the base for British intelligence and operations in the Arab Middle East. The poem, then, accuses Britain of engineering the revolution because of Yasin's support for the Palestinian uprising.

Rusafi's suspicion of British support for Bakr Sidqi's military intervention, though baseless, was common enough among pan-Arabists, who regarded both Hikmat and Bakr Sidqi

¹⁷⁹ For Rusafi, see Hussein Kadhim's essay "Ma'ruf al-Rusafi and the Poetics of Anti-Colonialism" in Kadhim, *The Poetics of Anti-Colonialism*, 85-130. The listed poems can be found in Ma'ruf al-Rusafi, *Diwan al-Rusafi* (Beirut: Dar al-Muntazar, 1999), 1:45 and 2:53-81 and 332-358.

¹⁸⁰ Al-Rusafi, *Diwan*, 3:181-84 and al-Wa'iz, *al-Ittijahat al-Wataniyah*, 285-86.

with suspicion. Hikmat was an ethnic Turkmen while Bakr was ethnically Kurdish, and the affinity of both for Turkey was well-known. The populists were likewise distrusted by the pan-Arabists because of their well-known criticism of the platform of Arab unity and embrace of the slogan of "Iraq for the Iraqis."¹⁸¹ Rusafi may have been socially progressive, but his politics had always been primarily driven by anti-colonialism.¹⁸² His celebration of Yasin's Palestinian agenda underscores a critical failure of the populist agenda. While Jawahiri expressed his support for the rebels in "Palestine Day" and Bahr al-'Ulum composed anti-colonial poems like "The Palestinian Revolution," "Tortured Palestine: Where Is Your Treaty, League of Nations?" "The Italian Assault on Ethiopia," the populists bowed to pressure from Hikmat and Bakr Sidqi and remained silent.¹⁸³ Ironically, after the populist estrangement Hikmat and Bakr abruptly changed course, sensing that the danger of British intervention had passed. Bakr actively sought to purchase arms from the Germans and Italians and Hikmat sought Nazi cooperation in aiding the Palestinians.¹⁸⁴

Even more damning than the silence of the populists on the Palestinian issue was their lack of empathy towards Yasin's sudden death in exile. The Syrian National Bloc organized a republican funeral for Yasin in Damascus on January 22, 1937, but the transfer of his body to Baghdad was delayed by the Iraqi refusal to allow Taha and the Syrian delegation to accompany the procession. Frustrated by the obstructions and delays, Taha finally approved his brother's interment in the mausoleum of Salah al-Din next to the Umayyad Mosque in the old town of Damascus. The refusal of the Iraqi government to permit the repatriation of the corpse for burial in Baghdad shocked and appalled Arab nationalists in Egypt and Syria.¹⁸⁵ The Iraqi government finally convened a commemorative ceremony for Yasin in Baghdad on February 18, 1938, which became a venue for the critics and opponents of Bakr Sidqi and the populists to denounce the betrayal of the nation. Just as the National Bloc had exploited Yasin's funeral to bolster their own political position, conservative forces used the ceremony to further demonize the populists.

¹⁸¹ Michael Eppel, *The Palestine Conflict in the History of Modern Iraq: The Dynamics of Involvement, 1928-1948* (Portland: Frank Cass, 1994), 50-66.

¹⁸² See, for example, his poems "Wilson Between Word and Deed," "To Herbert Samuel," "Liberty in the Politics of the Colonizers," "The English in Their Colonial Policies," and "Satan and the Italians," in Rusafi, *Diwan*, 3:84-90, 110-14, 122-24, 240-43, and 282-85.

¹⁸³ *Al-Ra'i al-'Amm*, May 5, 1938, Jawahiri, *Diwan*, 2:313, and Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan*, 1:116 and 123-24.

¹⁸⁴ Al-Hashimi, *Mudhakkirat*, 1:219.

¹⁸⁵ Peter Wien, "The Long and Intricate Funeral of Yasin al-Hashimi: Pan-Arabism, Civil Religion, and Popular Nationalism in Damascus, 1937," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43:2 (2011), 271-92.

The poet Muhammad Bahjat al-‘Athari seized the occasion to denounce the sins of the populists by reciting his acerbic and biting "Epic of the Populist Revolution."¹⁸⁶ ‘Athari, a reactionary Salafi poet known for his fierce opposition to progressive social and political causes as well as his later support for Rashid ‘Ali, which led to his internment as a prisoner-of-war at Fao for several years, drew from heritage of Arab and Islamic history to denounce the supporters of the revolution.¹⁸⁷ He opened his poem, which was indeed an epic of some one hundred and twenty verses, with an attack on the populist rhetoric of al-Ahali and the Popular Reform League rather than the singular tyranny of Bakr Sidqi:

Come to your senses and awaken the sentry!
We have slept, but our hatred has not
That rotten and putrid populism clothed
The body of the nation as lecherous traitors
Vile creatures, deniers of the race, penetrated
With injustice the noblest of the nations
For the aim of domineering and aspiring to pursue
Tyrannical rule behind the blackness of night
Inciting the rabble in their fleeting greed
Lowly born and their temerity violent and insolent

In contrast to the treachery of the populists who conspired with Bakr Sidqi, the officers and soldiers who supported and participated in the coup d'état are portrayed as victims of trickery and cunning.

‘Athari spends a considerable portion of the poem elegizing Ja‘far al-‘Askari and denouncing Bakr Sidqi for the murder, an indication that even those politicians most tarred by allegations of collaboration and subservience to Britain could be rehabilitated by the pan-Arabists in death. The great bulk of ‘Athari’s venom, however, is reserved for the populist betrayal of Yasin in refusing to permit the repatriation of his corpse. The poet directly addresses the deceased Yasin:

¹⁸⁶ Al-Hasani, *Tarikh al-Wizarat al-Iraqiyah*, 5:15. Al-Wa‘iz, a fierce opponent of the revolution and its supporters who nevertheless demonstrates a critic’s appreciation of the considerable artistic achievements of Jawahiri, Bahr al-Ulum, and others, writes of ‘Athari’s "Epic of the Populist Revolution" that it was in truth "the best poem composed on this subject, whether supporting and blessing the revolution or denouncing and opposing it." Muhammad Bahjat Al-‘Athari, *Diwan al-‘Athari* (Baghdad: Matba‘at al-Majma‘ al-‘Ilmi al-Iraqi, 1990), 1:372-390 and al-Wa‘iz, *al-Ittijahat al-Wataniyah*, 286-89.

¹⁸⁷ For ‘Athari see ‘Athari, *Diwan*, 1:5-20, Hala Fattah, "'Wahhabi' Influences, Salafi Responses: Shaikh Mahmud Shukri and The Iraqi Salafi Movement, 1745-1930," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 14:2 (2003), 127-48, Wiebke Walther, "From Women’s Problems to Women as Images in Modern Iraqi Poetry," *Die Welt des Islams* 36:2 (1996), 219-41.

They renounced you after the friendship, no covenants
 Did they observe and no goodwill in their actions and effects
 They banished you and so retained a mark of disgrace
 Repugnant as though cretins could even be ashamed
 You did not depart from the homeland except to find another
 Like a lion who roams in the night from one den the next
 All of the capitals of 'Adnan are a kingdom
 Sharing a king with the sons of Qaydhar
 They feared you alive, and so we say, keen leader
 They fear he who wields neither sword nor spear
 A corpse terrifies them, so their leader must quake
 At the sight of an unfurled banner or unsheathed sword
 This is their courage and not what the Arabs relate
 Of 'Antar Bin Shaddad who toppled a massive force
 Do not apologize, for you gave to them bountifully while
 To you they showed disloyalty and wickedness of the lowly
 You rose like the sun in the radiant heavens
 From the dust challenging the horizon with exuberance

Like Jawahiri, Bahr al-'Uloom, Rusafi, Sharqi and others, 'Athari wrote in a neo-classical style, but his use of imagery and metaphor contrasts sharply with that of his opponents. The references to 'Adnan and Qaydhar, mythical ancestors of the Arabs, and 'Antar Bin Shaddad, a famous poet and warrior of pre-Islamic Arab history, parallel the romantic nostalgia of Arab nationalism, which set him apart even from Rusafi, whose support for the pan-Arab cause was always politically rooted in the politics of anti-colonialism. He extends the metaphor linking Yasin to this bygone romantic past:

From the descendents of Salah al-Din, what a man
 He protected the sanctuary from treacherous Crusaders

Unlike Rusafi, who berated Yasin's lack of resistance, 'Athari lauds his decision to go peacefully into exile as the act of man interested only in the salvation of the nation:

If you willed to confront them with fire
 Burning flames upon the rash and disloyal
 Resembling the catastrophic battle for Spain
 Burning as kindling our kin and our homes
 But your fidelity to the nation pushed aside
 The fire of discord and the burning betrayal
 Who do I have like you with loyal intentions
 For every wicked act the sting of the scorpion

It was not only archconservatives like ‘Athari who eulogized Yasin. Even Jawahiri, chastened by the failure of the revolution, travelled to Basrah to commemorate the life of Yasin. The poem, "In Memory of al-Hashimi," offered an apparently sincere appreciation of Yasin’s role in Iraqi politics, choosing to overlook the events that followed Yasin’s ascension to power in 1935 and focusing instead on the symbolism of national unity that Yasin provided the nation in opposition to the post-mandatory state:

Yasin, what a pity that you’ve gone early
Your unique and noble mind gone to decay
And what a disaster now that we seek you
No wonder the sunny weather has grown cloudy
O Shield of the Kingdom of strongest iron
The sword of your rule has not been blunted
Even if Iraq found fault with the empowered
Encumbered with those both crippled and healthy
Indeed they day we lost you we lost a star
That cannot be replaced by one more brilliant¹⁸⁸

After reading his eulogy, the poet launched into an attack on Britain for dividing Iraqis into parties and factions that grappled with one another over priorities of position in the pointless games of power politics, indicating his own evolving awareness of the importance of anti-colonial rhetoric on the local scene.¹⁸⁹

Jawahiri’s late attempt to come to terms with the strength of the pan-Arabists and create some distance between the issue of social justice and the issue of Arab unity was not enough to prevent the reactionary backlash. Mustafa al-‘Umari, the new Minister of Interior and the most ardent anti-Communist in Iraq, had dozens of Iraqi youths arrested and imprisoned on November 18, 1937 under the vague accusation of engaging in Communist activities.¹⁹⁰ On December 29, 1937, Da’ud al-Sa’di, a representative from Kut, stood before parliament and delivered a blistering attack on Midfa’i’s professed intention to close the curtain on the past. Sa’di denounced Hikmat and his supporters as Communists and accused anyone who disagreed with this assessment of supporting communism themselves: "It is necessary to obliterate everyone who embraces the Communist agenda. Where are the actions of the government in the path of

¹⁸⁸ Al-Jawahiri, *Diwan*, 2:303-4.

¹⁸⁹ Al-Wa’iz, *al-Ittijahat al-Wataniyah*, 262.

¹⁹⁰ Al-Hasani, *Tarikh al-Wizarat al-‘Iraqiyah*, 5:13-15.

resisting this Communist inclination? I, on the other hand, see that this idea is supported before the present government!"¹⁹¹ Sa'di's rant was so violent that he was censured and expelled for the remainder of the parliamentary session.¹⁹² By February, parliament had voted to strip the participants of the coup d'état of the legal immunity accorded them by Hikmat.¹⁹³

Jawahiri sunk into depression as his vision of social justice receded further into the horizon. The normally prolific poet composed a trilogy of paeans to pan-Arab nationalism in the summer of 1938 and two odes to the beauty of Lebanon, where he spent considerable time in exile. Otherwise, he composed just two elegies for his late wife and the late King Ghazi and one final attack on feudalism in 1939 before entering a two year period of silence.¹⁹⁴ Only Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulum, who had gone back to work in a cigarette factory in Baghdad, was left to defend the revolutionary course, angry and recalcitrant as always. He composed the poem "Where Were You?" in response to the attack on the progressive bloc by the new parliament. The poem's title refers to Ja'far Abu al-Timman's angry and defiant critique of the old guard one year prior:

Where were you when he delivered his statement to the people yesterday?
Indignantly the one who patronizes and betrays the idols cursed and yelled
If we could only stop him from howling at the people like a bitch in heat
We could finally get some rest and soothe the people from this betrayal¹⁹⁵

Conclusion

The populist effort to link feudalism and colonial exploitation as the dual impediments to national liberation was a victim of its own success. Anticipating the pitfalls of what Frantz Fanon called the "sterile formalism" of post-colonial nationalism,¹⁹⁶ the Ahali Group and Popular Reform League imbued their brand of anti-colonial nationalism with a commitment to social justice and economic equality. Despite the abuse that the movement took from the Iraqi Communist Party for rejecting doctrinal class struggle and deferring the looming cultural conflicts over religion and gender to a later date, the populists avoided the proto-fascist trap of

¹⁹¹ Al-Hasani, *Tarikh al-Wizarat al-'Iraqiyah*, 5:20.

¹⁹² Khadduri, *Independent Iraq*, 128.

¹⁹³ Iraq: Annual Report for 1938, FO 371/23214 E 932/932/93.

¹⁹⁴ Jawahiri, *Diwan*, 2:305-338 and *Dhikrayati* 1:341-51.

¹⁹⁵ Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan*, 1:140.

¹⁹⁶ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York, Grove Press, 1963), 204.

populism outlined by Slavoj Žižek.¹⁹⁷ The populist attacks on feudalists and landowners neither displaced social antagonism nor externalized the enemy. In fact, the failure of the populists to consistently and thoroughly explicate the fundamental relationship between internal and external enemies – feudalism and colonialism – left the movement open to attack from the right. For Iraqis, the lingering legacy of colonialism and the pervasive influence of Britain on the politics and policies of the post-mandatory state were real and visible threats, and if the conservative nationalist could only succeed in stymieing the populist attack on feudalism, the "immanent social antagonism" could indeed be displaced on the external enemy.

The populist platform offered too subtle an association between colonialism and feudalism and thus failed to convince many of its critics of the connection. There are several possible explanations for this failure. The most obvious is that Hikmat Sulayman and Bakr Sidqi prevented the populists from openly denouncing Britain and accusing their conservative opponents of benefitting from the imperial alliance because they feared British reprisals. Another is that the populists gambled that by harnessing the charismatic leadership of Ja‘far Abu al-Timman, a nationalist icon with impeccable anti-colonial credentials, they could convince the Iraqi people of their intentions without making their anti-colonial background explicit. This strategy, unfortunately, depended on the power of democratic institutions to circulate ideas and harness popular sentiment, and the interference of Hikmat and Bakr in the populist agenda for electoral reform and political agitation left the populists silenced and isolated. Finally, the failure of the progressive coalition to challenge public conceptions of the new regime as an obstacle to pan-Arab unity deprived the populists of the opportunity to exploit popular grievances over the crises in Syria and Palestine.

The conflation of feudalism and colonialism as dual impediments to national liberation was accomplished much more effectively by the leftist poets who supported the populist revolution. Neither Jawahiri nor Bahr al-‘Ulum were formally affiliated with the intellectual circles of the Ahali Group before or during the revolutionary year, but their support for the group's populist agenda was clear, even when they pushed for more radical interpretations. The poetics of resistance in the work of Jawahiri and especially Bahr al-‘Ulum galvanized the Iraqi public to such an extent that it could not possibly be satisfied by the tepid reforms endorsed by Hikmat and Bakr. Their verses, as Jabra Ibrahim Jabra has argued "gave point to a whole

¹⁹⁷ Slavoj Žižek, "Against the Populist Temptation," *Critical Inquiry* 32:3 (2006), 551-74.

nation's suffering and wrath,"¹⁹⁸ and aside from isolated reactionaries like Muhammad Bahjat al-
‘Athari, even their critics sympathized with their rallying cries. Sympathetic opponents like ‘Ali
al-Sharqi and Ma‘ruf al-Rusafi did not reject the populist revolution because of an inherent
ideological conflict with the supporters of the new regime, but rather because they distrusted its
leadership and felt that the young rebels had made too hasty a decision in hitching their star to
professional politicians and soldiers.¹⁹⁹ The radicals vowed to avoid the same mistake and
instead began to look directly to the people, especially students, workers, and peasants, to
continue the struggle toward national liberation.

¹⁹⁸ Jabra, "The Rebels, the Committed and the Others," 192.

¹⁹⁹ Rusafi and Jawahiri, in fact, consistently maintained their political and literary respect for one another, despite the fact that each came to respectively symbolize the pinnacle of pan-Arabist and Iraqist poetic excellence.

CHAPTER TWO

‘WHEN DID NAZISM ENTER THIS SHOP?’ CONTESTING FASCISM IN IRAQ, 1939-1945

Reflecting on the anti-fascist debates of the Egyptian press in the 1930s, Israel Gershoni has argued that “the acid test of every liberal intellectual in this decade was whether he raised a clear cry against fascist totalitarianism and Nazi racism.”¹ While historians have generally heeded the spirit of this dictum and adopted a critical stance toward those anti-colonial movements and leaders who remained sympathetic or ambivalent to the fascist menace in Europe, most nuanced analyses have refrained from the summary conflation of anti-colonialism and fascism where moral and material collaboration between Nazis and colonized peoples did occur. In Africa, for example, the stubborn calls for neutrality in the face of the “imperialist war” by anti-colonial leaders like Jomo Kenyatta, George Padmore, Emile Faure, and Wallace Johnson have been criticized as excessive and provocative but still fundamentally illustrative of *realpolitik* principles rather than ideological affinities.² Even in India, where the alliance of Subhas Chandra Bose and the Indian National Army with the Axis powers went far beyond that of Rashid ‘Ali, the dalliance with fascism has been criticized as unfortunate and mistaken but rarely as evidence of moral failure.³ Sugata Bose, for example, has written both critically and defensively of the alliance: “A pact with the devil: such was the terrible price of freedom.”⁴

These critical reservations have been less apparent in the historical analysis of fascism in the Arab world. The dominant narrative in the historiography of Arab nationalism in Iraq traces the nationalist movement that culminated in the Anglo-Iraqi War and the subsequent anti-Jewish *farhud* of 1941 backwards to its roots in German romantic nationalism. Numerous historians have emphasized the ideological influence of German nationalists like Arndt, Fichte, Herder, and von Schönerer on the thought of the Arab nationalist ideologue Sati‘ al-Husri. As Director-

¹ Israel Gershoni, "Egyptian Liberalism in an Age of 'Crisis of Orientation': *al-Risala's* Reaction to Fascism and Nazism, 1933-1939," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31:4 (1999), 570.

² See Jonathan Derrick, *Africa's 'Agitators': Militant Anti-Colonialism in Africa and the West, 1918-1939* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 408-37.

³ Jawaharlal Nehru defended Bose's troops in court and even Gandhi continued to praise his efforts in the struggle for national liberation after his death. See Ranjan Borra, "Subhas Chandra Bose: After Three Decades," *Asian Affairs* 2:5 (1975), 308-20 and Romain Hayes, *Subhas Chandra Bose in Nazi Germany: Politics, Intelligence and Propaganda, 1941-43* (London: Hurst & Company, 2011).

⁴ Sugata Bose, *His Majesty's Opponent: Subhas Chandra Bose and India's Struggle Against Empire* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 203.

General of Education in Iraq, Husri oversaw the institutionalization of a romantic nationalist narrative that looked to the national unification of Italy and Germany as an historical template for Arab unity.⁵ Other scholars have argued that the pervasive Germanophilia of this ideological framework developed by Husri enveloped the educational system, the military officer corps, and the cultural associations that dominated Iraqi civil society in the 1930s to such an extent that the Nazi propaganda campaign spearheaded by Fritz Grobba, the German Ambassador in Iraq, lubricated the descent into fascism and political violence.⁶ In this narrative, war and violence appear as the inevitable result of a pan-Arabist ideological agenda that glorified fascism and trafficked in the anti-Semitism of the Nazis.

As Basheer M. Nafi and Peter Wien have noted, this historical narrative of ideological affinity between Germany and the Arabs has lent legitimacy to academic and non-academic efforts to denigrate Arab nationalism as a co-conspirator with fascism in World War II.⁷ The flight of Rashid 'Ali and Hajj Amin al-Husayni to Nazi Germany and the eruption of violence against the Jewish community of Baghdad have been emphasized as indisputable evidence of Arab complicity in the crimes of the Holocaust and deployed as justification for partisan policy prescriptions.⁸ Several recent historical studies of popular reactions to fascism and Nazism in the Arab world have helped to complicate this narrative by analyzing the conditional nature of the Arab reception of fascism and demonstrating the existence of an anti-fascist and pro-

⁵ William Cleveland, *The Making of an Arab Nationalist: Ottomanism and Arabism in the Life and Thought of Sati' al-Husri* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), Phebe Marr, "The Development of a Nationalist Ideology in Iraq, 1920-1941," *The Muslim World* 75:2 (1985), 85-101, and Bassam Tibi, *Arab Nationalism: Between Islam and the Nation-State*, 3rd Edition (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 123-98.

⁶ Majid Khadduri, *Independent Iraq, 1932-1958: A Study in Iraqi Politics* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 159-211 and Reeva Simon, *Iraq Between the Two World Wars: the Militarist Origins of Tyranny* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

⁷ Basheer M. Nafi, "The Arabs and the Axis: 1933-1940," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 19:2 (1997), 1-24 and Peter Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism: Authoritarian, Totalitarian, and Pro-Fascist Inclinations, 1932-1941* (London: Routledge, 2006), 34-42, 56-68, and 113-16 .

⁸ In addition to the cottage industry of popular histories conflating Arabs and Nazis exemplified by recent works such as Edwin Black, *The Farhud: Roots of the Arab-Nazi Alliance in the Holocaust* (Washington, D.C.: Dialog Press, 2010), David G. Dalin and John F. Rothmann, *Icon of Evil: Hitler's Mufti and the Rise of Radical Islam* (New York: Random House, 2008), Klaus-Michael Mallman and Martin Cüppers, *Nazi Palestine: The Plans for the Extermination of the Jews in Palestine* (New York: Enigma Books, 2010), and David Meir-Levi, *History Upside Down: The Roots of Palestinian Fascism and the Myth of Israeli Aggression* (New York: Encounter Books, 2007), more reputable academic works like Gilbert Achcar, *The Arabs and the Holocaust: The Arab-Israeli War of Narratives* (London: Saqi Books, 2010) and Jeffrey Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009) , and Philip Mattar, *The Mufti of Jerusalem: al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni and the Palestinian National Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988) have tended to confirm the general historical narrative.

democratic bloc of activists and intellectuals in Arab civil society.⁹ Arab support for the Axis powers, according to these revisionist accounts, is better explained by *realpolitik* commitments to anti-imperialism than by the dubious parallels of racialism and authoritarianism inherent in both fascism and the Arab-Islamic historical tradition. The ideological support that did exist for fascism and Nazism in the Arab world can moreover be readily contrasted with the vocal anti-fascism of many Arab intellectuals.

This revisionist assessment of authoritarianism and fascism in the Arab world has been buttressed and extended by the work of Peter Wien and Orit Bashkin on the intellectual history of Iraq. Wien has challenged the facile reduction of Iraqi nationalist politics in this period to fascism, emphasizing the rejection of imperialism and the absence of racialism in the slogans, platforms, and writings of Iraqi nationalist intellectuals and politicians. While Wien acknowledges the overt support for fascism and Nazi Germany by a handful of Iraqis – most notably Yunis al-Sab‘awi, the translator of *Mein Kampf*, and Yunis Bahri, the Arab voice of Radio Berlin – he argues that most of the nationalist ideologues and activists designated as pro-Nazi fascists in colonial archival documents and the historiographical tradition derived from them in fact embraced a vision of political authoritarianism that looked more towards the example of Mustafa Kemal and Reza Pahlavi than to Mussolini or Hitler and embraced “fascist imagery” rather than “fascist ideology.”¹⁰ Bashkin has shown that local support for fascism was not as monolithic or uncontested as has been previously implied and that numerous artists and intellectuals vocally opposed fascism and its local proponents. Bashkin demonstrates that leftist intellectuals and activists like Dhu Nun Ayyub, Kamil al-Chadirchi, ‘Abd al-Fattah Ibrahim, and Yusuf Salman Yusuf, Jewish journalists like Ezra Haddad and Anwar Sha’ul, clerics like Hibat al-Din al-Shahrastani, and Egyptian teachers working in Baghdad like Ahmad Hassan al-Zayyat, ‘Abd al-Razzaq al-Sanhuri, and ‘Abd al-Mun‘am Khallaf all wrote vocally and publicly against

⁹ In addition to Nafi, "The Arabs and the Axis," see Haggai Erlich, "The Arab Youth and the Challenge of Fascism," in *Fascism Overseas*, edited by Stein Larsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 393-423, Israel Gershoni, "Egyptian Liberalism in an Age of 'Crisis of Orientation': *al-Risala's* Reaction to Fascism and Nazism, 1933-1939," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31:4 (1999), 551-576, Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism in Egypt: Dictatorship versus Democracy in the 1930s* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), and Götz Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon: The Ambivalence of the German Option, 1933-1945* (London: Routledge, 2009).

¹⁰ Peter Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism: Authoritarian, Totalitarian, and Pro-Fascist Inclinations, 1932-1941* (London: Routledge, 2006), 34-42, 56-68, and 113-16.

fascism, authoritarianism, and militarism before the Rashid 'Ali coup d'état and the Anglo-Iraqi War of May 1941.¹¹

Most recent studies of political conflict in post-colonial Iraq have emphasized the ideological chasm between the supporters of pan-Arab nationalism and Iraqist nationalism, with the Rashid 'Ali movement functioning as the prime symbol of the former.¹² This historical analysis, however, ignores the constant flux of political orientations and alliances in the interwar years and in doing so obscures the anti-colonial sentiments undergirding popular support for the Rashid 'Ali movement. Political divisions of this period might be more fruitfully analyzed across three distinct axes: pan-Arabist/Iraqist, Left/Right, and anti-colonial/pro-British. The Leftist-Iraqist alliance that took control of government in the wake of Bakr Sidqi's coup d'état soon gave way as the progressives were marginalized and replaced by conservatives and pan-Arabists. The brief rapprochement between the pan-Arabists and Iraqists was forgotten after Bakr Sidqi's assassination, as conservatives and pan-Arabists rekindled their longstanding alliance in power. The upheavals of the European war, however, soon fractured this alliance, as radical anti-colonial nationalists were unable to countenance the accommodationist policies of the pro-British conservatives. When Rashid 'Ali returned to power on April 1, 1941, he did so with the backing of radical anti-colonialists of both the Left and the Right, including both pan-Arabist and Iraqist nationalists. Any serious attempt to understand the motivations of the movement's supporters must therefore look beyond the writings of pan-Arabists and consider the stance of the anti-colonial Left.

While the revisionist accounts of Wien and Bashkin have offered much-needed complexity to the superficial reduction of pan-Arab nationalism to fascism, the historical picture remains incomplete. Taken together, the two arguments show that many Iraqis opposed fascism and Nazism and that even those who remained ambivalent or sympathetic to those ideologies tended to reject their most deplorable features, racialism and imperialism. The methodological turn of Wien and Bashkin away from colonial archives and toward newspapers and memoirs,

¹¹ Orit Bashkin, *The Other Iraq: Pluralism and Culture in Hashemite Iraq* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 58-69 and 76-79.

¹² Eric Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005) and Sami Zubaida, "The Fragments Imagine the Nation: The Case of Iraq," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34:2 (2002), 205-15.

however, has created new blind spots even as it opens additional avenues for exploration.¹³ The new emphasis on experience and ideology has tended to reify the artificial divisions between the Left and Right and the pan-Arabist and Iraqist nationalists in the struggle against colonialism. In clarifying the foundations of local anti-fascist and pro-fascist ideologies, Bashkin and Wien have tended to obscure the historical events and developments that drove individuals and groups towards particular political positions. Sympathy and antipathy toward Germany and the Axis war effort were in many cases much less conditional on ideology than on historical and political developments.

This chapter reframes the historical debate on the relationship between nationalism, anti-colonialism, and fascism in Iraq by focusing on public reactions to local and international developments. This historical project is built upon three different methodological interventions: the “return” to archival sources, the use of poetry as an historical source, and the expansion of chronological focus. The consideration of archival evidence in conjunction with contemporaneous newspaper articles and retrospective memoirs offers essential historical context for abrupt shifts in political orientation. The use of poetry as an historical source helps to capture emotional responses to historical events in a manner precluded by the formulaic structure of newspaper articles and the chronological distance of memoirs from the event and demonstrates the complexities of the relationship between anti-colonialism and fascism in this period. The expansion of chronological scope serves to distance historical analysis from the teleological framework depicting a rising tide of fascism and culminating in the slaughter of Iraqi Jews. A detailed analysis of the aftermath of the climactic events of 1941 in the often forgotten years of the re-occupation broadens historical understanding by depicting not only the development of pro-fascist or pro-Nazi sentiment in Iraq but also its unraveling. The retrenchment of popular opinion in support of the Soviet Union during these years underscores the centrality of anti-colonialism as the dominant factor shaping attitudes and emotions, and the rising influence of the Iraqi Communist Party heralds the dawn of mass politics in Iraq.

Conspiracy & Recrimination: The Death of Ghazi

King Ghazi, the young monarch of Iraq, was killed instantly in the early morning hours of April 4, 1939, when his car collided with an electric pole on the grounds of the Zuhur Palace.

¹³ For a discussion of sources and methodology, see Bashkin, *The Other Iraq*, 1-15, Pierre-Jean Luizard, "Mémoires d'Irakiens: à la découverte d'une société vaincue," *Monde arabe: Maghreb Machrek* 163 (1999), 5-23, and Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism*, 1-6.

Despite the fact that Ghazi's love for liquor and fast cars was well-known to the general public, whispers and rumors of a conspiracy orchestrated by Prime Minister Nuri al-Sa'id in collusion with British agents quickly spread throughout the capital, with some individuals alleging that 'Abd al-Ilah, the uncle of the late king, had avenged his nephew's death by killing Nuri. An outpouring of public sympathy for the departed monarch erupted immediately and spontaneously, along with an explosion of popular anger directed against Nuri and Britain. An incredulous British Ambassador described the emotional gravity of the funeral procession, noting that women "abandoned themselves to hysterical grief, rending their garments and covering their heads and breasts with mud from the gutters" while policemen and soldiers were observed "sobbing like children." Crowds of mourners chanted in the streets of Baghdad, "You shall answer for the blood of Ghazi, O Nuri!"¹⁴

Whispers of a foreign conspiracy were stoked by secondary students in Baghdad, who distributed fliers accusing Britain of conspiring with not only Nuri, but also the nationalist leader Rashid 'Ali al-Kaylani, to engineer Ghazi's death. In Mosul, crowds of mourners stormed the British Consulate and murdered the British Consul, Mr. Monck-Mason, with a pick-axe blow to the head. The Iraqi government quickly declared martial law and dozens of individuals were arrested. In Mosul, those arrested were ordered to provide substantial sums of cash as collateral for good behavior in the hopes that the cash sureties could be traced back to foreign agents or nationalist agitators and establish a deeper dimension to the crime.¹⁵ Two youths were sentenced to death by court-martial, though the sentences were quickly commuted to lengthy prison terms because the two were underage and ineligible for the death penalty. A number of other defendants were sentenced to varying terms of imprisonment, none exceeding fifteen years and some including hard labor. British officials complained that no one would be put to death and bemoaned the absence of capitulations in the country.¹⁶

Once the national furor was temporarily pacified and order was restored, nationalist intellectuals and activists set out to ensure that Ghazi's death would not be in vain, but rather would stand as a rallying cry for the nationalist causes to which the late king had devoted his

¹⁴ Houston Boswell to Foreign Office, April 11, 1939, FO 371/23201 E 2820/72/93 and R.A.F. Monthly Intelligence Summary, April 1939, FO 371/23213 E 6201/72/93.

¹⁵ Houston Boswell to Foreign Office, April 4, 1939, FO 371/23200 E 2475/72/93, Houston Boswell to Foreign Office, April 21, 1939, FO 371/23201 E 3204/72/93, and R.A.F. Monthly Intelligence Summary, April 1939, FO 371/23213 E 6201/72/93.

¹⁶ Houston Boswell to Foreign Office, April 20, 1939, FO 371/23201 E 3021/72/93.

energies. Ghazi had initially been viewed with suspicion and distrust by pan-Arab nationalists due to his complicity in the Bakr Sidqi coup d'état of 1936, but he gradually emerged as a genuinely popular political figure with both the pan-Arabists and the Iraqi public due to his vocal support for the Palestinian and Syrian struggles for independence and his public calls for the annexation of Kuwait. British officials grew increasingly vexed with Ghazi's efforts to mobilize public support behind these nationalist causes through his impassioned broadcasts over his private radio transmitter at the royal palace, particularly after he reportedly ordered military advisers to prepare for an immediate invasion of Kuwait one drunken night shortly before his death.¹⁷ At Ghazi's funeral, delegates from across the Arab world paid tribute to Ghazi's legacy and urged a redoubling of efforts to achieve Arab unity. The Palestinian nationalist Akram Zu'aytar, among others, urged the Arabs to seize the opportunity presented by European crisis to press their demands for the liberation of Palestine.¹⁸

Despite the absence of unequivocal evidence implicating Nuri and Britain in Ghazi's death, the profusion of conspiracy theories surrounding the event fueled anti-British sentiment and reinforced popular perceptions of neo-colonial perfidy that fueled the Rashid 'Ali movement.¹⁹ These conspiracy theories were sustained by a series of irregularities and contradictions surrounding the circumstances of the accident and its explanation. The scene of the accident left numerous observers, including some otherwise favorably disposed toward Nuri and Britain, skeptical of the official explanation. According to various eyewitness accounts, the soil around the fallen electric pole was left relatively intact, the path bore no evidence of skid marks, and the car was virtually unscathed except for the collapsed windshield. An African servant who was a passenger in the car and broke his hand during the crash vanished immediately afterwards and Nuri refused all attempts to conduct an official investigation. Ghazi's wife 'Aliyah, the sister of 'Abd al-Ilah testified that Ghazi told her of his wish to have his powers transferred to her brother, with whom Ghazi was known to be at odds, in the event of

¹⁷ Mahmud al-Durrah, *al-Harb al-'Iraqiyah al-Britaniyah* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'rifa, 1982), 84.

¹⁸ *Al-Bilad*, May 17, 1939 and Houstoun Boswell to Foreign Office, May 18, 1939, FO 371/23201 E 3782/72/93.

¹⁹ The allegation that Ghazi was assassinated by Nuri in collaboration with Britain remains uncontroversial in Iraqi historiography today. See for example Ahmad Fawzi, *Ashhar al-Ightiyalat al-Siyasiyah fi al-Ahd al-Malaki* (Baghdad: Matba'at al-Diwani, 1987), 131-73, Raja Husayn Husni al-Khattab, *al-Mas'uliyah al-Tarikhiyah fi Maqatal al-Malik Ghazi* (Baghdad: Maktabat Afaq 'Arabiyah, 1985), 'Abd al-Rahman al-Jalili, *al-Malik Ghazi wa Qatiluhu: Britaniyah, 'Abd al-Ilah, Nuri al-Sa'id* (London: Dar al-Hikmah, 1993), and 'Abd al-Rahman al-Munif, *al-'Iraq: Hawamish min al-Tarikh wa al-Muqawamah* (al-Dar al-Baydah: al-Markaz al-'Arabiyah al-Thaqafi, 2003), 101-14.

his death, and his uncle Zayd was overheard after the crash muttering cryptically, “Ghazi was stubborn and took advice from no one.”²⁰

These suspicious details would take on deeper meaning as public personalities recounted ominous warnings about Ghazi’s activities and their consequences from both Nuri and various British officials. Colonel Salah al-Din al-Sabbagh recalled Nuri’s eldest son Sabah broaching the idea of assassinating Ghazi in retaliation for his complicity in Bakr Sidqi's coup d’état. Tawfiq al-Suwaydi, a pro-British politician, recounted Rab Butler, the British Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, fulminating against Ghazi’s agitation for the annexation of Kuwait and warning that “the king does not know that he is playing with fire, and I fear that he will burn his fingers one day!” While Tawfiq, unlike Salah al-Din, never explicitly endorsed the conspiracy theories, he admitted that the disappearance of the servant provoked considerable skepticism and admonished Nuri for refusing to convene an official investigation to lay bare the facts of the case, arguing that this failure encouraged further military interventions in politics.²¹ For their part, British officials were highly sensitive to the whispers of conspiracy and alerted all embassy staff members to avoid any actions or statements that might lend credence to these rumors. They understood that Nuri’s decision to suppress rather than to address specific rumors and allegations would undoubtedly lead to the entrenchment of conspiracy theories and urged Nuri to publicly deny British involvement in the affair. British officials had privately encouraged Nuri’s efforts to marginalize Ghazi, but British officials had always opposed any attempt to dethrone Ghazi, partly because such an action would “split this country in a way which would be inconvenient and dangerous” and “provide a rallying-ground” for those opposed to Nuri.²²

Mystified by the explosion of public anger in the aftermath of the accident, many British officials grew convinced that Nazi secret agents had been responsible for circulating rumors and inciting crowds to violence. This counter conspiracy theory, though, was perhaps even less convincing than the whispers of British involvement and no evidence of foreign involvement in exciting the crowds was ever uncovered. The crowds that gathered to protest at the British

²⁰ Salah al-Din al-Sabbagh, *Fursun al-'Urubah fi al-'Iraq* (Baghdad: al-Shabab al-'Arabi, 1956), 81-88 and Talib Mushtaq, *Awraq Ayyami, 1900-1958* (Beirut: Dar al-Tal'iah, 1968), 314-25.

²¹ al-Sabbagh, *Fursun al-'Urubah* and Tawfiq al-Suwaydi, *Mudhakkirati: Nisf Qarn min Tarikh al-'Iraq wa al-Qadiyah al-'Arabiyah* (London: Dar al-Hikmah, 1999), 326-331.

²² Houstoun Boswell to Nuri al-Sa'id, April 5, 1939, FO 371/23201 E 2618/72/93, Houstoun Boswell to Foreign Office, April 6, 1939, FO 371/23200 E 2548/72/93 and FO 371/23200 E 2549/72/93, Maurice Peterson to Foreign Office, December 21, 1938, FO 371/23207 E 281/72/93 January 16, 1939, FO 406/77 E 756/72/93.

Embassy in Baghdad and at the Consulate in Mosul formed spontaneously and immediately following the announcement of Ghazi's death, leaving scarcely any time for hypothetical foreign agents to organize a whisper campaign. The popular reception of conspiracy theories is better explained by the historical events preceding the accident, most notably Nuri's "discovery" of a secret plot to assassinate Ghazi just one month prior. Nuri exploited the opportunity to purge the army of dissident officers and to settle personal scores with old rivals like Hikmat Sulayman, whom he held responsible for the murder of his brother-in-law Ja'far al-'Askari during the Bakr Sidqi coup d'état. Eight individuals were found guilty of participation in the plot and seven were sentenced to death, including Hikmat, who was spared only by British intervention.²³ The long history of British collusion with Nuri in subverting nationalist efforts to undermine the Anglo-Iraqi alliance led many Iraqis to conflate the political interests of the two parties. Tensions over British policy in Palestine and French policy in Syria further fueled popular suspicions that Britain intended to consolidate neo-colonial power in Iraq and the entire affair appeared to many as "nothing more than one of the steps taken by Britain to prepare for war."²⁴

Anti-Colonialism and Fascism at the Ministry of Education

The rising tide of anti-British sentiment that helped to fuel conspiracy theories of British involvement in Ghazi's death and to underscore the conflict at the heart of the Anglo-Iraqi alliance between pan-Arab nationalist goals and colonial ambitions in Syria and Palestine was crucially shaped by the ideological agenda of the Ministry of Education. Under the guidance of Sati' al-Husri, who served as Director-General of Education from 1921 until 1927 and occupied other key posts until 1937, the carefully constructed historical narrative of Anglo-Iraqi friendship and collaboration assiduously cultivated by the British Embassy was undermined in favor of a counter-narrative emphasizing colonial tyranny and treachery. This trend was further cemented by the continued influx of secondary school teachers from Syria and Palestine who naturally emphasized British perfidy in the ongoing colonization of their home countries.²⁵ By the end of the 1930s, the open conflict between the anti-colonialism of leading educators and civic leaders

²³ Maurice Peterson to Foreign Office, March 1, 1939, FO 371/23200 E 1640/72/93, March 6, 1939, FO 371/23200 E 1704/72/93, March 7, 1939 FO 371/23200 E 1742/72/93, March 17, 1939, FO 371/23200 E 2042/72/93 and March 19, 1939, FO 371/23200 E 2211/72/93, and W.E. Houstoun-Boswell to Foreign Office, March 30, 1939 FO 406/77 E 2749/72/93.

²⁴ Salah al-Din al-Sabbagh, *Fursun al-'Urubah fi al-'Iraq* (Baghdad: al-Shabab al-'Arabi, 1956), 76.

²⁵ On the radicalization of the Ministry of Education see Bashkin, *The Other Iraq*, 229-64, Marr, "The Development of Nationalist Ideology," 85-101, and Simon, *Iraq Between the Two World Wars*, 69-105.

and the collaborationist agenda of the political establishment precipitated an erosion of trust between the British Embassy and the Iraqi government.

The British Embassy, which tended to ignore the cultural dimensions of anti-colonial politics earlier in the decade, soon found the problem impossible to overlook. C.J. Edmonds, the advisor to the Ministry of Interior, warned that Britain risked losing influence in the country due to younger generations' "complete and profound ignorance of the real history of Iraq." His description of the imperial alliance as "the *haqiqa* of the Iraqi *tariqa*" constructed colonialism as a secular religion, and his advocacy for a governmental apparatus along the lines of the U.S. House Committee on Un-American Activities that would identify and repress anti-colonial activity as "un-Iraqi activities" underscored the maintenance of colonial relations. Kinahan Cornwallis supported Edmonds' assessment, arguing that British neglect of the educational system meant that only the "older men of standing" were cognizant of the benefits of the imperial alliance.²⁶ Basil Newton, the British Ambassador in Baghdad, complained to 'Ali Jawdat, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, that the Iraqi educational establishment was failing to impress upon the youth "the fundamental importance of friendship and co-operation with Great Britain" and that the history of Anglo-Iraqi relations was being "deliberately distorted." Iraqi students were taught that independence was achieved by "a triumphant struggle against British oppression" and that "only British imperialism stood in the way of the rapid progress and development of the new Iraqi State." Stunned at the ingratitude of Iraqis for the British role in liberating and civilizing their country, Newton bitterly complained that "not even the merest lip-service" was paid to British sacrifices and that "the generosity and, in fact, indulgence" displayed by Britain towards Iraq "have secured little recognition amongst the present generation, and none at all, to judge by the students and the junior officers in the army, amongst the younger generation."²⁷

The British perception that anti-colonial sentiment was much stronger among the younger generation reinforced their suspicions about the pernicious influence on the youth of Syrian and Palestinian teachers. This impression was strengthened by comparisons between urban youth and rural youth, with the latter evincing few signs of the generational upheaval in the cities. One British official noted that the older generation maintained a monopoly of power in the

²⁶ Kinahan Cornwallis to the Ministry of Information, September 11, 1939 and C.J. Edmonds to Nuri al-Sa'id, September 12, 1939, "Education," FO 624/17.

²⁷ Basil Newton to Foreign Office, August 10, 1939, FO 406/77 and September 28, 1940, FO 406/78.

countryside and therefore very few tribal youths were subject to the negative influence of modern education.²⁸ In the cities, by contrast, the establishment of the Futuwa, a paramilitary youth movement that emphasized chivalry, discipline and sacrifice, challenged the ideological hegemony of the older generation. While Basil Newton welcomed the program because of its disciplinary objectives, other British officials warned that Sami Shawkat, then Director-General of Education, was fostering pan-Arabism with “Nazi methods” and warned against “the dangerous absurdity of encouraging school-boys to believe that their military training has a political object just at the time when responsible Iraqi statesmen are doing their utmost to keep the army out of politics.”²⁹

While the militarism of the youth movement and the concerted efforts of German officials to cultivate relations between the Futuwa and the Hitler Youth have prompted repeated historical comparisons with the fascist youth movements in Europe, civic leaders and educators in Iraq were much more liable to look to Mustapha Kemal’s Turkey and Reza Pahlavi’s Iran than to Mussolini’s Italy and Hitler’s Germany as models of authoritarian rule and militant nationalism. Many assessments of fascist “trappings” in Iraq were predicated on superficial interpretations of visual imagery that imputed fascist motives to even notoriously pro-British leaders like Salih Jabr.³⁰ Military leaders like Salah al-Din al-Sabbagh, who was highly supportive of the Futuwa movement, looked to Turkey and Iran as Eastern models of an anti-colonial modernity that could be crafted by an authoritarian nationalist movement. After visiting the two countries, Salah al-Din pointedly asked, “Where is this complete and enduring independence enjoyed by Turkey and Iran to be found in the limited and false independence of Iraq? Iraq crawls while they run, because they are free to choose their course without guidance and free to arm themselves as they please.”³¹

This enthusiasm for alternative models of national modernity rooted in the politics of anti-colonialism was shared by the educational establishment. Yasin al-Hashimi was adored by the teachers, who contended that he would make himself into a “benevolent dictator” like Mustafa Kemal, while Nuri al-Sa‘id and the late Ja‘far al-‘Askari were openly denounced in class as traitors in the pay of the British Intelligence Service who forced Iraq into an unequal and

²⁸ C.J. Edmonds to Kinahan Cornwallis, July 26, 1941, "Germany: Propaganda," FO 624/24.

²⁹ *Al-Istiqlal*, June 29, 1939, W.E. Houston-Boswell to Foreign Office, April 19, 1939 FO 371/23201, and Basil Newton to Foreign Office, May 20, 1939 and July 4, 1939..

³⁰ See Simon, *Iraq Between the Two World Wars*, 101-105 and Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism*, 78-105.

³¹ al-Sabbagh, *Fursun al-Urubah*, 60-61.

unjust treaty. Students were encouraged by their teachers to compose letters to Yasin and to everyone's surprise even received lengthy replies in return. By contrast, Britain was portrayed as a band of treacherous liars who resorted to bribery as the chief instrument of a divide-and-rule strategy, and students were encouraged to deliver anti-British speeches in front of the class commemorating the Arab Revolt, which was depicted not as anti-Ottoman but anti-British.³²

Zionism, Colonialism, and Violence

Mussolini's evident colonial agenda undermined any potential support for Italian fascism as a political model, and what sympathy did exist for Nazism was rooted in the politics of anti-Zionism. Popular campaigns against Zionism in Iraq emerged as early as 1928, when teachers and students led popular demonstrations against the visit of Alfred Mond to Baghdad, though this early event seems to have been guided by the mistaken impression that Mond sought to establish a Zionist colony in Iraq and marred by the inability of the demonstrators to pronounce the word "Zionism" in Arabic.³³ The rapid development of a modern curriculum rooted in an Arab nationalist vision of history dramatically increased public awareness of the issue, and the eruption of a popular rebellion in Palestine in 1936 spurred both demonstrations of national sympathy and violent acts of reprisal inside of Iraq. While anti-colonial politics had previously been rooted in an opposition to the lingering British presence in Iraq, the new politics of pan-Arabism placed greater emphasis on the ongoing colonization of Syria and Palestine.

While earlier denunciations of Zionism largely steered clear of classical anti-Semitic tropes and refrained from demonizing the Iraqi Jewish population, the situation worsened considerably after the outbreak of the rebellion in Palestine and the publication of Zionist atrocities against Arab civilians. Several newspapers were rumored to have accepted financial subsidies from Fritz Grobba, the Nazi envoy in Baghdad, and began to reproduce the anti-Semitic propaganda of the Nazi regime. Yunis al-Sab'awi published an Arabic translation of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* in *al-'Alam al-'Arabi*, the daily newspaper with the closest ties to Grobba. Prominent clerics like Nu'man al-A'dhamy and Kamal al-Ta'i also appear to have accepted Nazi subsidies, and Ta'i relied heavily on anti-Semitic propaganda to market his weekly paper *al-*

³² "Nazi Propaganda in Iraq," enclosed in secret dispatch from C.J. Edmonds to Kinahan Cornwallis, July 26, 1941, "Germany: Propaganda," FO 624/24

³³ "Nazi Propaganda in Iraq," enclosed in secret dispatch from C.J. Edmonds to Kinahan Cornwallis, July 26, 1941, "Germany: Propaganda," FO 624/24 and Michael Eppel, *The Palestine Conflict in the History of Modern Iraq: The Dynamics of Involvement, 1928-1948* (Portland: Frank Cass, 1994).

Nashi'ah al-Islamiyah.³⁴ Even the more prominent nationalist newspaper, like *al-Bilad* and *al-Istiqlal*, adopted increasingly uncritical attitudes towards Nazi policies.³⁵

Although most Iraqi Jews remained either indifferent or hostile to Zionism, several individuals were deported for disseminating Zionist propaganda and encouraging Jewish emigration to Palestine.³⁶ When Irgun terrorist attacks killed dozens of Palestinian civilians in Jaffa in July and August of 1938, Iraqi groups retaliated by hurling bombs at Jewish targets in Baghdad in August and October, killing one (Muslim) and injuring several more.³⁷ The perpetrators were never identified, but the Iraqi government seized the occasion to arrest anyone with three or more criminal convictions and demanded large securities for good behavior. Over sixty individuals were imprisoned because they were unable to raise the required cash. Provincial governors were so impressed that they began asking whether their own “bad men” could be dealt with in a similar manner. While the British Ambassador welcomed the procedure as “well-timed and well-directed,” the government’s actions further inflamed anti-British sentiment in Iraq.³⁸ In November 1938, a student demonstration in support of Palestine descended into chaos when local workers and inhabitants joined the protesting students and began attacking British and Jewish owned stores on Rashid Street. Only five individuals were arrested, and several of them were Jewish youths accused of breaching the Public Security Law by spreading panic in warning shopkeepers to close their shops. Official censorship of news reports and religious sermons and a prohibition on popular demonstrations could not contain popular anger, and one Iraqi politician warned the British Embassy that he feared demands for the expulsion of Iraqi Jews would emerge if Zionist aggression continued.³⁹

Dismayed by the deterioration of relations with the Arabs, Britain sought to stem the bleeding by offering serious concessions on Palestine. The British government released the White Paper in May 1939, but the concessions met a cool reception in Iraq due to widespread

³⁴ "Nazi Propaganda in Iraq," enclosed in secret dispatch from C.J. Edmonds to Kinahan Cornwallis, July 26, 1941, "Germany: Propaganda," FO 624/24.

³⁵ Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism*, 52-112.

³⁶ "Palestine, Zionism (Ben Zvi)," FO 624/5 and "Palestine, Zionism (Kallay)," FO 624/6.

³⁷ Houston Boswell to Foreign Office, August 15, 1938, FO 371/21861 E 4895/4895/93 and August 29, 1938, FO 371/21861 E 5394/4895/93 and Maurice Peterson to Foreign Office, October 25, 1938, FO 371/21861 E 6357/4895/93 and November 22, 1939, FO 371/21861 E 7134/4895/93.

³⁸ Basil Newton to Foreign Office, July 18, 1939, FO 371/23202 E 5253/72/93 and C.H. Summerhayes to Basil Newton, August 2, 1939, FO 371/23202 E 5891/72/93.

³⁹ C.J. Edmonds to Houston Boswell, August 22, 1938, FO 371/21861 E 5394/4895/93.

skepticism that its provisions would be put into effect.⁴⁰ While Nuri al-Sa‘id and other pro-British politicians were privately delighted by the scope of concessions, public pressure from pan-Arabist newspapers and organizations forced the government to publicly reject the proposals. Hajj Amin al-Husayni, the Mufti of Jerusalem who took up residence in Baghdad in October 1939, would later direct his representatives to seek a firmer commitment from Britain on implementing the recommendations after entertaining offers from Germany and Italy, but the request came too late and the British Ambassador refused to address it until after the war.⁴¹

While British policy in Palestine received the brunt of anti-colonial anger due to close official ties between Britain and Iraq, French colonial policy in Syria was equally troubling to Iraqi nationalists. Iraqi journalists proved adept at appropriating the liberal language deployed by Britain against Nazi Germany to point out the hypocrisy of colonial policy in Palestine and Syria, as was evident in the critique of a French military tribunal’s announcement of death sentences for seven Syrian nationalists in April 1940. *Al-Bilad* pointed to the uneven distribution of power in the imperial alliance, complaining that Iraq was simultaneously expected to assist the French war effort and to tolerate the oppression of their Arab brethren “for no fault other than struggling to secure their freedom and defend their existence.” The paper expressed hope that the Allies would “straighten this crooked policy and grant to the Arabs their legitimate rights in their various countries.”⁴² *Al-Istiqlal* likewise pointed to the hypocrisy of colonialism, declaring that “the Allies are persisting in their acts of violence and persecution” and concluding that Iraq must not be blamed for adopting “an attitude of hesitation and suspicion, attaching no value to honeyed words and the policy of sweet promises.”⁴³ *Al-Ra‘i al-‘Amm* denounced the anti-liberal nature of the trial, pointing out that the accused were only permitted to appoint lawyers cleared by the prosecution and could not provide full and detailed answers in defense to the charges levied against them.⁴⁴

Anti-colonial attacks directed against Britain were not limited to the rhetorical realm, but instead motivated a wave of violence against British nationals in Iraq even before outbreak of World War II. A series of attacks on R.A.F. personnel underscores the deterioration of relations

⁴⁰ Basil Newton to Foreign Office, June 16, 1939, FO 371/23201.

⁴¹ Eppel, *The Palestine Conflict*, 88-90 and Tawfiq al-Suwaydi, *Mudhakkirati: Nisf Qarn min Tarikh al-‘Iraq wa al-Qadiyah al-‘Arabiyah* (London: Dar al-Hikmah, 1999), 340-41.

⁴² *Al-Bilad*, April 24, 1940

⁴³ *Al-Istiqlal*, April 15, 1940

⁴⁴ *Al-Ra‘i al-‘Amm*, April 16, 1940

between Britain and Iraq at the local level long before the emergence of the Rashid 'Ali movement. Petty Officer George William Jones was stabbed to death and left in a ditch near Habbaniyah by three local tribesmen on December 12, 1937, and local relations suffered from the fact that British military police arrested and detained, beat and tortured several local fisherman, shepherds, and workers for lengthy periods of time before releasing them on account of a lack of evidence and honing in on the real culprits.⁴⁵ Two officers were detained on May 7, 1939 after photographing rural life in the countryside by local citizens who were particularly sensitive to the foreign publication of fact photographs illustrating the "backwardness" of their country. The officers were so enraged by their subsequent interrogation that they assaulted several local police officers, which provoked a brawl with Iraqi soldiers.⁴⁶ Several months later, three airmen brawled with local police outside of the Piccadilly Hotel, an upscale cabaret frequented by British airmen, and the next night a fourth airman was whipped by a crowd of locals outside of the hotel. Local officials and newspapers condemned the behavior of the military personnel, which caused Britain to demand that local police and officials "adopt a more friendly attitude toward members of the Royal Air Force, to practice greater restraint, and above all to regard the British forces as guests in Iraq who were to be treated as such."⁴⁷

Violent tensions were not limited to relations between military personnel and the local population, but rather extended to the expatriate business community. On June 23, 1939 A.D. Timpson, a British engineer employed in Basra struck 'Abbas Khalil, a disgruntled employee, and was subsequently "subjected to a brutal and humiliating treatment" at the local police station during which 'Abbas and the soldiers beat Timpson with their belts while a local crowd threw stones and beat him with sticks. The supervising Iraqi officer observed the beating and remarked simply, "These Englishmen do not know how to behave." Timpson was later tried by a local court, convicted, and fined a paltry sum. Nuri assured the British Ambassador that the soldiers

⁴⁵ Evidence of Bahth Ibn Muhammad and Za'al Ibn Hardan, "English and Arabic Records of Legal Proceedings: Murder of Petty Officer Jones, R.A.F. Habbaniyah, 1937," FO 624/15.

⁴⁶ Corporal Worby and Aircraftman 1st Class Blaymires to Basrah R.A.F. Station, May 9, 1939, Basrah Commandant of Police to Basrah Port Officer, May 17, 1939, British Embassy to Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, May 20, 1939, and Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs to British Embassy, December 12, 1939, "R.A.F. Personnel," FO 624/15.

⁴⁷ R.A.F. Basrah Station to R.A.F. Headquarters, July 31, 1939, R.A.F. Headquarters to British Embassy, August 4, 1939, British Embassy to Foreign Office, August 23, 1939 and October 11, 1939, Basrah Consulate to British Embassy, October 12, 1939, Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs to British Embassy, October 14, 1939, "R.A.F. Personnel: Basra," FO 624/17.

intervened not as representatives of the Iraqi Army but instead as personal friends of ‘Abbas Khalil.

Iraqi Views on World War II

While British officials tended to attribute the rising tensions and the eruption of violence as manifestations of pro-Nazi trends in Iraqi public opinion, the truth was more complex. The fiercely anti-colonial poet Muhammad Salih Bahr al-‘Ulum denounced Hitler in an eponymous poem as early as 1934:

Belligerent monster, drenched in sin
Hitler revels in his disdain for the people
He alleges things whose lies we see
Ugliness in the face of the deceitful leader
If Satan proceeds in his seductions
And war erupts there shall be no return
Do not entrust peace to him in retreat
So long as he is infatuated by his love for war⁴⁸

In the wake of the Second Italo-Ethiopian War in 1936, Bahr al-‘Ulum denounced the appeasement of fascist colonialism in his poem “The Italian Assault on Ethiopia,” praising the principled stand of the Soviet Ambassador Maxim Litvinov and ridiculing British and French hypocrisy:

I saw the Fascism of Italy, the Fascism of Tyranny, propped up by the League of Nations
Litvinov told the truth and was denounced
By the heads of governments without conscience
They cry with hypocrisy over the fate of the Ethiopians
While going to court and woo the ravenous conquering victor
There is no good in the League whose nature ignites
Fierce and endless war while the people roast in its fire⁴⁹

While his repeated attacks on colonial policy in Syria and Palestine and the appeasement of fascist aggression in Ethiopia and Libya underscore his lack of faith in the European anti-fascist coalition, Bahr al-‘Ulum nevertheless articulated his yearning for the destruction of Nazism after the war finally erupted:

War erupted and her poison terrified the earth

⁴⁸ Muhammad Salih Bahr al-‘Ulum, *Diwan Bahr al-‘Ulum* (Baghdad: Matba‘at Dar al-Tadamun, 1968), 1:96.

⁴⁹ Bahr al-‘Ulum, *Diwan Bahr al-‘Ulum*, 1:116.

Stars fell down eclipsing and concealing her martyrs
Both the living and the dead burned in her flame
It began from the leaders of the Reich and there lies its end⁵⁰

The fundamental difficulty of the Arab stance, as the poetry of Bahr al-'Ulum illustrates, lay in the apparent colonial ambitions of both sides in the war. While leftists like Bahr al-'Ulum were repulsed by the domestic implications of fascism and radical nationalists were prone to admire its authoritarian model of political leadership, anti-colonial activists on both sides of the political divide condemned the colonial implications of both Axis and Allies. Neville Chamberlain's infamous concession of Czechoslovakia in Munich lent support to popular perceptions that British anti-fascism was merely cover for self-interest, and nationalist newspapers contrasted the firm stand of Germany with the weak appeals of the Arab state en route to the conclusion that Britain respected only strength.⁵¹ The British Ambassador warned that if war broke out before the Palestine issue was resolved, Britain could expect at best half-hearted cooperation from Iraq and at worst popular opposition to the implementation of treaty obligations.⁵²

In the early years of the war, Nazi influence in Iraq was probably aided more by practical matters than ideological affinities. At least fourteen members of the German Legation were conversant in Arabic, a number significantly larger than their British counterparts. Even pro-British politicians like 'Ali Jawdat al-Ayyubi were seduced by the German offer to provide genetically superior German rams to breed with Iraqi sheep.⁵³ The inclination of the press to use the German Transocean wire service instead of Reuters was largely driven by the fact that Transocean was both cheaper and longer than Reuters, largely devoid of complicated abbreviations that plagued Reuters, focused on international news, and was "generally regarded as being more interesting and snappy."⁵⁴ In a similar vein, British intelligence officials

⁵⁰ Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan Bahr al-'Ulum*, 1:146.

⁵¹ Houston Boswell to Foreign Office, October 4, 1938, FO 371/21861 E 6068/6068/93.

⁵² Houston Boswell to Foreign Office, April 10, 1939, FO 371/23201 E 2626/72/93.

⁵³ Basil Newton to Foreign Office, June 21, 1939, FO 371/23217 E 4614/4614/93.

⁵⁴ Iraqi Office of the Director General of Posts and Telegraphs to British Embassy, October 18, 1938 "Press: Wireless," FO 624/13.

complained that Iraqis preferred the “bombastic and insulting type of radio propaganda” put out by the Nazis to the “‘straight’ news and moderate tones” of the B.B.C.”⁵⁵

In any case, the enthusiastic consumption of Nazi propaganda was not necessarily an indication of rising pro-Nazi sentiment. Some British intelligence reports indicated that Iraqis had a rather sophisticated understanding of Nazi propaganda and used Radio Berlin broadcasts as a benchmark for comparison with the pro-British propaganda of the Iraqi government.⁵⁶ While little effort was made to bridge the propaganda gap over the radio, Britain did begin to import copies of *al-Harb wa al-Siyasah*, a periodical produced by the British administration in Palestine and punctuated with snappy cartoons emphasizing the colonial dimensions of fascism by depicting Hitler and Mussolini as monstrous caricatures brutalizing the populations of Libya, Ethiopia, and Albania.⁵⁷ Aside from the cartoons, though, British propaganda was crude and unconvincing, relying on fictional dialogue to illustrate the folly of opposing Britain: “By God, had I realized that England would put up such resistance, I would have struck a bargain with her and entered the war on her side instead of Germany’s!” In case the point was lost amidst the successive Axis military victors, the editorialists warned against underestimating Britain’s capacity for vengeance: “English scientists, experts in chemistry and agriculture, have not left any wheat, barley or potato plantations in Europe undestroyed by phosphorus and cellulose leaf-packets and plant-devouring insects dropped from the air over plantations in Europe.”⁵⁸

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to British propaganda efforts in Iraq was the comparative weakness of British concessions on Syria and Palestine. By 1939, some British officials believed that anti-British sentiment was too powerful to counter directly, though most argued for more comprehensive bribery campaigns in lieu of rebutting anti-colonial critiques.⁵⁹ British propaganda increasingly focused on projecting power so as to “impress the Arab world with the strength and vast resources of the British and French Empires” with comparison to “Germany’s ill-founded claims to might.”⁶⁰ Dozens of propaganda films were imported into Iraq in order to

⁵⁵ "Enemy and Allied Publicity and Propaganda" by A.H. Marsack, Air Liaison Officer, Mosul, May 13, 1940, "Germany: Propaganda," FO 624/18.

⁵⁶ R.A.F. Monthly Intelligence Summary, November 1939, FO 371/2312.

⁵⁷ *Al-Harb wa al-Siyasah*, August 31, 1940 and C.J. Edmonds to V. Holt, September 23, 1940, "Publicity and Propaganda: Press Bulletin," FO 624/20.

⁵⁸ *Al-'Iraq*, October 15, 1940.

⁵⁹ Lieutenant-General Sir Robert Gordon-Finlyson to Basil Newton, June 5, 1939, "Visitors," "Visitors," FO 624/15.

⁶⁰ "Enemy and Allied Publicity and Propaganda" by A.H. Marsack, Air Liaison Officer, Mosul, May 13, 1940, "Germany: Propaganda," FO 624/18.

visually convey to the local population that which could not be properly articulated over the airwaves and on the pages of newspapers. As one British official remarked, films would be used “for the purpose of bringing home to the Iraqis, more graphically than any written propaganda could do, the power of Britain and the civilizing ends to which that power is directed.”⁶¹

Despite the dire predictions of many British officials, the eruption of war in Europe evinced no serious indication of pro-Nazi sentiment in Iraq. The daily *al-Nahar* condemned the Nazi invasion of Poland as “greedy and rapacious conduct” and even the radical nationalist *al-Istiqlal* qualified its anti-colonial declaration that Britain was “pretending to fight for the cause of civilization and the deliverance of small nations” by praising British resistance to Nazi aggression.⁶² Nazi propaganda efforts in the region were initially futile, as the eastern nations held in contempt by the fascist racialism were not easily deluded by Nazi entreaties. The only real inroads made by Nazis propaganda in Iraq came through anti-colonial attacks on Allied policy in Palestine and Syria, which led Iraqis to increasingly “look forward to the day when both Germany and the Allies will be so weakened in a long drawn-out struggle that foreign influence in the East must relax its grip.”⁶³ The prescience of that assessment was apparent in Salah al-Din al-Sabbagh's later recollection that Iraqis hoped that “both sides emerge from the war on equal footing, so that Germany remains eternally capable of checking British ambition.”⁶⁴

Like Salah al-Din, many Iraqi intellectuals could scarcely contain their glee over the looming destruction of European colonialism. The renowned poet Ma‘ruf al-Rusafi described his astonishment with the rapid collapse of Europe in apocalyptic terms in the poem “The State of the World and Us”:

I discern in the vicissitudes of time
 A revolution sweeping every land
It will appear close at hand when it is far
 And will appear far away when it is close
The consoler will cease to console
 And the disparager will not disparage
The right of the weak will be respected
 While the oppressor suffers destruction

⁶¹ Basil Newton to Foreign Office, September 25, 1939, "United Kingdom Films: Cinema," FO 624/16.

⁶² *Al-Nahar*, October 2, 1939 and *Al-Istiqlal*, August 13, 1940

⁶³ "A Memorandum on German Propaganda in the Near-East" by Dr. Herbert Melzig, Former Press Adviser to the Near-Eastern Department of the German Ministry of Propaganda, and "Enemy and Allied Publicity and Propaganda" by A.H. Marsack, Air Liaison Officer, Mosul, May 13, 1940, "Germany: Propaganda," FO 624/18.

⁶⁴ al-Sabbagh, *Fursun al-'Urubah*, 64.

Pleiades will rise above in peace and security
From the aggression of Capella and Aldebaran
The Milky Way will appear tender and affectionate
While the stars of Ursa Minor come together
The Lord of the Heavens and of the Earth
Will be known to us by his justice and mercy
For the colonizers will retreat in destruction
And nations will be illuminated by ekistics⁶⁵

Rusafi warns his fellow nationalists not to watch the unprecedented destruction passively but to exploit the circumstances in order to achieve their national liberation:

Band of Arabs, are you truly a nation if you
Do not consummate this revolution of the ages?...
Britain violated your treaty even before this
And scornfully stashed it away in the cupboard

Virtually all newspapers drew a sharp moral equivalence between the colonial aims of both sides, a task made easier after one British paper suggested that the government make contingency plans to destroy Iraqi oil wells.⁶⁶ The editor of *al-Sijil* complained that the major powers were “inspired by greed and by the desire to subjugate peoples and rob them of their wealth,” while the poet Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri argued in *al-Ra’i al-‘Amm* that both sides sought “either to defend colonies already forcibly acquired or to obtain colonial territories which have long been coveted.”⁶⁷ *Al-Istiqlal* urged the government to “exploit all opportunities” by demanding a strict quid-pro-quo attitude toward the European conflict, offering support for the Allied cause only in exchange for concessions in Palestine and Syria. The paper argued that if Britain were truly fighting Germany in defense of liberty, “Britain should rather first deal with the Palestine question in the light of these sacred objects for which she has gone to war” and warned that the Arab attitude toward the Allied war effort would remain lukewarm and conflicted as long as the Palestine problem remained unaddressed.⁶⁸ Even the staunchly pro-British *al-Iraq* called upon Britain to support independent governments in Syria and Palestine without delay.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Ma’ruf al-Rusafi, *Diwan al-Rusafi* (Beirut: Dar al-Muntazar, 1999), 3:348-53.

⁶⁶ *Al-‘Alam al-‘Arabi*, August 4, 1940.

⁶⁷ *Al-Sijil*, September 2, 1940 and *al-Ra’i al-‘Amm*, September 28, 1940.

⁶⁸ *Al-Istiqlal*, October 10, 1939 and August 12, 1940.

⁶⁹ *Al-‘Iraq*, June 21, 1940.

Britain, however, was not prepared to accept neutrality from such a strategically integral client regime. At the insistence of the British Embassy, plainclothes police officers monitored cafes and arrested anyone criticizing Britain or expressing sympathy for the Axis cause. The British Ambassador reminded Prime Minister Nuri al-Sa'id that Iraq "owed its creation, independence, and its preservation to Great Britain" and warned that the example set by *al-Istiqlal* "was incidentally a very poor argument for its own thesis that we should hasten to follow in Palestine the precedent of Iraq." Nuri was instructed to warn 'Abd al-Ghafur Badri, the paper's editor, that he had transgressed "the limits of political decorum" and to moderate his tone or face the legal consequences.⁷⁰ When the nationalist paper *al-Sijil* demanded a similar quid-pro-quo, the Iraqi government acted quickly and suspended the paper's license.⁷¹ British efforts to cultivate the support of prominent politicians through bribes and other inducements did pay limited dividends. The staunchly nationalist *Al-Bilad* was still considered to be "well-disposed to the Allied cause" in the fall of 1939.⁷² Sami Shawkat, the Director-General of Education who has been frequently described as one of the leading proponents of Nazism in Iraq, wrote three articles under a pseudonym in *al-Iraq* in October 1939 praising democracy and warning against an uncritical acceptance of Nazi propaganda and another the following year offering qualified support for the Allies.⁷³ Propaganda articles circulated by the British Embassy increasingly offered lip-service to the ideal of isolation and neutrality before pivoting to expose the futility of trusting Axis promises to respect the neutrality of small nations.⁷⁴

By the fall of 1940, however, pan-Arabists were increasingly frustrated by the absolute refusal of Britain to negotiate the future independence of Palestine and Syria and progressively more receptive to Axis proposals. Both Naji Shawkat and 'Uthman Kamal Haddad met secretly with German representatives in Ankara, the former as an authorized representative of the newly appointed Rashid 'Ali and the latter as the personal emissary of Hajj Amin al-Husayni. While Haddad promised access to Iraqi oil resources and assistance in organizing armed rebellions in Iraq, Syria, and Palestine in exchange for German recognition of Arab independence, Shawkat

⁷⁰ Basil Newton to Foreign Office, May 27, 1940, FO 371/24561 E 2095/2022/93, October 24, 1939, FO 371/23218 E 7284/7080/93, and R.A.F. Monthly Intelligence Summary, October 1939, FO 371/23213.

⁷¹ The action against *al-Sijil* can be probably explained by the fact that the paper, unlike *al-Istiqlal* did not support Nuri al-Sa'id. Basil Newton to Foreign Office, October 12, 1939, FO 371/23218 E 7080/7080/93.

⁷² Basil Newton to Foreign Office, October 12, 1939, FO 371/23218 E 7080/7080/93.

⁷³ *Al-'Iraq*, October 15, 1940 and R.A.F. Monthly Intelligence Summaries, October 1939, FO 371/23212.

⁷⁴ See for example, *al-Ittihad*, June 2, 1940.

would only agree to restore diplomatic relations and warned his German contact that Iraq would continue to oppose German and Italian colonial ambitions.⁷⁵ It was largely in response to Haddad's far more extensive promises that the Nazis finally agreed to broadcast a declaration promising full Axis support for Arab independence on October 23, 1940.⁷⁶

The Nazi declaration of sympathy made an immediate and noticeable impact on the Iraqi government, which began to censor criticism of Nazism in the press. The British-subsidized *al-Iraq* saw articles rejected for expressing doubt about the sincerity of the Nazi promises and even for denouncing the extraordinarily unpopular Italian occupation of Libya.⁷⁷ Rashid 'Ali's declaration of "absolute neutrality" in the war met with great acclaim in the nationalist press and overwhelming popular approval.⁷⁸ The press argued that it would be a grave mistake for Iraq to accept the promises of the colonial powers on either side and pointed to the lesson of the last war, "as a result of which certain Arab territories continue under foreign domination."⁷⁹ Even Nuri, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, sought to negotiate his own concessions with Italian representatives. Rebuffed by both the Italians and the radical pan-Arabists in Rashid 'Ali's administration, Nuri exposed the secret negotiations to the British Embassy. Forced to resign on January 31, 1941 after Britain suspended the supply of dollars and halted all food and arms shipments, Rashid 'Ali angrily vowed to C.J. Edmonds, the British Adviser to the Ministry of Interior, that he would "rake up the whole past and tell the story of British interference" in Iraq.⁸⁰

The Rashid 'Ali Movement

On April 1, 1941, military officers delivered an ultimatum demanding that Prime Minister Taha al-Husayn resign and allow Rashid 'Ali to return to power. Acting on British advice, Nuri al-Sa'id and 'Abd al-Ilah fled to Jordan along with a number of other minor political figures. While the military engineered virtually every change in government since Yasin

⁷⁵ While some reports indicate that Shawkat agreed to Nazi demands that Iraq introduce anti-Jewish legislation, both he and Rashid 'Ali flatly rejected any such proposals. Both politicians were said to be motivated, at least in part, by the fact that their own financial interests were managed by Iraqi Jews. C.J. Edmonds to Basil Newton, February 15, 1941, FO 371/27063 and Mahmud al-Durrah, *al-Harb al-'Iraqiyah al-Britaniyah* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'rifa, 1982), 122-24.

⁷⁶ Majid Khadduri, *Independent Iraq, 1932-1958: A Study in Iraqi Politics* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 177-89.

⁷⁷ Gordon M. Dyce-Keele to Captain Holt, November 7, 1940, "Press," FO 624/18.

⁷⁸ *Al-Istiqlal*, July 4, 1940 and *al-'Alam al-'Arabi*, July 5, 1940.

⁷⁹ *Al-Nasr*, August 6, 1940 and *al-Yawm*, August 8, 1940.

⁸⁰ C.J. Edmonds to Basil Newton, February 3, 1941, FO 371/27062 and Basil Newton to Foreign Office, February 21, 1941, "Political Situation," FO 624/19.

al-Hashimi came to power in 1935, British opposition to Rashid ‘Ali ensured an immediate erosion of relations between the two countries. Britain had always distrusted Rashid ‘Ali, regarding him as “an arch-intriguer and in politics a ‘wild man’” who behaved like “untutored tribesmen who have never seen a town or had contact with civilized humanity.”⁸¹ While Rashid ‘Ali offered to retract his prior support for complete neutrality in exchange for British recognition of his government, British officials were already resigned to the inevitability of war.⁸² British Ambassador Kinahan Cornwallis proposed a trap “to put Rashid ‘Ali’s sincerity to the test,” informing him that troops needed to pass through the country en route to Palestine in accordance with treaty obligations. If Rashid ‘Ali refused the request, Cornwallis noted, Britain would have “a perfect right to take any action we think fit” and if he accepted, British troops would “gain military foothold in the country and be in much better position to recover the vast amount of ground which he have lost.”⁸³

Rashid ‘Ali readily agreed to the British request and a large British force landed at Basrah on April 13 without resistance. When Cornwallis announced that further troops would arrive by air on April 17 and by sea on April 18, Rashid ‘Ali inferred that Britain meant to again remove him from power and declared that the new troops would be permitted to land only after those currently in the country had passed through. Unwilling to risk a precipitous break with Britain, he quickly backed down and over military objections approved the new deployments, but continued to press for the troop’s rapid transit and to appeal for formal recognition and some sympathetic statement on Syria and Palestine.⁸⁴ Rashid ‘Ali and Cornwallis met numerous times at the house of C.J. Edmonds and at one point seem to have reached an agreement, but British military officers remained convinced that Britain was merely buying time. By the end of the month, an increasingly frantic Rashid ‘Ali met with Tawfiq al-Suwaydi, a veteran diplomat with close ties to Britain, and complained that Britain was “searching for an avenue of collision” before imploring him to use his influence to help negotiate a solution to the crisis.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Maurice Peterson to Foreign Office, January 25, 1939, FO 406/77 E 938/72/93 and C.J. Edmonds to Basil Newton, February 15, 1941, FO 371/27063.

⁸² Kinahan Cornwallis to Foreign Office, April 7, 1941, PREM 3/238/7.

⁸³ Kinahan Cornwallis to Foreign Office, April 11, 1941, PREM 3/238/7.

⁸⁴ Kinahan Cornwallis to Foreign Office, April 21, 1941, FO 371/27066 and Kinahan Cornwallis to Foreign Office, April 28, 1941, FO 406/79.

⁸⁵ al-Suwaydi, *Mudhakkirati*, 354-55 and 364-68.

When it became apparent that British troops would remain at Basrah, Rashid 'Ali angrily denounced Britain's violation of the treaty and rejected Cornwallis' dismissive reply that "it was absurd to think that His Majesty's Government in bringing troops had designs on the independence of the country."⁸⁶ General Wavell urged a negotiated solution, warning that he could ill afford to sacrifice troops unnecessarily, but was overruled by Churchill and Cornwallis, who were obsessed with the humiliating reversal of imperial relations.⁸⁷ British forces initiated the attack on May 2 after Iraqi troops surrounded Habbaniyah airbase. Poets rallied the nation behind their government and military, with Muhammad Bahjat al-'Athari's "The Funeral Procession of Britain" offering something of an anthem for war:

The Allies felt your rejection and began to burn
As you began to claim your earth, air, and water
They desired you for permanent servility
They reckoned you a slave they bought for ransom
Woe unto they who overcome their nerves
And intrude upon you, drunk and deluded⁸⁸

In stark contrast to many of his contemporaries on the left, 'Athari openly voiced his approval of Nazism and offered praise for Hitler as a divine agent sent to punish Britain:

Judgment descended upon them in the guise of the savior
Who crushed and destroyed their courage as he willed
He cornered the unwanted tenants and terrified them
In the East and West leaving annihilation and extinction

In comparison to Nazi strength, 'Athari mocked British weakness by ridiculing entreaties for an American entrance into the war and utilizing the metaphor of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's lameness:

The blows of the noble, an assault they could not bear
So they cried for help from one who could not heed their call
The indulged their hopes in the one who was feeble and lame
As though one weak like him could be of some avail

⁸⁶ Kinahan Cornwallis to Foreign Office, April 29, 1941, FO 371/27067.

⁸⁷ General Wavell to War Office, May 3, 1941, FO 371/27069 and Kinahan Cornwallis to Foreign Office, June 6, 1941, FO 406/79.

⁸⁸ *Al-Bilad*, May 7, 1941, Muhammad Bahjat Al-'Athari, *Diwan al-'Athari* (Baghdad: Matba'at al-Majma' al-'Ilmi al-'Iraqi, 1990), 1:391-99 and Ra'uf al-Wa'iz, *al-Ittijahat al-Wataniyah fi al-Shi'r al-'Iraqi al-Hadith, 1914-1941* (Baghdad: Wizarat al-'I'lam al-Jumhuriyah al-'Iraqiyah, 1974), 286-89.

He concluded the poem with a metaphorical allusion to the Iraqi triumph as the moment of the long-delayed national liberation:

O Hour of Liberation! Your wedding feast draws near
Good tidings and omens are sung by the heralds
Paving way for your day, historic in time, for it
Since Laylat al-Qadr has been the shining beacon

When British planes dropped leaflets over the Middle Euphrates containing a call from Kinahan Cornwallis urging loyalty from the Iraqi tribes, a group of nationalist shaykhs led by Fariq al-Fir‘awn of the al-Fatlah tribe issued an indignant response mocking the British position: “It is worthwhile to note the collapse of reason, for your self-reliance, foolish Englishman, has fallen so low that you yearn for victory through the treachery of your adversaries towards their sovereign leaders.”⁸⁹ *Fatwas* in support of the movement were secured by Siddiq Shanshal, Director-General of Propaganda, mostly without recourse to bribery. The Shi‘i clerics were somewhat more hesitant than their Sunni counterparts to lend public support to the movement, but most nevertheless issued the requested support. Shaykh Abu al-Hasan al-Musawi al-Isfahani, the leading Shi‘i mujtahid in Iraq, was said to be particularly hesitant but went along because, as a Persian, he was obliged to support the lead of the most prominent Arab mujtahid, Shaykh ‘Abd al-Karim al-Jaza’iri, in all matters of national importance.⁹⁰

Intellectuals on the left supported the Rashid ‘Ali movement out of a shared opposition to British imperialism and loyalty to Soviet policy.⁹¹ The staunchly anti-fascist poet Muhammad Salih Bahr al-‘Ulum celebrated the “declaration of revolution” in an eponymous improvised poem:

Najaf gathered ferocious in resistance and defiance
The people heralded the declaration of revolution
There is surprise in this, for their souls are resentful
And the strength of the soul emerges from its wrath
As for their sentiments, they burn with indignation
And the people depart from the past with resolution
The sword thirsty in its sheath implores us

⁸⁹ *Al-Zaman*, May 21, 1941.

⁹⁰ C.J. Edmonds to Kinahan Cornwallis, June 23, 1941 and August 14, 1941, "Political Situation," FO 624/60.

⁹¹ Kamil al-Chadirchi, *Mudhakkirat Kamil al-Chadirchi wa Tarikh al-Hizb al-Watani al-Dimuqrati* (Beirut: Dar al-Tali‘a, 1970), 54.

In the name of liberation to assuage his thirst⁹²

In “The May Revolution,” Bahr al-‘Ulum denounced the British decision to divert resources from the anti-fascist struggle in Europe in order to protect colonial interests in the Arab world, imploring Iraqis to counter British cowardice with courage:

What do the English want, for their property
They do not protect, and Hitler persists
Berlin terrorizes London with her eagles
While London’s flies feign to us as eagles
Yes, more vile than these flies is the baseness
Of fleeing the revolution that its people deny
Defense is a duty, and denying attention to injunction, what an evil denial!⁹³

Bahr al-‘Ulum’s most important contribution to the revolutionary cause, however, was his epic “O History, Record!” He recited the poem on the radio on May 20, opening with a defiant cry:

O History, record how the faithful rebelled
In a country where the colonizers persist in their deceit⁹⁴

At the very outset of the poem, Bahr al-‘Ulum takes pains to situate the Iraqi effort within the context of the global anti-colonial struggle:

We considered what descended upon Egypt of dreadful affliction
And we had enough of what befell the Balkans of evil deeds

Throughout the poem he emphasizes the significance of Palestine, first commemorating the betrayal of the Husayn-McMahon conventions that lead to the occupation of both Jerusalem (“the first of the two *kiblahs*”) and Iraq (“the valley of the two rivers”):

O History Record, Where is the covenant of Husayn?
What hand has been left, with the traces out of sight?
It is the hand that reached for the first of the two *kiblahs*
And then came anew to occupy the valley of the two rivers

⁹² Muhammad Salih Bahr al-‘Ulum, *Diwan Bahr al-‘Ulum* (Baghdad: Matba‘at Dar al-Tadamun, 1968), 1:177.

⁹³ Muhammad Salih Bahr al-‘Ulum, *Diwan Bahr al-‘Ulum* (Baghdad: Matba‘at Dar al-Tadamun, 1968), 1:178.

⁹⁴ Muhammad Salih Bahr al-‘Ulum, *Diwan Bahr al-‘Ulum* (Baghdad: Matba‘at Dar al-Tadamun, 1968), 1:179-84

The current struggle, the poet argues, is part of an historical lineage extending back to the national uprising of 1920:

O History Record, the incidents of the Euphrates Valley
What we did in 1920 with the forefathers of the tyrants
When we made the corpses of the slaughtered impede the trains

In case the point was lost on his audience, Bahr al-‘Ulum ends the poem with a flat rejection of further diplomacy and negotiation, contending that colonialism can only be vanquished with violence:

O Airplanes, O Protectors of the beloved people
Deliver the world from the tyranny of these English monsters
Converse with them with the mouth of a machine gun for time is brief
And they do not hear the voice of truth except when it speaks with a rat-a-tat-tat

As successive British military victories laid bare the increasing likelihood of a British victory, poets again struggled to rally the nation. ‘Abd al-Karim al-‘Allaf praised the historic achievements of the movement and warned against retreat in “After Twenty Years I Stand in the Face of the British Beast”:

Do we safeguard the rights of the English and these
Designs of theirs whose veil has been drawn away
We have been silenced forever to the wrongs of our nation
And when we are silenced vengeance within us grows⁹⁵

‘Abd al-Sahib al-Dujayli reminded his fellow nationals of the litany of British sins:

She violated the treaty and persisted in blindness
Never stopping to follow the path of reason...
She humiliated the Arabs until they could not bear
And made them taste all classes of injustice⁹⁶

Ahmad al-Safi al-Najafi, writing from exile in Damascus, praised his native country in “Iraq’s Leap” and reminded Iraqis of their movement’s significance to other colonized peoples:

Truly you are the aspiration of the hopes
Of the nations of the East and West⁹⁷

⁹⁵ *Al-Istiqlal*, May 22, 1941

⁹⁶ *Al-Istiqlal*, May 22, 1941

The aerial bombardment of Fallujah marked the climax of the war, with hundreds of civilians killed by bombs and hundreds more raped and murdered by Assyrian mercenaries. One elderly man complained bitterly that not even the Turks had ever bombed a city full of women and children.⁹⁸ Ma'rif al-Rusafi commemorated the massacre in his poem, "Day of Fallujah," which served as a paean to the tragedy of national defeat and despair:

O England, we will not pretend to forget
Your injustices in the homes of Fallujah
Such atrocity God will not avenge except
With the swords of the wounded and broken⁹⁹

Rusafi denounced the divide-and-rule politics of colonialism that pitted ethnic and religious groups against one another:

Your army encamped in pursuit of vengeance
The infidels seduced by pursuit of the inhabitants
That day the Assyrian wolves came to ravage
The harem enduring a most monstrous disgrace
You derided and scorned the Muslims as fools
While making of the Jews advisors and confidants

In line with the rich heritage of the contrapuntal anti-colonial qasidah, Rusafi addressed Britain directly, turning the civilizing discourse of liberal colonialism against the empire:

Is this the civilization and loftiness
That your people profess to aspire?
Or were you drunk when you went to war
Leaping headstrong before conditions were ripe?

Even in defeat, though, Rusafi offers praise for the national sacrifice and points to the destruction of Fallujah as a symbol not of national disgrace but rather national pride:

What is human life in humiliation except
Bitterness to spit out upon the first taste
So praise and honor to the Tigris and Euphrates

⁹⁷ *Al-Bilad*, May 20, 1941.

⁹⁸ John Glubb, "A Report on the Role Played by the Arab Legion in Connection with the Recent Operations in Iraq," June 10, 1941, CAB 106/512.

⁹⁹ Ma'rif al-Rusafi, *Diwan al-Rusafi* (Beirut: Dar al-Muntazar, 1999), 3:343-46.

And thanks and peace be upon you, O Fallujah

The Aftermath of War: Chaos and Violence in the *Farhud*

Rashid 'Ali, Hajj Amin al-Husayni, and leading military leaders fled the country on May 29, 1941. Yunis al-Sab'awi, furious at the cowardice of his comrades, declared himself military governor and distributed arms to his student "death squads" in preparation for the final battle, but hours later the Committee for Internal Security hastily formed by Arshad al-'Umari, the Mayor of Baghdad, arrested Sab'awi and sent him to exile after his comrades.¹⁰⁰ The collapse of the Iraqi army led to the horrific events of the *farhud*, an anti-Jewish pogrom that erupted on June 1 when a group of Jews chanting in support of Britain and 'Abd al-Ilah clashed with the retreating Iraqi soldiers on Ghazi Street in downtown Baghdad.¹⁰¹ General panic ensued as the Jewish community barricaded themselves in their homes in fear of rampaging mobs bent on looting, raping, and murdering. The slaughter lasted until midnight and then resumed the following morning. 'Abd al-Ilah's delay in appointing Jamil al-Midfai the new Prime Minister left those in power with no clear sense of the chain of command. Arshad pleaded with the Director-General of Police to order his officers to fire on the rioters, but the latter was unwilling to take such a drastic measure without direct orders from 'Abd al-Ilah. When the Regent finally sent written orders, Iraqi police opened fire on the rioters and cleared the streets immediately.¹⁰² At least one hundred and seventy Jews perished over the two days of violence, along with hundreds of rioters.¹⁰³

While recent accounts have depicted the pogrom as either the fruition of Rashid 'Ali's anti-Jewish agenda or the inevitable product of swelling support for Nazism, relations between Jews and the nationalist government during the two months of Rashid 'Ali's tenure, though tense, did not suggest an imminent crisis. Government representatives did solicit financial "contributions" from the Jewish community on several occasions, but the only real threat of violence came from Yunis Sab'awi's declaration on May 30 that Jews should prepare food and

¹⁰⁰ Rifa'il Butti, *Dhakirah 'Iraqiyah, 1900-1956* (Damascus: al-Mada, 2000), 1:451-55 and Talib Mushtaq, *Awraq Ayyami, 1900-1958* (Beirut: Dar al-Tal'iah, 1968), 408-9.

¹⁰¹ Assistant Inspector General 'C', Report on Visit to Baghdad and Mosul, January 6-22, 1944, "Minorities: Jews," FO 624/38.

¹⁰² Kinahan Cornwallis to Foreign Office, July 11, 1941, FO 406/79.

¹⁰³ Some sources suggest that as many as eight hundred Muslims, mostly slum-dwellers who turned out on the second day to loot both Jewish and Muslim property, were killed when Iraqi troops finally opened fire. See 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Hasani, *al-Asrar al-Khafiyah fi Hawadith al-Sinna 1941 al-Tahririyah* (Sidon: Matba'at al-'Urfan, 1958), 223-25.

remain in their homes for three days.¹⁰⁴ While many Jews feared that the warning was a harbinger of an impending massacre, the swift arrest and exile of Sab'awi convinced most that the danger had now passed, and the next day Jews filled the synagogues to celebrate the Festival of Shavuot in peace. Increasingly confident that security had been restored, hundreds of Jews marched through the streets to greet 'Abd al-Ilah upon his return to Baghdad before the violence erupted.¹⁰⁵

Arshad al-'Umari, horrified by the events and his impotence in stopping them, accepted full responsibility for the collapse of security in front of a gathering of Jewish community leaders, though most refused to blame him. Many noted that Muslims risked their own lives to protect those of their Jewish friends and neighbors while British troops stood by idly.¹⁰⁶ One elder argued that "all signs showed" that 'Abd al-Ilah and Cornwallis "wanted to let the Iraqi people find an outlet for themselves in riots against the Jews, and not fight the British." Another bluntly declared that "only the British are responsible in this matter" and recounted a popular rumor that five days after the violence an Iraqi Muslim surrendered a revolver that had been given to him by an official at the British Embassy on May 1 for use against the Jews.¹⁰⁷ Senator Ezra Daniel complained that Britain was prepared to use the Jews in both Iraq and Palestine as pawns in their political negotiations without consideration of the effect on the Jews themselves. Daniel remained opposed to Zionism and complained bitterly that Britain had introduced the alien ideology to the region, allowed it to pit Arabs against Jews, and then finally decided to abandon Zionism, leaving local Jews to suffer the fruit of colonial policy.¹⁰⁸

Iraqi Jews remained overwhelmingly opposed to Zionism even after the events of the *farhud*, with many continuing to condemn Zionist propaganda campaigns as provocations and assisting Iraqi police in identifying agitators.¹⁰⁹ Jewish radicals and intellectuals grew

¹⁰⁴ According to Arshad al-'Umari, Sab'awi, the Arabic translator of *Mein Kampf*, had planned to broadcast a call for the pogrom but was thwarted at the last moment.

¹⁰⁵ Excerpt from "The Diary of Abraham Twena," published in *The Scribe: Journal of Babylonian Jewry* 11:2 (May-June 1973), 3-7.

¹⁰⁶ In Basrah, town notables opened their own homes to local Jews and other vulnerable minorities and no cases of violence were reported. See Wolstan Weld-Forester to Kinahan Cornwallis, July 16, 1941, FO 406/79.

¹⁰⁷ Excerpt from "The Diary of Abraham Twena," published in *The Scribe: Journal of Babylonian Jewry* 11:2 (May-June 1973), 3-7.

¹⁰⁸ Assistant Inspector General 'C', Report on Visit to Baghdad and Mosul, January 6-22, 1944, "Minorities: Jews," FO 624/38.

¹⁰⁹ Violette Heskail Murad, "The Tragedy of the 1st and 2nd June, 1941 in the Capital of Iraq, "Minorities: Jews," FO 624/38 and Iraqi Criminal Investigation Department "Special Report," July 5, 1944, FO 371/40042 E 4488/37/93.

progressively more alienated from both British and Zionist leadership and were drawn increasingly closer to the Iraqi Communist Party. Many Jewish Communists imprisoned for supporting the Rashid ‘Ali movement developed close personal and political ties with their fellow prisoners.¹¹⁰ The Jewish Agency in Jerusalem, meanwhile complained that the *farhud* had not led Iraqi Jews to embrace Zionism, blaming the fatalism and passivity of notables “as in all Oriental Jewish communities.” One confidential report, which praised the “positive results” of Arab-Jewish enmity in the aftermath of the *farhud*, suggested that Zionist propaganda efforts bypass notables and instead appeal directly to the masses.¹¹¹ The fruits of that strategy, however, would not be realized until the post-war period, when the creation of the state of Israel unleashed a new wave of anti-Jewish sentiment in Iraq.

Post-War: Nazi Hunting in Baghdad

As Iraqi soldiers finally abandoned the fight against Britain in the wake of the flight of the political and military leadership to Tehran and violence erupted in the Jewish quarters of Baghdad, Muhammad Salih Bahr al-‘Ulam reflected on the catastrophic defeat in his poem “Bloody Procession”:

‘Amman has become a refuge for wolves thanks to Abu Hunayk and his entourage
And from there the Two Rivers grew tender for the fangs of your repulsive treachery
For Fallujah was drowned in blood and her noble breath stifled and smothered
And the English returned to dance with the whores and harlots at Habbaniyah...
And now the blood and tears have come to swallow Baghdad in a bloody procession
And we along the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates bestow our dear souls
A sacrifice to our homeland afflicted by the sin of the foundling of the Bedouin¹¹²

The poem was a bitter attack on British colonialism and its symbolic representative, John Glubb, nicknamed “Abu Hunayk” because of his abnormally small jaw and “foundling of the Bedouin” for his success in recruiting Jordan tribesmen into his Arab Legion forces. Glubb was widely seen as the true power behind the Hashemite throne in Jordan and the decision of the Jordanian state to provide refuge to the pro-British politicians infuriated Arab nationalists. The entry of the Arab Legion onto Iraqi soil under Glubb’s leadership signaled to Bahr al-‘Ulam the dawn of a resurgent colonial era.

¹¹⁰ Talib Mushtaq, *Awraq Ayyami, 1900-1958* (Beirut: Dar al-Tal’iah, 1968), 428.

¹¹¹ Political Department of the Jewish Agency, “The Position of Jewry in Iraq,” “Minorities: Jews,” FO 624/38.

¹¹² Muhammad Salih Bahr al-‘Ulam, *Diwan Bahr al-‘Ulam* (Baghdad: Matba‘at Dar al-Tadamun, 1968), 1:185

Once acquainted with the horrific events of the *farhud*, Bahr al-'Ulum paid respect to the memory of the slaughtered Jews, whose death he blamed squarely on the colonial politics of divide-and-rule and the collaborationist politicians who sanctioned it in the poem "The Wolves of Colonialism":

You divided the people into sects and parties
 Until you opened a door to their colonization
And you suppressed and ignored the spirit of truth
 A politics which distorted and transformed enemies into lovers...
You permitted the arrival of tyranny in this nation
 That has suffered from tyranny for ages and eras
O Vilest of Creation, your character so depraved
 To become leaders with the spears of injustice!¹¹³

As he witnessed his nationalist comrades systematically accused of Nazism and sent to internment camps over the following weeks, Bahr al-'Ulum turned his focus to the absurdity of the witch hunt in the allegorical poem "Fatumah the Baker":

The inspector asked Fatumah the baker,
 When did Nazism arrive at the shop?
She moaned over her deplorable fortune
 And wailed in the face of horror and dread
Do you not know my name or occupation?
 For your food comes from my delicious bread!
We see ourselves in the example of this simpleton
 As the oppressed of our lofty and distressed Iraq¹¹⁴

The poor nationalist baker, so ignorant of the ideological principles of Nazism that she confused the term for a name and assumed the police were accosting her in a case of mistaken identity, stood as a metaphor for the coordinated efforts of Britain and her clients to conflate nationalism and Nazism.

The campaign to identify "Nazis" began with an effort to round up the exiled political and military leadership of the Rashid 'Ali movement. The process of identification was relatively simple, as all but Yunis al-Sab'awi had fled to Iran of their own accord. While the exiles had initially been promised sanctuary in Tehran in exchange for a promise not to intervene in internal politics or to cause the Iranian government any embarrassment, they were soon turned over to the

¹¹³ Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan Bahr al-'Ulum* (Baghdad: Matba'at Dar al-Tadamun, 1968), 1:187.

¹¹⁴ Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan Bahr al-'Ulum* (Baghdad: Matba'at Dar al-Tadamun, 1968), 1:188.

British army by Iranian authorities, a betrayal which many nationalists never forgave.¹¹⁵ Only Rashid 'Ali, Hajj Amin al-Husayni, and Salah al-Din al-Sabbagh managed to elude their captors and escape to Turkey. Salah al-Din was later arrested, deported, tried, and executed in Baghdad, but the other two remained safely in exile long after the end of the war. While the circumstances of exile certainly turned the exiled politicians into enthusiastic partisans of the Axis war effort, if they had not already held such commitments, most remained fiercely resistant to charges of ideological affinity with Nazism. 'Ali Mahmud al-Shaykh 'Ali dismissed the accusations as an irresponsible conflation of anti-colonialism with Nazism: "Every Iraqi and every Englishman living in Iraq knows that I have opposed British policies since their introduction, and if this opposition of mine is interpreted as Nazism, then I won't object to it, but the charge still wounds me deeply."¹¹⁶ The British Embassy delayed the execution of the condemned leaders until they could be joined by others, for "a row of dangling bodies would impress the public more than the same number displayed singly at intervals."¹¹⁷

While the criminal conviction of the nationalist leadership was preordained, the case against junior officers and civilian partisans of the nationalist movement was less self-evident and therefore required the careful manipulation of the legal process. Several dozen students charged with membership in nationalist militias found that no lawyers were willing to represent them for fear of political reprisals from the central government, until Talib al-Mushtaq finally agreed to represent them. Talib was not allowed to consult directly with his clients or to review the evidence used by the military court against them, and when his vigorous defense offended the prosecution, he too was charged as a Nazi sympathizer.¹¹⁸ Talib would later recall the irony of finding himself accused as an enemy of democracy for the crime of insisting on the duty and obligation of an attorney to mount a vigorous defense for his clients, regardless of the nature of the accusations. Not even acquittal spared the defendants from internment, and virtually all of the accused were eventually sent to internment camps at Fao and 'Amarah, where they suffered from disease spread by overcrowding and polluted water and were subjected to regular torture sessions

¹¹⁵ 'Ali Mahmud al-Shaykh 'Ali characteristically attributed the betrayal to a flawed national character, "submissive by nature with a languid disposition, cowardly and weak-hearted, powerless to contradict even those who wish him harm." Al-Shaykh 'Ali, *Muhakimatuna al-Wijahiyah* (Sayda: Dar al-Maktabah al-'Asriyah, 1966), 9-19.

¹¹⁶ 'Ali Mahmud al-Shaykh 'Ali, *Muhakimatuna al-Wijahiyah* (Sidon: Dar al-Maktabah al-'Asriyah, 1966), 201-4.

¹¹⁷ C.J. Edmonds to Kinahan Cornwallis, July 2, 1941, "Political Situation," FO 624/60.

¹¹⁸ Talib later found himself accused of supporting an incitement of violence against the Iraqi Jews contained in pamphlets allegedly distributed by his clients, which he had not been permitted to see. Talib Mushtaq, *Awraq Ayyami, 1900-1958* (Beirut: Dar al-Tal'iah, 1968), 418-33.

in a tiny room with iron walls referred to as the “recreation room” and meant to simulate a live burial. Many prisoners emerged from internment without ever discovering the nature of the charges against them, let alone undergoing any sort of political or moral rehabilitation.¹¹⁹

The punishment of rural Iraqis implicated in attacks on British troops during the war proved more complicated. Efforts to prosecute tribesmen for the murder of a downed British pilot were thwarted by the divergent testimonies of eyewitnesses. Several peasants accused their foremen of leading the attack, while the brother of one of the accused foremen testified that the pilot was killed by an ex-lover.¹²⁰ Where prosecution was not deliberately thwarted by witnesses seeking to settle personal scores, a general reluctance to testify against the accused or even speak with prosecutors marred the ability to establish guilt. In cases devoid of physical evidence or collaborating witnesses, defendants were often dismissed from their jobs and blacklisted, while others were convicted and executed in spite of conflicting eyewitness testimonies.¹²¹

Perhaps more problematic to the eradication of “Nazism” in the countryside was the resistance provoked by clashes between imperial troops and local citizens. Sikh troops quickly garnered a reputation for violence and sexual depravity after several well-publicized cases in which Iraqi women were abducted and gang-raped. Clumsy court-martial efforts, which forced the reluctant victims to publicly recount their ordeal and their male relatives to testify to their own inability to defend family honor, only further enraged the local population when the accused soldiers were either acquitted or sentenced to nominal terms of imprisonment.¹²² Armed bedouin were sometimes killed when they fled from British troops in fear of having their rifles confiscated and both British and Indian troops were repeatedly accused of looting alcohol and tobacco from local merchants and randomly attacking both civilians and local police.¹²³ As the severity of conflict accelerated, local residents retaliated by pelting foreign troops with stones,

¹¹⁹ Kinahan Cornwallis to Foreign Office, March 23, 1943, FO 371/35010 E 1667/489/93 and Talib Mushtaq, *Awraq Ayyami, 1900-1958* (Beirut: Dar al-Tal'iah, 1968), 428-59.

¹²⁰ 'Abbas al-'Alwan to British Embassy, August 25, 1941, C.I.C. to Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, October 21, 1941 and C.I.C. to British Embassy, December 8, 1941, "Prisoners of War: British," FO 624/25.

¹²¹ Office of the Political Adviser, Central Area to British Embassy, August 13, 1941 and August 24, 1941, and Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, September 29, 1941, "Prisoners of War: British," FO 624/25.

¹²² Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs to British Embassy, November 8, 1941 and British Embassy to Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, December 19, 1941, "British Forces: Incidents," FO 624/25 and 'Amarah Consulate, Report for Period Ending August 21, 1941, FO 838/1.

¹²³ Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs to British Embassy, August 25, 1941, September 25, 1941, and December 6, 1941, and Basrah Consulate to British Embassy, September 8, 1941, "British Forces: Incidents," FO 624/25.

garbage, and rotten tomatoes, vandalizing army property, and spitting at passing troops. Several offenders, primarily local children, were sentenced to public lashing as punishment.

After settling scores with those directly implicated in the violence and treason of the Anglo-Iraqi War, the British Embassy turned its attention to the intellectual partisans of the nationalist movement. Iraqi authorities scoured back editions of newspapers, especially *Istiqlal* and *al-Bilad*, in order to identify “Nazis.”¹²⁴ Rafa’il Butti, the editor of *al-Bilad*, was arrested and interned after refusing to resume publication and commit to promoting British propaganda. While Butti’s support for the Rashid ‘Ali movement was uncontested, several pro-British informants defended his reputation by describing *al-Bilad* as “the most moderate journal in Baghdad” and contending that as a Christian, Butti did what he had to do to spare his own life.¹²⁵ Nationalist poets like Muhammad Bahjat al-‘Athari, Ahmad Safi al-Najafi, and Muhammad Salih Bahr al-‘Ulum were arrested along with hundreds of nationalist politicians, journalists, teachers, and students. Ma’ruf al-Rusafi’s caustic poem “Between the Mandate and Independence,” which opened with a denunciation of the role of C.J. Edmonds, the British Adviser to the Ministry of Interior, in coordinating the post-war purges, attested to the popular indignation at the neo-colonial intrusion:

Ask the Englishman who still enjoys
 A place of honor next to the Minister Interior
Are you a minister or just an advisor?
 For we see you visiting the ministry every day
There you are with our affairs thrown before you
 Approving and vetoing our lives according to your will
You take from us a salary as an employee
 And this, by God, is the most painful part
Today we bear the burden of your tyranny
 And pay for the privilege your wages in cash...
You had during the Mandate the power of advising
 That terminated and yet your surveillance persisted
You replaced your Mandate with our independence
 But as we see it, this independence is merely slavery
You created for us from every diluted treaty
 Shackles with which to bind our independence
Until our liberty turned into the laughingstock

¹²⁴ C.J. Edmonds to Kinahan Cornwallis, July 2, 1941, "Political Situation," FO 624/60.

¹²⁵ C.J. Edmonds to Kinahan Cornwallis, July 14, 1941, "Press," FO 624/24, and "Nazi Propaganda in Iraq," enclosed in secret dispatch from C.J. Edmonds to Kinahan Cornwallis, July 26, 1941, "Germany: Propaganda," FO 624/24.

Of every sneering and condescending man¹²⁶

Rusafi escaped arrest due to his iconic public stature, but political patronage and subsidies were withdrawn and he was left to suffer in poverty for the final three years of his life.¹²⁷ His poem “The English in Their Colonial Policies” nearly brought down the post-war government when Ahmad Zaki Khayyat, Director-General of Posts and Telegraphs, aroused the ire of the British Embassy by publicly praising the poem. Jalal Baban, Minister of Transportation and Public Works, refused to dismiss Khayyat, and the other cabinet ministers quickly seized the opportunity to protect their own friends and clients.¹²⁸ The poem drew a broad connection between the Rashid ‘Ali movement and the politics of global anti-colonialism:

Repel the blame and listen to what I say
For I have mastered the nature of the Thamesians
As if they and the Iraqis were moths and wool
For can the wool persevere in the clutches of moths?
How often have they plowed in colonized land
Black injustices hidden in the depths of fertile soil?
How often have they roused the people from slumber
Disturbance like dark clouds erupting over the arduous road?
They feast on the produce of their machinations
And throw to the inhabitants some of the scraps
They take from the land the gem deprived of them
And give back to the nation only rubbish and junk
Visit India and cast a glance around in order to see
On the ground nothing but the dust and rubble of destruction¹²⁹

Rusafi concluded the poem by reiterating British culpability in provoking war with Iraq and underlining his fundamental critique of colonial violations of national sovereignty:

They say: “We are working for your interest”
But they producing nothing but catastrophe
For they provoked in the east an ill-favored war
Resembling in its terror the Hour of Resurrection...
It seems our sovereignty is nothing but a game
That the Yankees regard like mere child’s play

¹²⁶ Ma’ruf al-Rusafi, *Diwan al-Rusafi* (Beirut: Dar al-Muntazar, 1999), 3:244-47.

¹²⁷ Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrayati* (Damascus: Dar al-Rafidayn, 1988), 1:382.

¹²⁸ C.J. Edmonds to Kinahan Cornwallis, July 2, 1941, "Political Situation," FO 624/60.

¹²⁹ Ma’ruf al-Rusafi, *Diwan al-Rusafi* (Beirut: Dar al-Muntazar, 1999), 3:340-43.

By the end of 1941, there were one hundred and seventy political prisoners interned at Fao, and by the end of the following year nearly three hundred prisoners between Fao and the newly constructed camps at ‘Amarah and Nuqrat Salman.¹³⁰ The British Embassy and the Ministry of Interior clashed repeatedly over the release of the internees, with Britain fiercely (but ineffectively) resisting the attempts of prominent politicians and ministers to secure the release of their friends and relatives.¹³¹ One British official, praising the Iraqi government’s efforts in purging the government of Rashid ‘Ali supporters complained only that it was “becoming difficult to provide the victims” for the new camps, but expressed confidence that they would be found.¹³² Ordinary Iraqis began writing to the British Embassy to inform on their neighbors’ support for the Rashid ‘Ali movement, usually without any sort of corroborating evidence.¹³³ Those who had been imprisoned as collaborators by the Rashid ‘Ali administration, meanwhile, seized the opportunity to seek compensation from Britain in recognition of their sacrifice.¹³⁴

The arbitrary nature of the internment process is exemplified by the case of Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri, the iconic poet of the anti-colonial left who boasted that his newspaper *al-Ra‘i al-‘Amm* was “the prickly thorn in the face of the Nazis” and accused Rashid ‘Ali of “acting in accordance, whether he wanted to or not, with the designs of Hitler, that butcher of men.” Jawahiri spent the duration of the crisis in hiding in Najaf in order to evade Rashid ‘Ali’s personal request for a poem celebrating the nationalist resistance. After the war, Jawahiri found himself caught up in the politics of national retribution when the new government implored him to resume publication of his newspaper in support of the new propaganda line. Jawahiri later reflected bitterly, “Rashid ‘Ali wanted poetry from me, and his adversaries wanted a newspaper. The one wanted me to indirectly bless the Nazis by exploiting my hatred of Britain, and the other wanted me to praise him in the shadow of the British lance by exploiting my hatred of the

¹³⁰ Kinahan Cornwallis to Foreign Office, December 14, 1941, FO 371/31371 E 258/204/93.

¹³¹ Kinahan Cornwallis to Foreign Office, January 24, 1943, FO 371/34994 E 996/49/9 and June 15, 1943, FO 371/34994 E 3787/49/93, and G.H. Thompson to Foreign Office, July 5, 1943, FO 371/34994 E 3901/49/93, July 6, 1943 FO 371/34994 E 3950/49/93, July 15, 1943, FO 371/34994 E 4152/49/93.

¹³² ‘Amarah Consulate, Report for Period Ending November 23, 1941, FO 838/1.

¹³³ See, for example, Muhammad Taqi Muhammad Husayn to British Embassy, August 15, 1941, "Political Situation," FO 624/60.

¹³⁴ Agha Dhahir Bin Agha Tahir to British Embassy, August 7, 1941 and Sayyid Jabr al-Muntafji to British Embassy, August 20, 1941, "Foreigners: Internment," FO 624/25.

Nazis.” Unwilling to opportunistically back the new government while the people were still in mourning, Jawahiri left the country for Tehran.¹³⁵

Upon his return to Baghdad several months later, Jawahiri discovered from a friend working in the Ministry of Interior that he had been blacklisted and designated for internment, despite his numerous public denunciations of Nazism and fascism. Suspecting that he had been targeted for political revenge by “that old hag Britain” in retaliation for resuming his attacks on colonial policies in Syria and Palestine, Jawahiri appealed to his old family friend Muhammad al-Sadr for intercession. Sadr arranged a meeting between Jawahiri and Minister of Interior Salih Jabr, who informed the poet that he had been blacklisted because Yunis Bahri had recited his poetry on Radio Berlin during the Anglo-Iraqi War. Jawahiri protested that Bahri was merely recycling an old anti-British poem written some twenty years earlier in praise of the Great Iraqi Revolution of 1920 and defended his denunciations of Nazism while refusing to renounce the anti-colonial message of the poem. Jabr reluctantly agreed to dismiss the charges only after he consulted his own collection of Jawahiri’s poetry and confirmed the veracity of the story.¹³⁶

Those poets, journalists, and intellectuals who lacked political connections with the ruling oligarchy, however, were not spared the ignominy of internment. The radical socialist Muhammad Salih Bahr al-‘Ulum was arrested at the cigarette factory in Baghdad where he worked and imprisoned at the notorious desert prison at Nuqrat al-Salman. He continued to attack Nuri al-Sa‘id and other collaborationist politicians in prison, most notably in “The Crimes of Parliament”:

*Our representatives?! These are the crimes of parliament
Composed by nature of scoundrels, rascals, and rogues...
You and whoever declare yourselves our representatives
Showering the demonic ministers with flattery and praise
You came with plans and projects enacted by whips
The hands of criminals given power over my skin
While here I am, far from the Euphrates and thirsty,
Imprisoned in Nuqrat al-Salman and deprived of my well¹³⁷*

In “The First Anniversary of the May Revolution,” Bahr al-‘Ulum continued to rail against the fundamental illegitimacy of the post-colonial state:

¹³⁵ al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrayati*, 1:367-74.

¹³⁶ al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrayati*, 1:379-82.

¹³⁷ Muhammad Salih Bahr al-‘Ulum, *Diwan Bahr al-‘Ulum* (Baghdad: Matba‘at Dar al-Tadamun, 1968), 1:194.

They sold their nation to the motherland of Cornwallis
 And rushed to spend the bounty of sale on themselves
 They suppressed every freedom in their citadels
 Liberty shackled with neither crime nor conviction
 Here in Nuqrat al-Salman, we see our tribulation
 More puzzling than any ordeal that came before it
 The slave governs our every waking second
 A governing apart from custom and convention
 This is our government!! This tyranny set up
 For us, would God that it had not ever been¹³⁸

Bahr al-'Ulum continued to catalogue the suffering of the people through his poetry, addressing the litany of false accusations and convictions in the poem "I Am Not a Leader":

I felt sorry for the shaykh who entered the jail sullen
 And sat near me, absentminded and morose
 I said to him, "Have they leveled at you a charge?"
 And he replied, "To be sure, I am not a leader,
 But I have a daughter and someone came to rape her
 And so I found for my land and family a guard
 And after this trial can you really blame me
 If I look upon this government with despair?"¹³⁹

Defiant as ever, Bahr al-'Ulum continued to vigorously defend his support of the nationalist movement and to denounce colonial culpability for the descent to war. His poem "Martyrs of the Struggle," written in internment at 'Amara, starkly juxtaposed national patriots and traitors:

A faction pursued their fancy and went to serve the English in their endeavors
 Obstructing the dreaded revolution by imprisoning the patriots at Fao and Salman
 Trying to forget that the climax of tragedy
 Awoke the people to vigilance and attention
 Announce to them that morning is near
 And upon its dawn the end of darkness¹⁴⁰

He depicted the war as an anti-colonial struggle for national liberation, provoked by imperial excess and suppressed only with violence:

¹³⁸ Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan Bahr al-'Ulum* (Baghdad: Matba'at Dar al-Tadamun, 1968), 1:199-200.

¹³⁹ Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan Bahr al-'Ulum* (Baghdad: Matba'at Dar al-Tadamun, 1968), 1:194.

¹⁴⁰ Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan Bahr al-'Ulum* (Baghdad: Matba'at Dar al-Tadamun, 1968), 1:201-204.

Our spirits seethed under the pressure
 Unable to endure the deception of politics
While the colonizers persisted in choosing
 The path of severity, prohibition, and wile
Their policy of dealing with the people failed
 Its pretense shattered with violence and ferocity
For they erected the gallows of tyranny and terror with fervor and enthusiasm

While historiographical narratives tend to emphasize an indelible struggle between Iraqis and pan-Arabist nationalism, Bahr al-‘Ulum’s fealty to pan-Arab concerns underscores the national solidarities of anti-colonial alliances in this period:

We were not created to live to live in disgrace as if we were ignoble souls
Rather we were created to liberate the people of the *daad* from all foreign power
And we were sent off to raise the lofty flag to establish an Arab state
To gather all speakers of the language of the *daad* and to build a free life

Yet in spite of his relentless commitment to anti-colonial politics, Bahr al-‘Ulum never wavered in his long-standing opposition to fascism and continued to side with the Allies everywhere outside of the colonized world. While still interned at ‘Amarah, he mourned the British setback at the First Battle of al-‘Alamayn in “The Sun of Righteousness Will Rise”:

Whoever imagines the black night as morning
 Slow down, for your morning is not to be found
Do not rejoice at the triumph of barbarity, but observe
 The trampling of peoples by this barbarity in the desert
Tomorrow the sun of righteousness will rise in purity
 And evil will sink and fade in its blackened tatters
The earth and moons will grow strong and swallow up
 The rashness of Hitler or the tyranny of Nimrod¹⁴¹

Ahmad Safi al-Najafi, interned in Beirut for his poems praising the Rashid ‘Ali movement, offered perhaps the most powerful evidence of the counterproductive effects of the interment policy in his collection of prison poetry. In “The Noble Crime,” he responded to the charges leveled against him:

He finished explaining that my sin was that I
 Served my country; I said woe unto you, you scoundrel
For you have adorned me with a crown of honor

¹⁴¹ Muhammad Salih Bahr al-‘Ulum, *Diwan Bahr al-‘Ulum* (Baghdad: Matba‘at Dar al-Tadamun, 1968), 1:209.

And invested me with a throne of glory without knowing
Oh you generous rascal, you have upgraded me
With a shining lofty crown that renews and invigorates me
When I saw the crime was service to my homeland
Prison became sweet until I fancied it a paradise of the soul¹⁴²

In the poem, “A Declaration of War,” Najafi warned that his internment had transformed his opposition to Britain from mere verbal criticism:

England was driven away, by God!
She was blinded in both of her eyes
Her grave was dug in every land
Excavated by her own two hands
She imprisoned for no crime
Other than cursing her paternalism
My war is faithful and my imprisonment
Is a declaration of war upon her¹⁴³

While he would later strenuously deny accusations of Nazism,¹⁴⁴ Najafi declared in the poem “Half a Muslim” that he only feared a Nazi victory because it would deprive him the opportunity for revenge:

I fear that if they die, Satan himself will perish
And I will remain without my curses half a Muslim
My soul, my hand, and my mind wage war upon them
For they meant to kill me so my blood boils against them¹⁴⁵

Muhammad Bahjat al-‘Athari, one of the few vocal supporters of Nazism despite his apparent disinterest in the political dimensions of anti-Semitism, likewise addressed the humiliation of internment in his poem “Welcome to Exile”:

We were vividly acquainted with our lowliness in the shadow
Of the flag of the Thames... and in the death of the conscience¹⁴⁶

In “Among the Reasons for the Setback,” ‘Athari continued to defiantly justify anti-colonial violence in the name of national dignity and honor:

¹⁴² Ahmad al-Safi al-Najafi, *Hasad al-Sijn* (Beirut: Maktabat al-Ma‘arif, 1964), 110-111.

¹⁴³ Ahmad Safi al-Najafi, *Hasad al-Sijn* (Beirut: Maktabat al-Ma‘arif, 1964), 110-111.

¹⁴⁴ Ahmad Safi al-Najafi, *al-Shallal* (Beirut: Dar al-‘Ilm li al-Malayin, 1962), 206-7.

¹⁴⁵ Ahmad Safi al-Najafi, *Hasad al-Sijn* (Beirut: Maktabat al-Ma‘arif, 1964), 126.

¹⁴⁶ Muhammad Bahjat Al-‘Athari, *Diwan al-‘Athari* (Baghdad: Matba‘at al-Majma‘ al-‘Ilmi al-‘Iraqi, 1990), 1:419-20.

They cornered us, for we had not taken
 The preparations for war in arms and munitions
 They cornered us and then expelled us
 So welcome to adversity and severity...
 There is no escape from national defense
 Even if it throws us under the raging hounds
 The honor of man is his nation and sanctuary
 Whose mere name he lives to honor and proclaim
 What is free, even on the verge of extermination,
 Must nevertheless burn in the fires of deception¹⁴⁷

His nihilistic commitment to watching his country burn before submitting to colonial rule underscores the failure of internment policy to reshape political opinions.

‘Athari’s most surprising post-war contribution to the legacy of anti-colonialism, however, was his subversive and satirical poem, “The Tragic Tale of the Rooster of Fao,” composed in the winter of 1941 in the internment camp at Fao. A prisoner living in the dormitory next door to ‘Athari managed to acquire a pet rooster, which escaped from its cage in the middle of the night and defecated on the head of his roommate, who killed the rooster in his state of terror. The entire prison camp convened in the courtyard the next day for a mock trial of the rooster, convicting of it treason and sentencing it to death. The already dead body of the rooster was hung from a makeshift miniature gallows before ‘Athari stepped forward to offer a eulogy:

My heart is saddened and my tears are shed
 Woe upon your blackened day, O Rooster!
 The fortress trembles from top to bottom
 With sorrow for you as the people cry, “Cock-a-doodle-doo!”

‘Athari turned the rooster into a symbolic metaphor for the Axis powers – and by extension, in his view, for the anti-colonial struggle in Iraq:

You roamed freely among us, merry and gay
 And upon your head lay a crafted royal crown
 Your dominion stretched from China at one end
 And the far end stretched to Jaghbub and Tabruk!

Alluding to the absurdity and inconsistency of the post-war purges, ‘Athari used the rooster to symbolize the confusion of the nationalists in the face of various accusations of treason:

¹⁴⁷ Muhammad Bahjat Al-‘Athari, *Diwan al-‘Athari* (Baghdad: Matba‘at al-Majma‘ al-‘Ilmi al-‘Iraqi, 1990), 1:406.

Is this real freedom or is it utter anarchy?
 Or are you, O Rooster, a Bolshevik in this world?
 I cannot say, but the people are divided in their views
 Between truth and falsehood, faith and misgiving
 What is the substance of your sin to the people?
 Is it incitement or zeal, or slander and agitation?
 They say you shat upon al-Karkhi in his sleep
 And he startled awake, terrified and confused
 So he slit your throat in a swift motion of fury
 You became, poor rooster, a laughingstock to the world!

The poet concluded with a subtle explication of the metaphor, juxtaposing the absurdity of the prison yard spectacle with the post-war campaign against the nationalists:

How did you sanction the death of the unfortunate,
 O oppressed nation? The rope of tyranny is severed
 We rose against it and with the sword beheaded it
 For how could the rooster tyrannize our courtyard?
 But how could we ask from the tyrant moderation
 When we treat the guiltless rooster with such misgiving?
 When we took up residence in the marshes of al-Fao
 Vanity seized us as if we were Saxons and Sikhs!
 How vile is man! Even if he is oppressed,
 His head stricken by the palms of tyranny
 Look at the foolishness that the government has done
 For how does one hope for reform when people are such fools?
 Rationality was lost, so is darkness expected at dawn?
 And will the present assembly then be dismantled?¹⁴⁸

When Nuri al-Sa'id and Salih Jabr, then Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior, heard the poem, they vowed publicly to lengthen 'Athari's period of incarceration.

It was not only the nationalist poets, of course, who were capable of resistance and subversion in the face of imprisonment. While Britain exerted a considerable degree of influence over the political prisoners in internment camps, administrative control of the central prison system remained firmly in the hands of the central government. The Baghdad Central Jail was said to be controlled by three prostitutes, and gambling, drinking, and sodomy were unregulated. The prison director in Basrah, Sayyid 'Abbas Hilmi, himself a prominent supporter of Rashid 'Ali, ate and socialized with political prisoners, offering preferential treatment in exchange for

¹⁴⁸ Muhammad Bahjat Al-'Athari, *Diwan al-'Athari* (Baghdad: Matba'at al-Majma' al-'Ilmi al-'Iraqi, 1990), 1:432-36.

future considerations should Germany win the war. Those prisoners accused of crimes against Britain, including the murder of British citizens and soldiers, were treated as a political prisoners and awarded private rooms and servants, as well as unfettered access to female visitors.¹⁴⁹ ‘Abd al-Rahman Shahib, the father of Yunis al-Sab‘awi’s personal secretary ‘Abd al-Razzaq Shahib, was transferred from the Ba‘qubah Jail to Baghdad in order to personally tend to ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni, the nephew of Hajj Amin al-Husayni.¹⁵⁰

Reconstructing the Alliance: Poetry and Propaganda after the War

While all agreed on the necessity of interning anyone suspected of harboring anti-British views, British officials differed sharply over proposed political reforms to ensure the long-term stability of the imperial alliance. Britain came under increasing pressure from Shi‘i politicians like Muhammad al-Sadr, who argued that fascism was the logical consequence of a colonial policy that empowered an unrepresentative minority. In the few spheres where the Shi‘a enjoyed numeric equality with Sunnis – still unreflective of their demographic majority – like the Senate, many of the seats reserved for Shi‘i politicians were allocated to illiterate tribal representatives unable to fully understand legal proceedings. Sadr’s argument was countered by the fact that the Ministry of Education, a locus of anti-colonial nationalism, had been controlled for years by Shi‘i ministers.¹⁵¹ The situation of the Kurds was scarcely better; while each cabinet reserved one or two portfolios for Kurds, these were as a rule monopolized by the “pseudo-Kurds” of the Baban family in Baghdad, none of whom were connected in any real sense to the Kurdish populations of northern Iraq and all of whom carried reputations of personal corruption.¹⁵²

While elements of both strategies were central to the reform agenda, British policy during the war years centered on the dramatic expansion of the Embassy’s power. British officials were obsessed with the role of propaganda in the incitement of public opinion against Britain and identified radio broadcasts, newspaper editorials, public speeches, poetry recitations, and demonstrations as the primary conduit for the spread of “Nazism” in the country.¹⁵³ The Embassy began its propaganda campaign by revamping the process of press censorship. The radical nationalist *al-Istiqlal* was immediately banned, and the refusal of Rafa’il al-Butti to resume publishing *al-Bilad* led to his designation as an “unrepentant pro-Axis die-hard” and

¹⁴⁹ Lax Discipline in the Jails, July 30, 1942, "Administration: Justice," FO 624/33.

¹⁵⁰ Report on Conditions in Jails, November 13, 1942, "Administration: Justice," FO 624/33.

¹⁵¹ C.J. Edmonds to Kinahan Cornwallis, September 2, 1941, "Political Situation," FO 624/60.

¹⁵² C.J. Edmonds to Kinahan Cornwallis, March 14, 1944, "Political Situation," FO 624/67.

¹⁵³ Kinahan Cornwallis to Foreign Office, June 6, 1941, FO 406/79.

internment. The other papers were initially ordered to run pro-British propaganda without distinction, but Iraqi officials in the Ministry of Interior complained that this blanket policy defied public credibility. While those papers with historical pro-British reputations, like *al-‘Iraq* and *Sawt al-Sha‘b*, could dive headstrong into an explicitly pro-British stance, the nationalist papers could not be expected to entertain such an immediate and dramatic shift without losing all propaganda value.

The coordination of press propaganda was carefully negotiated between the British Embassy and the Ministry of Interior to maintain “certain subtlety” through the regulated rotation of pro-British, pro-Regent, and anti-Rashid ‘Ali articles between newspapers to ensure that propaganda articles would be “sandwiched in between the mud-slinging which really attracted the newspaper-reading public and sent up the sales.”¹⁵⁴ The most noteworthy points of contention were not about the recent conflict but rather the reframing of colonial history. When the Ministry of Interior altered the text of a *Sawt al-Sha‘b* editorial on the national uprising of 1920 from the original “the rebellion hastened the birth (*‘ajallat tawliidiha*) of the independent Iraqi state” to “the rebellion gave birth (*qad waladat*) to the independent Iraqi state,” the Embassy condemned the alteration as a “wicked falsification of history” because of the implication that independence was taken rather than given. When *Sawt al-Sha‘b* defiantly published the article in its original form, the Embassy was forced to intervene to abrogate the paper’s suspension.¹⁵⁵

While all press discussion of Palestine was initially forbidden, Nuri eventually permitted the nationalist press to resume discussion of the issue, but only in the context of encouraging Anglo-Iraqi reconciliation.¹⁵⁶ After acknowledging that “Nazi propaganda has fully exploited Arab sentiment and played on sensitive nerves, built intrigues, made full use of the weak and faithless by deceiving them to serve its own ends and encouraged them to play with fire,” the editor of *al-‘Alam al-‘Arabi* contended that it was in the best interests of both Britain and Iraq to “reconsider and solve the Palestinian Problem in the shortest possible time for the main purpose of destroying Nazi propaganda and effacing its effects by calming the Arabs and Muslims and

¹⁵⁴ C.J. Edmonds to Kinahan Cornwallis, July 2, 1941, “Political Situation,” FO 624/60.

¹⁵⁵ *Sawt al-Sha‘b*, November 3, 1941, C.J. Edmonds to V. Holt, November 4, 1941, and V. Holt to C.J. Edmonds, November 7, 1941, “Press,” FO 624/24.

¹⁵⁶ Kinahan Cornwallis to Foreign Office, November 22, 1941, “Press,” FO 624/24.

winning them over to the side of the democracies.”¹⁵⁷ The editor of *al-Zaman* likewise urged a swift resolution to the Palestinian conflict as a means of restoring Anglo-Iraqi friendship, appealing to “the cause of liberty for which the Allies are fighting and sacrificing wealth and souls.”¹⁵⁸ Britain began to more directly subsidize the Iraqi press, experimenting first with the practice of purchasing bulk quantities of pro-British papers and distributing them for free before settling on a payment scheme that rewarded newspaper editors in proportion to the friendliness of their editorial line.¹⁵⁹

After the initial contraction of the press, the number of newspapers in the country increased from five to twelve by the end of 1944, with a corresponding liberalization of censorship policies. The Ministry of Interior continued to prohibit direct attacks on Britain but began permitting journalists to denounce American support for Zionism after Roosevelt’s reelection.¹⁶⁰ While rightwing papers like *al-Nida* and *al-‘Alam al-‘Arabi* denounced Zionism as American imperialism without reservation, even liberal papers like *Sawt al-Ahali*, which welcomed the reelection of Roosevelt and praised his longstanding anti-fascist stance, condemned Roosevelt’s support for Zionism and urged a return to the spirit of the Fourteen Points.¹⁶¹ Even the pro-British paper *al-Sa‘a* criticized the “shameful” prostration of American politicians to Zionist interests during the electoral season, appealing cleverly to the Allied propaganda claims to defending democracy and urging the United States not to sacrifice principles for the sake of a “local victory.”¹⁶² *Al-Nida* complained that the Arabs had always regarded the United States as “the champion of human rights and justice” and were therefore “bitter disappointed” by the eruption of pro-Zionist declarations from prominent American politicians.¹⁶³ At the same time, most of the independent Iraqi papers expressed their full confidence in American and British promises regarding the eventual liberation of Syria and Lebanon.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁷ *Al-‘Alam al-‘Arabi*, November 22, 1941.

¹⁵⁸ *Al-Zaman*, November 22, 1941.

¹⁵⁹ Mosul Consulate to British Embassy, November 29, 1941, "Press," FO 624/24.

¹⁶⁰ Kinahan Cornwallis to Foreign Office, November 16, 1944, FO 371/40042 E 7251/37/93 and November 18, 1944, FO 371/40042 E 7563/37/93.

¹⁶¹ *Al-Nida*, November 10, 1944, *al-‘Alam al-‘Arabi*, November 11, 1944, and *Sawt al-Ahali*, November 11, 1944.

¹⁶² *Al-Sa‘a*, November 12, 1944.

¹⁶³ *Al-Nida*, November 16, 1944.

¹⁶⁴ See, for example, *al-Sa‘a*, November 19, 1944 and *al-Sha‘b*, November 22, 1944.

Press censorship, of course, could not fully suppress anti-colonial resistance, as a confiscated pamphlet produced by the cartoonist Fadhil Qasim Raji reveals. One cartoon featured an ominous bedouin looming over the desert dunes with an outstretched hand threatening a snake labeled “Zionism” and a fox labeled “England” and a caption asking, “It is well known that the symbolic banner of the English is the lion, so what turned it into a fox?” The answer followed: “Nature prevailed, for their artifice, guile, and trickery tarnished even the fox.” Another cartoon features a horse labeled “Iraq” angrily throwing its British jockey to the ground, while a spectator representing global opinion laughed derisively and taunted Britain, “Are you crazy?! This horse is not for riding, even if it is a horse...” Another showed John Bull falling to his death after the Iraqi army cut a chord labeled “the oil pipeline of Iraq” that merged into his entrails. Another showed John Bull reeling from Iraqi blows while a figure labeled “Zionism” drawn with obvious anti-Semitic references begged Britain for more of Iraq’s wealth.¹⁶⁵ Raji later authored “What Is Said and What Is Rumored,” an anti-colonial political gossip column that appeared in *al-Zaman* and *al-Hawadith* before its censorship¹⁶⁶

Mustafa al-‘Umari, the archconservative Mayor of Baghdad, argued that nationalist propaganda could only be countered by mimicking the methods of its leaders and arranged for prominent poets to compose and publish *qasidahs* in praise of the monarchy.¹⁶⁷ Some of those who had supported the Rashid ‘Ali movement were all too eager to lend their services to the new government. ‘Abd al-Husayn al-Huwayzi had earlier praised the nationalist movement in his poem “The Kaylani Administration”:

You supported the people of Iraq and spared them
 From the politics of the Left and the politics of the Right
 You made for them a sanctuary with your resolution
 You preserved her residents from all dangers and perils
 Your radiant brow poured forth its brilliant light
 And your hospitality has kindled pockets of fire¹⁶⁸

After the failure of the movement, however, Huwayzi rapidly shifted course. In the poem “A Lofty Smile,” he condemned both the cowardice and deception of the nationalists:

¹⁶⁵ *Al-Harb al-‘Iraqiyah al-Britaniyah*, No. 2, 1941.

¹⁶⁶ Iraqi Criminal Investigation Department "Special Report," July 5, 1944, FO 371/40042 E 4488/37/93.

¹⁶⁷ C.J. Edmonds to Kinahan Cornwallis, June 16, 1941, "Political Situation," FO 624/60.

¹⁶⁸ ‘Abd al-Husayn al-Huwayzi, *Diwan al-Huwayzi* (Beirut: Dar Maktabat al-Hayah, 1964), 134-36.

The parties deluded the nation and misled the wise
For in the morning they crept away like shirkers
For he said in preaching, all of you shall die as martyrs
But those of you who stayed among us are fortunate
For was the preaching of the vanquished useful to the battalions?¹⁶⁹

More startling, and certainly more counter-productive, was Huwayzi's celebration of Britain aerial bombardment of the country as a sort of colonial national salvation.

O Fitnah, you deceived the people with upheaval
Those with confused minds transfixed by seduction
And when the frenzied fire of rage erupted
It was extinguished by airplanes from above
Throwing their blazing bombs at the brilliant blaze

Like Huwayzi, Muhammad 'Ali al-Ya'qubi displayed a similar change of tenor and tone after the war. At the heat of the Rashid 'Ali movement, Ya'qubi denounced British colonialism and praised the nationalist resistance in his poem, "The Ringing Cry of Iraq":

Britain came to occupy the country
That sacrificed to her our dear souls
She betrayed the treaties that we fulfilled
And revealed to all her furtive treachery
She is assaulted today by enemy lands
For how could our people launch an attack
London did not protect and defend her own sons
For how can they defend them from Habbaniyah
Today there is no defender and so she faces
A deluge of waves of overwhelming destruction
Tyranny led her to the banks of obliteration
For this is the fate of domineering nations
Have you forgotten what befall her army
At our hands, for I do not reckon that she has forgotten¹⁷⁰

After the war, however, Ya'qubi quickly pivoted to praise the new regime in his poem "You Returned to Baghdad Drawn by Her Beauty," which commemorated 'Abd al-Ilah's return from exile in 'Amman:

¹⁶⁹ *Al-Akhbar*, October 4, 1941 and al-Wa'iz, *al-Ittijahat al-Wataniyah*, 311-12. It is perhaps telling that the poem of rebellion was included in Huwayzi's *diwan* while the poem of repentance was omitted.

¹⁷⁰ Muhammad 'Ali al-Ya'qubi, *Diwan al-Ya'qubi* (Najaf: Matba'at al-Nu'man, 1957), 1:167 and al-Wa'iz, *al-Ittijahat al-Wataniyah*, 313-14.

You returned to Baghdad drawn by her beauty
 And cast off the robe of pilgrimage and adornment
 Though conditions of the city had changed
 Your love – such love – had remained unchanged
 And when misfortune grew dark you dispelled it
 And the moon glistened from your radiant face
 You were distant, and so we said hardship will expire
 You were absent and so we said adversity will vanish
 But you were scarcely gone before the pillars of morning
 Cracked under the misfortune and calamity of blackened night
 And when you were gone the country and people were left
 With nothing more than the pointed tips of the slivers of the past¹⁷¹

Ya‘qubi closed the poem with a plea for clemency from ‘Abd al-Ilah for his prior lack of faith in the beneficence of the monarchy:

I have come to implore from you forgiveness
 And to offer a penitent apology and renunciation
 Yes, I have lowered my hopes and expectations
 In the nobility I expected and the good I hoped
 And I, despite those begrudging souls who flatter
 You with praise, stand in categorical deference
 I pay no heed to obtaining from you favor
 If the critic rages against you with blame and reproach

The framing of political conversion from nationalist to monarchist as a lowering of expectations underscores the lingering distrust of the monarchy after the death of Ghazi and the Anglo-Iraqi war. Dozens of lesser poets likewise capitalized on patronage opportunities by publishing poems flattering ‘Abd al-Ilah and denouncing Rashid ‘Ali in the pages of the pro-British *al-Akhbar*.¹⁷²

While journalists could be censored and poets silenced or co-opted, the rehabilitation of Iraqi civil society required a far more concerted and extensive propaganda campaign. Under the influence of Freya Stark, the British Embassy oversaw the formation of a group called the Brotherhood of Freedom (*Ikhwan al-Hurriyah*), a counter-propaganda organization designed to counter anti-British and pro-Nazi rumors and conspiracies. The group promoted an “education in citizenship” based on “democratic principles” by striving to “prepare the public mind” for “responsible public opinion.” Members were urged to spread British propaganda in

¹⁷¹ *Al-Akhbar*, September 21, 1941 and *al-Wa‘iz, al-Ittijahat al-Wataniyah*, 315-16. Ya‘qubi's poem of repentance, like that of Huwayzi, was omitted from his *diwan*.

¹⁷² See *al-Akhbar*, November 20, 1941, November 22, 1941, and November 26, 1941 and *al-Wa‘iz, al-Ittijahat al-Wataniyah*, 316-332.

conversations with their fellow citizens. The society was divided into local groups – there were over six hundred cells and nearly seven thousand member in Iraq – which met weekly to discuss the contents of the weekly bulletin and the best means of disseminating that information. Members were required to pay an entrance fee and an annual subscription fee, which was meant to ensure the personal investment of members in the movement but tended to be viewed locally as a fee-for-service arrangement guaranteeing future political favors from the British Embassy.¹⁷³

As the war drew to a close, the Brotherhood was transformed from a counter-propaganda organization to a civic society based in the old headquarters of the Muthanna Club in Baghdad in 1944. In his inaugural speech, Major Scaife noted the poetic justice of the requisitioning of the old center of nationalist activity and argued that while propaganda had become a “very much discredited word” due to totalitarian abuses, the Brotherhood espoused “another kind of propaganda which is inseparable from vigorous faith.”¹⁷⁴ Muhammad Mahdi Kubba, the ex-vice president of the Muthanna Club, penned a furious rebuttal to Scaife’s allegations of Nazi influence to the editors of *al-Bilad*, but the press censor refused to run the rebuttal. Kubba protested that enforcing the silence of the Muthanna leaders and members would imply an admission of guilt and sarcastically dismissed the new club, which was met by the general public with a mixture of contempt and bemusement, as the “Brotherhood (of Servitude).”¹⁷⁵

New Horizons: The Red Utopia

Much like the internment policy, the British propaganda campaign made scarcely any impact on the general public and only exacerbated the alienation of journalists, poets, and intellectuals. Sympathy for the Axis powers, driven initially by the political considerations of anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism and later buttressed by popular hopes of reversing the national humiliation of the Anglo-Iraqi war, remained dominant for several months but declined markedly after Rommel’s defeat in the Libyan desert.¹⁷⁶ More importantly, the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union impelled Iraqi Communists to mobilize their supporters behind an anti-fascist

¹⁷³ C.H.O. Scaife, "Objects of the Ikhwan al-Hurriya & Methods of Working in al-'Iraq," November 1943 and C.H.O. Scaife, "Memorandum on the Ikhwan al-Hurriya by the Area Officer," December 27, 1943, FO 371/44078 E 2515/1090/93.

¹⁷⁴ Kinahan Cornwallis to Foreign Office, May 2, 1944, FO 371/44078 E 3070/1090/93.

¹⁷⁵ Muhammad Mahdi Kubba, *Mudhakkirati fi Samim al-Ahdath, 1918-1958* (Beirut: Manshurat Dar al-Tali'a, 1965), 57-59.

¹⁷⁶ Mosul Consulate to British Embassy, May 13, 1943, "Situation: Mosul," FO 624/33.

alliance.¹⁷⁷ Students, poets, and intellectuals, previously trapped in the unenviable position of tacitly supporting Axis fascism or Allied colonialism, enthusiastically organized in support of the Soviet Union, taking advantage of a colonial policy that permitted Communist agitation in the interests of an anti-fascist alliance in order to articulate their sympathy for a brand of global politics that was at once anti-fascist and anti-colonial.

Iraqi Communists, of course, had suffered severe political repression since at least 1936, when the British Embassy and the Nazi Legation in Baghdad began sharing intelligence on Communist activists with the Ministry of Interior.¹⁷⁸ Official repression of communism escalated sharply after the fall of the Bakr Sidqi-Hikmat Sulayman regime, as known Communists were systematically arrested and condemned to imprisonment, exile, or even loss of citizenship. Amin al-‘Umari actually made an attempt to outlaw communism but ran into difficulty defining the term, opting in the end to outlaw the distribution of all “harmful propaganda.”¹⁷⁹ The prominent leftist support for the Rashid ‘Ali movement left some British officials committed to the belief that communism was merely a variant of “anti-Britainism” and led some to dismiss any politician known for an opposition to Britain as “Communist sympathizers,” including such notorious reactionaries as Yasin al-Hashimi and Rashid ‘Ali. Popular sympathy for Communist objectives, meanwhile, was contemptuously dismissed as the foolishness of the “rag-tag and bob-tail” masses who saw communism merely as a means “to be openly anti-British and ‘agin th’guv’ment’.” Not even Rashid ‘Ali’s defection to Germany was accepted as proof of the divergence between Nazism and communism, for as one official alleged, Rashid Ali’s “communism” was simply “not the ‘dyed in the wool’ genuine Russian article.” “Is there any *real* difference,” he asked, between “National Socialism” and “National Communism”?¹⁸⁰

Other British officials, however, noted with amazement the abrupt transformation of the Communists into ardent anti-fascists who openly challenged and fought Nazi sympathizers in the streets and cafes of Baghdad. One intelligence report described the Communists as “a ‘sixth column’ operating to good effect against the Nazi fifth column in this country.” By the beginning of 1942, British officials noted that communism was replacing Nazism as the dominant political

¹⁷⁷ British Embassy to Foreign Office, July 17, 1941, July 24, 1941 and October 16, 1941, "Publicity: Public Opinion on the War," FO 624/22.

¹⁷⁸ "Communism," FO 624/6.

¹⁷⁹ Oswald Scott to Foreign Office, September 13, 1937 and Archibald Clark Kerr to Foreign Office, November 27, 1937, "Communism," FO 624/9.

¹⁸⁰ Wilkins to V. Holt, October 20, 1941, "Communism," FO 624/25.

current among Iraqi youth, who were observed painting over swastikas chalked on the walls of university buildings. These striking developments occurred despite the total lack of dialogue between Communists and the British Embassy. The Iraqi Criminal Investigations Division, as one British official readily admitted, had virtually no intelligence on either the membership or leadership of the Iraqi Communist Party and could only identify some twenty-eight party members by the end of 1948 – the vast majority of whom, like Kamil al-Chadirchi and Ja‘far Abu al-Timman, were not in fact party members or even Communists, but merely leftist sympathizers.¹⁸¹

While intellectual support for communism was driven largely by ideological commitments to social justice and anti-colonialism, popular sympathy with the Communist agenda resonated at least in part due to the deterioration of economic conditions in the wake of the British occupation. Inflation, already a problem in the months following the Anglo-Iraqi War, reached unprecedented levels after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in December 1941. The price of some essential goods, which had nearly tripled over the preceding six months, reached nearly ten times their pre-war value by the end of the year.¹⁸² Initial anger over inflation, which left many essential goods outside the price range of many Iraqis, was directed with significant encouragement from official sources at Jewish merchants but began to subside as the Communists succeeded in redirecting anger towards politicians and landowners. Both British and Iraqi officials began to complain privately of the loss of the Jews as scapegoats for popular anger.¹⁸³

By the end of 1943, a combination of factors contributed to unprecedented levels of inflation and pushed corruption to an “all-time high.” The combination of dramatically strengthened domestic purchasing power driven by the presence of occupation forces and the export revenue from a particularly strong harvest and contraction of consumer markets due to strict import limitations sent the quantity of currency in circulation soaring from six million dinars in 1941 to thirty-four million by the end of 1943. Popular dissatisfaction with the state of the economy was exacerbated by the decision of Colonel Bayliss, who enjoyed virtually dictatorial powers over the Iraqi economy, to stringently ration even coffee and tea, which were

¹⁸¹ C.I.C. Report, "Communism in Iraq," C.I.D. Report, January 18, 1942, Wilkins to V. Holt, October 20, 1941 and September 30, 1941, "Communism," FO 624/25.

¹⁸² 'Amarah Consulate, Report for Period Ending December 14, 1941, FO 838/1.

¹⁸³ C.J. Edmonds to V. Holt, December 23, 1941, "Communism," FO 624/25.

not all in shortage.¹⁸⁴ Bayliss clashed openly with Iraqi officials and local politicians and merchants denounced his policies as transparent attempts to corner the Iraqi market by eliminating American and Soviet competition.¹⁸⁵ The government's subservience to powerful agricultural interests militated against any serious intervention in lowering prices and sullen bread lines soon formed in the poorer districts of Baghdad. An increase of cigarette prices likewise spurred popular unrest and provoked allegations of political corruption due to the fact that prominent politicians Tawfiq al-Suwaydi, 'Ali Mumtaz al-Daftari, and Jamil al-Midfa'i owned a major cigarette factory in Baghdad.¹⁸⁶

Economic troubles were compounded by political stagnation, as successive administrations continued to be drawn entirely from the members of the old ruling class. Even the British Embassy grew concerned about the lack of progressive voices in government and the potential for future revolution.¹⁸⁷ "Democracy" somehow grew even more dysfunctional as Tariq al-'Askari, the nephew of Nui al-Sa'id, explained to the British Ambassador. While in the past the monarch had personally nominated - in effect appointed - the vast majority of parliamentary deputies, the delegation of power to provincial governors and tribal shaykhs left deputies confused about the sources of political patronage: "Things have become so ridiculous that some people even think they got in on their own merits. Why, Najib al-Rawi said to me the other day, 'Of course I'm a deputy; it is only right. I'm one of the leading Democrats. That is how I got here.' When it comes to people saying that kind of thing, you can see how rotten things have become. They all think they're independent!"¹⁸⁸

The economic and political circumstances created by the occupation provided fertile ground for leftist agitation. The Ahali Group reformed and launched their daily newspaper, now called *Sawt al-Ahali*, on September 23, 1942 with a call to legalize political parties, end press censorship and intimidation, and convene free and fair elections. The paper publicly supported the Allied war effort as a counter to the "grave danger" of Nazi occupation.¹⁸⁹ The paper's

¹⁸⁴ Kinahan Cornwallis, Political Review, 1943, February 8, 1944, "Embassy Reports: Annual," FO 624/38.

¹⁸⁵ Iraqi Criminal Investigation Department Special Report, June 1944, FO 371/40042 E 4037/37/93.

¹⁸⁶ Kinahan Cornwallis to Foreign Office, January 22, 1943, FO 371/35010 E 946/489/93 and January 27, 1944, FO 371/40041 E 649/37/93.

¹⁸⁷ Kinahan Cornwallis, Political Review, 1943, February 8, 1944, "Embassy Reports: Annual," FO 624/38.

¹⁸⁸ Kinahan Cornwallis to Foreign Office, February 9, 1944, "Political Situation," FO 624/67.

¹⁸⁹ Kamil al-Chadirchi, *Mudhakkirat Kamil al-Chadirchi wa Tarikh al-Hizb al-Watani al-Dimuqrati* (Beirut: Dar al-Tali'a, 1970), 55.

inaugural editorial demanded “government of the people, from the people, and for the people.”¹⁹⁰ The paper rejected free market economics, contrasting the resilience of the planned Soviet economy with the collapse of market economies during the depression and advocating a radical shift in tax policy from consumption to excise taxes.¹⁹¹ While some conservative nationalists derided the Ahali Group and other leftists as “sycophants and opportunists” and accused them without evidence of membership in the Brotherhood of Freedom Society, most leftists justified their decision to back the Allied war effort as a temporary tactical necessity in the struggle against fascism.¹⁹² Kamal al-Chadirchi later recalled that while the second British occupation was distinguished by political despotism, “nevertheless the progressive movement found for itself something of a respite after the period of fascist tyranny that followed the coup of 1936 and continued until the April 1941 movement.” Jawahiri likewise recalled this period with nostalgia, conceding that in spite of the severe economic distress caused by the war and occupation, the freedom of association and expression accorded to the Iraqi left in recognition of its anti-fascist ideology was unprecedented. Both Chadirchi and Jawahiri took great pains to distinguish their own stance from that of both the Communists, who embraced the politics of anti-fascism only after the collapse of the Nazi-Soviet alliance, and the “Old Guard,” who struggled against fascism not because of principle but instead “for the sake of British and American interests.”¹⁹³

In late 1941, Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri’s poem “Democracy in the Eastern Front” drew the attention of British intelligence with its candidly effusive praise for the Soviet army. Poems and cartoons celebrating Soviet resistance to Nazi aggression dominated the pages of Jawahiri’s newspaper, *al-Ra’i al-‘Amm*, though conservative local politicians continued to press the British Embassy to cancel the paper’s publishing license, arguing disingenuously that the pro-Soviet slant was intended to mask “Nazi” subversion.¹⁹⁴ Jawahiri’s most celebrated wartime poem was his ode to “Stalingrad,” which celebrated Stalin’s stubborn refusal to submit to Nazi tyranny:

O Stalin, what is more important than

¹⁹⁰ *Sawt al-Ahali*, September 23, 1942.

¹⁹¹ *Sawt al-Ahali*, September 27 and September 28, 1942.

¹⁹² Muhammad Mahdi Kubba, *Mudhakkirati fi Samim al-Ahdath, 1918-1958* (Beirut: Manshurat Dar al-Tali’a, 1965).

¹⁹³ Kamil al-Chadirchi, *Mudhakkirat Kamil al-Chadirchi wa Tarikh al-Hizb al-Watani al-Dimuqrati* (Beirut: Dar al-Tali’a, 1970), 68 and al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrayati*, 1:375-76.

¹⁹⁴ Combined Intelligence Centre, “Communism in Iraq,” “Communism,” FO 624/25 and C.J. Edmonds to Kinahan Cornwallis, November 29, 1944, “Political Situation,” FO 624/67.

Signing characters is refusing to sign
Existence persists in the characters
Freedom and prosperity and brotherhood¹⁹⁵

Jawahiri closed the poem with a frank assessment of his own inspiration from the Soviet resistance and a prophetic hint of his radical post-war activism:

And from the darkness and its eulogy
The poets vie with one another in eloquence
Sympathies and affections hover over
Seas of poetry sought by the thirsty...
It did not foment personal whims and fancies
Nor did it vaunt vanity or let flow hypocrisy
What salvaged me was lofty and sublime and
In my poetry my mouth responds to the spirit of the call

'Ali al-Sharqi, a progressive nationalist poet who nevertheless opposed the Bakr Sadiq coup d'état out of a commitment to traditional politics, captured the spirit of the era with his dramatic embrace of Communist revolution. Sharqi's poem "The Tempest" offered a stark contrast between the oppression and violence of capitalism and the redemptive possibilities offered by communism. He opened the poem with a vivid depiction of the destruction of the "capitalist war":

Workers sacrificed by their country
For life is death and benefit is loss
The factory explodes into its machines
And the capitalist sees in it his destruction
The plowman sows his fields with mines
Burning the crops and uprooting the trees
The house that he erected is razed to the ground
And every precious safekeeping is destroyed
He reckons the destruction among his goals
And sees the annihilation from a distance
The homeland of the peasants so dear
The adversary will not escape with his object
He sowed arrogance in the countryside
Will he not now reap from what he has sown?¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ *Al-Ra'i al-'Amm*, February 21, 1943 and Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri, *Diwan al-Jawahiri* (Beirut: Bisan, 2000), 2:363-67.

¹⁹⁶ 'Ali al-Sharqi, *Diwan al-Sharqi* (Baghdad: Dar al-Rashid li al-Nashr, 1979), 232-35 and al-Wa'iz, *al-Ittijahat al-Wataniyah*, 246-50.

Juxtaposed to this critique was an idyllic view of the Soviet Union and a hagiographic depiction of Stalin:

A system of collective merits
For each and every one of her people
A sentry stood watch by her side
Protecting a country best in all respects
A country in which all people share
For it is not a kingdom but a congress
An inclusive union and brotherhood
With equality between man and woman
A union that rejects all distinction
Between the wealthy and the wretched
Guided by a cool and collected leader
His character crafted from iron and stone

While poets like Sharqi and Jawahiri had no affiliation with any party apparatus during this period, the Iraqi Communist Party began to coalesce under the leadership of Yusuf Salman Yusuf, best known as Comrade Fahd, and held its first Party Conference in March 1944 at the home of the locomotive driver ‘Ali Shukur in Baghdad. Fahd denounced the British exploitation of the anti-fascist front, criticizing with particular animosity the transparently collaborationist Brotherhood of Freedom. He argued that the Najafi branch of the Brotherhood promoted reactionary beliefs by distributing burial shrouds and encouraging members to cut their heads in the *ta‘ziyahs*. He singled out Kinahan Cornwallis, arguing that the style of colonialism was so entrenched in the ambassador’s character that he was “perhaps unable” to speak honestly, and attacked Nuri al-Sa‘id for sanctioning the British monopolization of the Iraqi sugar and date markets and encouraging the expansion of foreign spy networks.¹⁹⁷

Fahd redefined the character of the anti-fascist struggle in Iraq, minimizing the significance of the Iraqi contribution to the Allied war effort and emphasizing instead the struggle against a philosophical, political, and social ideology:

Our declaration of war against Nazism means a declaration of war against Nazi ideas that oppose our national goals and our national honor. It means a declaration of war against those who carry and circulate these ideas in our great land and among the citizens of our good people. It means combating the fifth column and uprooting it.

¹⁹⁷ Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 512-15 and Yusuf Salman Yusuf, *Kitabat al-Rafiq Fahd* (Baghdad: al-Tariq al-Jadid, 1976), 120-26.

He argued that fascism fed on poverty and despair and denounced both British and Iraqi officials for failing to address the foundations of cultural despair and choosing instead to exploit war conditions in order to “tighten the noose around the people and their liberty.” Fahd also attacked government bureaucrats for cooperating with their imperial masters to exploit the people and enrich themselves through bribes and stolen rations, arguing that the practice was a colonial innovation far worse than anything that occurred during the Ottoman era. Even moderate progressives like Kamil al-Chadirchi were condemned for succumbing to governmental pressure to publicly condemn the Communists. His approach closely paralleled the populist platform of the Bakr Sidqi era. It opened with a call for “true” national liberation and free and fair democratic elections before proceeding to demand an end to feudalism and monopolies and to articulate the need for land reform and the necessity of labor unions. Unlike the populists a decade earlier, however, the Communist platform explicitly called for the liberation of women and the full equality of ethnic minorities. The platform denounced the army’s intervention in politics and complicity in the practices of arbitrary detention and torture. Fahd also denounced Zionism as colonialism and called for the liberation of Palestine.¹⁹⁸

By the time that Fahd convened the First Party Congress in March 1945 at the home of Yahuda Siddiq in Baghdad, new issues had emerged. Fahd pointed to the emergence of American imperialism in the region over the preceding year, denouncing U.S. designs on Sa‘udi Arabian oil, the increasingly vocal support for Zionism expressed by American politicians, and clandestine American attempts to forge an American-Kurdish alliance in order to splinter the nation and appropriate northern oil.¹⁹⁹ He linked the anti-colonial struggle with the struggle for social justice and labor rights, briefly acknowledging Prime Minister Hamdi al-Pachachi’s approval of unionization in certain public sectors before denouncing the denial of labor rights to the thousands of Iraqi workers directly employed by Britain at military bases, railways, ports, and electric companies. The vast majority of parliamentary deputies, Fahd argued, were mere colonial tools and their opposition to the Pachachi government was dismissed as “the stirring of corpses and filth piled up in the stables of the Iraqi nation” by Britain. Fahd was well aware that

¹⁹⁸ Yusuf, *Kitabat al-Rafiq Fahd*, 127-31.

¹⁹⁹ Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 515-19 and Yusuf, *Kitabat al-Rafiq Fahd*, 133-144.

the Iraqi Director-General of Propaganda received his orders directly from the British ambassador.²⁰⁰

The growing strength of the Iraqi Communist Party inspired numerous demonstrations of party loyalty. One Communist was caught distributing pamphlets in Mosul calling for a popular uprising, while a female Communist provoked an uproar by interrupting the grand opening of a new thoroughfare in Baghdad with the unfurling of a banner reading, "The government should seize the produce of the capitalists and landowners and safeguard the food of the people!" The question of prosecution was complicated by the Allied alliance with the Soviet Union and prompted British officials to privately urge Iraqi officials to avoid reference to political ideology and instead charge the offenders with disturbing the peace.²⁰¹ Despite their willingness to dispense advice on dealing with Communist agitators, British officials grew increasingly frustrated with the Iraqi government's obsession with communism. One exasperated official declared, "It seems to me that it is the Russian Communists who have saved our bacon, whereas it is the hoarders and Nazi infected Ministries of Education and Defence who are impeding our war effort."²⁰²

The liberalization of political and intellectual life presented new problems for British and Iraqi officials. Even conservative politicians appreciated the gravity of change, as Mustafa al-'Umari and Jamil al-Midfa'i, two of the most reactionary politicians in the country, informed their astounded British advisers that they were thinking of forming a political party and branding themselves as Democratic Socialists.²⁰³ *Al-Zaman* provoked a furious response from the British Ambassador after it complained about the lingering imperial presence: "The East lived in peace for generations before these Western ravens came along and lured the ignorant with their croaks, thus creating the rancor and discord that we witness today."²⁰⁴ The leading leftist newspapers, *al-Sha'b* and *al-Ra'i al-'Amm*, once viewed by both the Iraqi government and the British Embassy as obscure curiosities in a journalism landscape dominated by conservative and nationalist

²⁰⁰ Yusuf Salman Yusuf, *Kitabat al-Rafiq Fahd* (Baghdad: al-Tariq al-Jadid, 1976), 145-49.

²⁰¹ One British official commented that after telling the Director-General of Police in Mosul that "opinion is no crime" in response to a suggestion that all Communist sympathizers should be arrested, "I found out later I was wrong in this: apparently it is a crime in this country to hold certain opinions." Mosul Consulate to British Embassy, February 22, 1943 and V. Holt to J.P.G. Finch, April 26, 1943, "Communism," FO 624/33 and Kinahan Cornwallis to Foreign Office, June 5, 1943, FO 371/35010 E 3585/489/93.

²⁰² Colonel Lyon to V. Holt, February 12, 1943, "Communism," FO 624/33.

²⁰³ C.J. Edmonds to Kinahan Cornwallis, December 23, 1944, "Political Situation," FO 624/67.

²⁰⁴ *Al-Zaman*, November 18, 1944 and Kinahan Cornwallis to Foreign Office, December 2, 1944, FO 371/40042 E 7911/37/93.

papers, emerged as political threats in their own right by late 1944 due to their hard-line anti-imperialist stance.²⁰⁵

Iraqis were increasingly attuned to the currents of global politics, with Greek civil war emerging as a particularly controversial topic in the public sphere. Leftist papers like *Sawt al-Ahali* publicly backed the left-wing Greek People's Liberation Army, while the reactionary *al-Nida*, controlled by the reactionary Minister of Interior Mustafa al-'Umari, denounced the ideological stance of *Sawt al-Ahali* as communism and argued that the Iraqi leftists aimed to monopolize political power in Iraq just as their counterparts had accomplished or attempted in Yugoslavia and Greece. Less than a month after liberalization, *al-Nida* was already complaining that the leftist papers ought to be censored, though even its editors began to complain about British monetary policy in the country.²⁰⁶ The publication of an anti-colonial poem by the late Ma'ruf al-Rusafi in *al-Bilad* on May 4, 1945, which attacked the Allies for betraying promises made to Sharif Husayn and the Arabs after World War I, was so popular among the youth that it led to the eventual restriction of the new press freedoms.²⁰⁷

Conclusion

By the time the war ended, the old ideological divisions between left and right had either broken down or been subsumed by the all-encompassing struggle against colonialism. The Rashid 'Ali movement finalized the rupture between the old alliance of radical anti-colonial nationalists and conservative nationalists who saw the British Empire as a legitimate ally in securing pan-Arab unity. At the same time, the participation of radical leftists like the poet Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulum in the anti-colonial movement underscored the shifting contours of wartime politics. The socialization of radical nationalists and Communists inside of the internment camps left both sides more appreciative of the anti-colonial credentials of their erstwhile enemies and helped to pave the way for the popular front alliances of the coming decade. The collapse of Nazism as either a viable political alternative or a credible political bogey that could be used to splinter the opposing ideological wings of the radical anti-colonial movement left the edifice of the post-colonial state isolated and vulnerable to attack from an increasingly united population. The caustic anti-colonialism of the war years, propagated under

²⁰⁵ Kinahan Cornwallis to Foreign Office, January 16, 1945, FO 371/45302 E 626/195/93.

²⁰⁶ *Sawt al-Ahali*, January 2, 1945 Iraqi C.I.C., "Special Report," January 7, 1945, FO 371/45302 E 658/195/93, and Kinahan Cornwallis to Foreign Office, February 1, 1945, FO 371/45302 E 1167/195/93.

²⁰⁷ Iraqi Criminal Investigation Department, May 18, 1945, FO 371/45302 E 3819/195/93.

the guise of pro-Soviet ebullience and sanctioned by the politics of the anti-fascist alliance, did not fade away into post-war oblivion but rather erupted from the constraints of colonial censorship into open calls for national liberation.

Perhaps more alarming to both British and Iraqi officials was the total collapse in popular legitimacy of the old networks of political patronage and domestic electioneering. The dominant figures of the old political elite who could have commanded some level of popular support were now either dead, or in exile, while those who remained had sacrificed their reputations by fleeing to 'Amman in disgrace and returning only on the coattails of British occupation forces. Iraqi politics would no longer be dominated by the rotation of power between rival elites vying for their share of the spoils of national wealth. Instead, the entire fabric of the post-colonial political arrangement was challenged by new political actors increasingly willing to contemplate revolution, whether in whispers or shouts.

The rise of mass politics was guided, as with so many other developments in Iraqi politics, by the public intervention of poets. No longer content to recite their poems at literary salons and publish their poems in newspapers and allow the verses to circulate via word of mouth, radical poets began to recite their poetry in public, daring the regime to intervene.²⁰⁸ When Ja'far Abu al-Timman, an elder statesman and icon of the anti-colonial nationalist movement, died in late 1945, Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri seized the occasion of an official ceremony commemorating Ja'far's life and service to denounce the hypocritical appropriation of the nationalist legacy by collaborationist politicians in the poem, "In Memory of Abu al-Timman." As Jawahiri later recalled, "The poem was unyielding fury and a violent challenge... I said in it what Moses did not say to the Pharaoh!" Indeed, the poem was so caustic and venomous that an outraged Nuri al-Sa'id stood up and stormed away from the gathering as Jawahiri reached the climax:

Twenty-five years have passed as if they were
 With their personalities an item from the news
We tired of them like a prisoner tires of his shackles
 In excess of the burdens that they bore...
Who could reckon that it would last so long
 A government founded on such a flawed basis?!
After all the atrocities that the people have faced

²⁰⁸ See Muhsin al-Musawi, "Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri (1901-1997)," in *Essays in Arabic Literary Biography*, Vol. 3, edited by Roger Allen (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010), 170-71.

In the shadow of their constitution and slogans
The captive is obliged to demand from his captor:
Give us some information and loosen the straps!²⁰⁹

When Jawahiri published the poem on the front page of *al-Ra'i al-'Amm* the next morning, he expected to be arrested. The police never came, but he was eventually sued for slander and defamation by the government. The moment nevertheless marked a watershed in the modern political history of the country, and Jawahiri resolved to further push the limits of what the government would bear.²¹⁰ The next decade would be dominated by the recurring themes of anti-colonialism and national liberation and marked by the eruption of popular protests challenging the fundamental legitimacy of the post-colonial state.

²⁰⁹ *Al-Ra'i al-'Amm*, January 6, 1946 and al-Jawahiri, *Diwan al-Jawahiri*, 3:52-57.

²¹⁰ Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrayati* (Damascus: Dar al-Rafidayn, 1988), 1:421-26.

CHAPTER THREE

"LEAVE YOUR FIELDS AND THROW AWAY YOUR SICKLE" URBAN MIGRATION, 1932-1958

In his landmark study of Iraqi social history, Hanna Batatu provided the authoritative account of the impact of the colonial nation building project on the political and social structures of tribalism in Iraq.¹ Batatu demonstrates that administrative expediency and political necessity drove colonial officials to reverse the tribal disintegration of the late Ottoman era. By strengthening the power of the major tribal shaykhs, British officials maintained a balance of power at both the regional and national level that reduced the administrative costs of empire and ensured a measure of political loyalty and stability in the carefully managed transition to independence. Colonial interventions in the tribal sphere thus fundamentally altered the historical trajectory of modernity and reified ideological distinctions between rural and urban society as spheres of "traditional" and "modern" Iraqi society. Alongside an emerging urban modernity characterized by the rise of transportation and communication infrastructures, modern education, middle class commerce, and mass politics, an artificial brand of feudalism distinguished by the progressive development of commercial agriculture and the regressive entrenchment of oppressive serfdom emerged in the rural south. These structural transformations of rural society mirrored the disruptive and alienating fruits of colonial rule in rural Africa and South Asia, as scholars like Mahmood Mamdani and Karuna Mantena have cogently documented.²

For Batatu, though, this contradiction was a mere interregnum in the unfolding process of tribal disintegration outlined by Peter Sluglett as the logical outcome of "natural forces arising from the process of sedentarisation."³ When the military modernization of the 1930s definitively broke the cycle of tribal rebellions and thereby restricted the sphere of the shaykh's power to his control of traditional tribal lands, the results were not difficult to predict:

¹ 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: Princeton University Press, 1978), 63-152.

² See Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) and "What Is a Tribe?," *London Review of Books* 34:17 (2012), 20-22, and Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 56-88.

³ Peter Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq, 1914-1932* (London: Ithaca Press, 1976), 239. Quoted by Toby Dodge, "The Social Ontology of Late Colonialism: Tribes and the Mandates State in Iraq," in *Tribes and Power: Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Middle East*, edited by Faleh Abdul-Jabar and Hosham Dawod (London: Saqi Books, 2003), 272.

In the tribal countryside, only small local risings broke from time to time the reigning uneasy quiescence – risings not under the shaikhs, as in the previous decades, but against them. In this urban and rural popular unrest, the monarchy and the shaikhs discovered their common interests, and coalesced in the hope of withstanding the mounting threat to their position and privileges. Their close alliance made all the more certain that the 1958 Revolution, by destroying the monarchy, should seal the fate of sheikhdom.⁴

It was only with the mass politics of the post-war period that “the history of Iraq became henceforth largely the history of Baghdad.”⁵

If Batatu’s narrative of modern tribal history underscores the integral impact of colonial intervention in disrupting the historical trajectory of Iraqi modernity, it does not escape the inevitable conclusions of its teleological determinism. The internal contradictions of an emergent urban modernity and a resurgent tribal feudalism, Batatu argues, could only delay the processes of tribal disintegration. The striking confidence of this conclusion, however, has been implicitly challenged by recent historical interventions addressing the salience of tribal identities and solidarities in the post-revolutionary era. Amatzia Baram has illustrated the substantial effects of Ba’thist state policy under Saddam Husayn in the late 1980s and early 1990s to reconstruct tribal shaykhs as rural pillars of the regime’s authority and to “tribalize” the Ba’th Party itself through the ideological and rhetorical recourse to tribal notions of kinship and honor.⁶ Hosham Dawood and Faleh Abdul-Jabar, meanwhile, have complicated Baram’s emphasis on the role of the state and the shaykh in the re-tribalization of the countryside by instead focusing attention on the persistence of lineage solidarities and cultures of communal politics.⁷ These critical interventions have helped to incorporate the problem of tribalism in modern Iraq into a broader corpus of historical literature analyzing the failure of state modernization agendas to eradicate traditional modes of social organization based on tribal solidarities.⁸

⁴ Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 119.

⁵ Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 119.

⁶ Amatzia Baram, "Neo-Tribalism in Iraq: Saddam Hussein’s Tribal Policies, 1991-96," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29:1 (February 1997), 1-31.

⁷ Hosham Dawood, "The ‘State-ization’ of the Tribe and the Tribalization of the State: The Case of Iraq," in *Tribes and Power*, 110-35 and Faleh Abdul-Jabar, "Sheikhs and Ideologues: Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Tribes under Patrimonial Totalitarianism in Iraq, 1968-1998," in *Tribes and Power*, 69-109.

⁸ See, for example, Adrienne Lynn Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004) and Edward Schatz, *Modern Clan Politics: The Power of "Blood" in Kazakhstan and Beyond* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004).

The contradictions implied by a comparison of Batatu's narrative of tribal decline under the monarchy and more recent scholarship on the persistence of tribalism in the post-revolutionary period demand a more exhaustive analysis of the impact of political modernization on social relations in the countryside. While the detailed particulars of the descent into feudalism and the alienation of the tribal peasantry excavated in Batatu's narrative cannot be denied, neither can the confidence of his conclusions be uncritically accepted. Samira Haj has offered one path forward from this historical impasse in her call to move beyond essentialist narratives of tribal and urban conflict. Drawing on Talal Asad's critique of tribal essentialism, Haj rejects the conceptualization of the conflict between tribes and state as the central pivot of modern Iraqi history.⁹ She argues that social conflict within and between tribes must not be reduced to essential and inherent functions and features of tribalism but rather reflect the social ruptures caused by the expansion of modern political structures into the countryside.¹⁰ In order to properly understand the historical context of tribal conflict, Haj argues for a concerted effort to "identity and analyze the larger formations within which these tribes reproduced themselves as 'tribes.'"¹¹ Along these lines, an integration of tribal and urban histories in an analysis of anti-colonial cultures, practices, and politics under the monarchy promises to undercut monolithic narratives of tribal conflict and decline and to expose the historical processes by which colonial and post-colonial policies unmade certain aspects of tribal society while leaving other aspects of kinship solidarity intact.

The effort to problematize the trajectories of tribal history in modern Iraq must begin with a clarification of regional disparities in tribal power and authority. In the course of demonstrating that "the structural novelty that characterizes the contemporary Iraqi tribe is its dependence on the State to reproduce itself, and hence a relative loss in its larger political and territorial sovereignty," Hosham Dawood notes that the neo-tribal policies of Saddam Husayn posited a stark distinction between the honor and nobility of the nomadic tribes of western Iraq and the poverty and shame of the tribal peasants of southern Iraq.¹² While this distinction was certainly predicated upon ideological preferences with roots in the sectarian dynamics of later

⁹ Talal Asad, "Equality in Nomadic Social System?," *Critique of Anthropology* 3 (Spring 1978), 57-65 and "Ideology, Class, and the Origins of the Islamic State," *Economy and Society* 9 (November 1980), 450-73.

¹⁰ Samira Haj, *The Making of Iraq, 1900-1963* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 3.

¹¹ Samira Haj, "The Problems of Tribalism: The Case of Nineteenth-Century Iraqi History," *Social History* 16:1 (January 1991), 48.

¹² Dawood, "The 'State-ization' of the Tribe," 112-19.

Ba'athist politics, it also reflects the stark reality that tribal decline in the preceding period was not a fluid and even process. The stability and persistence of tribal structures was instead contingent upon the interrelated facts of sedentism and land tenure, on the one hand, and the political interference of colonial and post-colonial officials in tribal matters on the other. Sedentary tribes tended to disintegrate more rapidly and more completely due to the twin factors of a land tenure system that converted shaykhs and landlords and tribesmen into peasants and a diminished capacity for armed resistance that lubricated the transition of power relations between shaykh and tribe from consent to coercion. These factors were compounded by the measure of state interference in tribal relations, which was itself conditioned on the recent past of tribal resistance to the colonial state. The rebel tribes who led maintained their structural integrity and cultural solidarity in large part because colonial intervention militated against the economic and political empowerment of the rebels, while those tribes of collaborationist shaykhs tended towards disintegration precisely because colonial policies designed to reward their complicity created the necessary conditions for feudal despotism and social alienation.¹³

This chapter analyzes the incomplete and uneven unmaking of the sedentary tribes of the irrigated estates in southern Iraq with some comparative reference to the armed nomadic tribes of the western desert and the settled Kurdish tribes of the rain-fed northern plains. While I have endeavored to build upon Batatu's excavation of archival evidence in order to illustrate the economic impact of colonial and neo-colonial policies on the rural and tribal peasantry, my point of departure from the materialist narrative is an insistence on the crucial cultural impact of anti-colonial politics in shaping and inspiring peasant resistance and urban flight. The conditions of tribal feudalism were codified by colonial policies during the British Mandate and solidified by the parliamentary initiatives pursued by the landed elite entrusted with control of the post-colonial state, but the waves of peasant uprisings and migrations that characterized tribal decline and disintegration did not erupt until after nationalist anti-colonial politics penetrated the countryside through the medium of compulsory education and clandestine Communist activism. Timothy Mitchell's notion of a "culture of fear" that impeded peasant resistance to the "symbolic violence" of rural landowners in Egypt offers a useful foundation for understanding the

¹³ On the role of the tribes in the 1920 Revolt, see Pierre-Jean Luizard, *La formation de l'Irak Contemporain: Le rôle politique des ulémas chiïtes à la fin de la domination ottomane et au moment de la création de l'État irakien* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2002), 383-422, Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 66-72, and Amal Vinogradov, "The 1920 Revolt in Iraq Reconsidered: The Role of Tribes in National Politics," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 3 (April 1972), 123-39.

significance of peasant apathy in the face of feudal oppression.¹⁴ Orit Bashkin's discussion of tribalism's place in urban intellectual thought likewise provides a narrative framework of detribalization that demands more exhaustive attention to the impact of nationalist political movements in the countryside.¹⁵

Peasant voices, unfortunately, have proven impossible to recover, and so this chapter employs a broader reading of archival sources. Poetry provides one crucial resource for understanding the social transformations and dislocations of rural life in this period. The striking shift in the attention of prominent poets from village to city over the course of the 1940s helps to confirm the general marginalization of rural experiences in national cultural experience and to explain the irrepressible longing of peasant youth to escape the stifling atmosphere of village life for the hope and promise of the city. While many poets began to write about rural life from an academic vantage point, abandoning the radical invocations and exhortations of the 1930s and instead speaking *about* rather than *to* tribal peasants, other prominent poets simply ceased to talk about peasants at all. As I demonstrate in this chapter and the one that follows, peasants, tribes, and villages were gradually replaced by students, workers, and cities as symbols of the Iraqi nation and its resistance to colonial domination. I argue here that the unmaking of the tribes of southern Iraq and the incorporation of the detribalized peasantry into the radical politics of urban anti-colonialism proceeded in three distinct phases. In the first phase (1920-1935), histories and memories of tribal resistance to the incursions of the colonial state coincided with colonial policies that marked certain tribes as rebels and others as collaborators, strengthening the social and cultural solidarities of the one group while weakening those of the other. In the second phase (1935-1950), the failed tribal uprising of 1935 eradicated lingering hopes of a return to the pre-colonial past and entrenched the economic conditions of feudalism in southern Iraq. Only the third and final phase (1950-1958) witnessed the politicization of the tribal peasantry as rival purveyors of political modernity – most notably nationalist educators, Communist activists, and Western development experts – penetrated the tribal countryside. It was the conjunction of colonial history and the discourse and experience of “development,” I argue, that drove the proverbial final nail into the coffin of southern tribalism.

¹⁴ Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 153-78.

¹⁵ Orit Bashkin, *The Other Iraq: Pluralism and Culture in Hashemite Iraq* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 194-228.

Colonial Interventions and the Construction of Tribal Feudalism

Tribes and Tribalism before the British Occupation

British colonial policy in the tribal regions of southern Iraq was fundamentally shaped by the subtle misreading of pre-colonial tribal histories. While British administrators drew upon a remarkably nuanced and accurate body of evidence on tribal histories collected by distinguished Orientalists like Gertrude Bell and David Hogarth, an overarching emphasis on Ottoman despotism tended to obscure the historical significance of social change. Once the early patterns of tribal disintegration that accompanied sedentism and market integration were identified as artificial consequences of Ottoman misrule, British officials moved to arrest the process by reinforcing the political and judicial boundaries between tribe and town. This ambitious effort to reverse decades of historical change and to resurrect or recreate the social structure of the idealized Arab tribe was rooted in the romantic nostalgia for “martial races” and “noble savages” that dominated colonial imaginations at the time.¹⁶ This critical colonial intervention in the countryside, though, fundamentally transformed the nature of tribal power and authority by transforming the tribal shaykh into an effective ally of the colonial state. As the shaykhs came to view the state as the guarantor of land revenue rather than an economic rival, they forged an increasingly intimate alliance with national officials that presaged an era of anachronistic feudalism.

The colonial understanding of the historical processes of tribal migration and settlement closely conformed to Ibn Khaldun’s cyclical theory of dynastic power. Ibn Khaldun argued that dynasties always rise from the desert bedouin and then evolve in to a “sedentary stage,” because “royal authority is always followed by a life of ease.” The transition to the sedentary stage always carries the roots of the dynasty’s impending end, as the luxury of sedentary life leads successively to “leisure and tranquility... contentment and peacefulness... waste and squandering” before the final destruction.¹⁷ Gertrude Bell described the migration and fragmentation of Arabian tribes into subsections aligned with various tribal confederations as the “inevitable process” of sedentism:

¹⁶ In reference to the colonial dilemma produced by this juxtaposition of nostalgia and reality, Toby Dodge has argued that “the clash between this social romance and the problems of trying to rule Iraq through its categories led the British to adopt policies that can only be described as contradictory.” Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation Building and a History Denied* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 80-81.

¹⁷ Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, translated by Franz Rosenthal and edited and abridged by N. J. Dawood (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 138-42.

In their progress northward the tribes found themselves ultimately upon the limits of the desert; the wide spaces essential to nomadic existence no longer stretched before them, while the pressure of those behind forbade any return. They were obliged to look to agriculture as a means of livelihood.¹⁸

As new tribes arrived, those recently settled were “split up and thrust apart” so that “the old tribes are often widely scattered along the edges of the cultivated land.” Just as sedentism was the inevitable result of the “irresistible attractions” of fertile frontiers, the new wealth and luxuries of agricultural exploitation led to decadence, corruption, and ultimately defeat by new waves of bedouin warriors. The policy implications of this historical interpretation rested upon a dubious distinction between settlement and urbanization that allowed colonial administrators to embrace the political and economic stability of the former process while avoiding the social pathologies of the latter.

This sweeping categorization of the entire rural populace of southern Iraq as “tribal,” though, did not reflect colonial ignorance or indifference to social difference and historical chance but rather underscored the imperial project of restoring tribal authority and solidarity where it had already begun to decay. The archaeologist D.G. Hogarth pointed to the variety of tribal structures in several intelligence reports contrasting the ‘Anizah and Muntafiq tribes, noting that while the ‘Anizah brand “connotes, theoretically, a racial whole, which in practice includes several constituent units, politically independent of one another,” the Muntafiq appellation referred to a political confederation of tribes with “the most mixed origin in blood.”¹⁹ Each modular form of tribal configuration presented its own unique problem for colonial administrators – the historical patterns of migration and settlement had left the ‘Anizah tribe too physically fragmented to permit an effective coordination of policy by the leading shaykhs while misguided Ottoman land reform had enriched the Sa’dun shaykhs of the Muntafiq to such an extent that the tribes rejected their authority and forced them off of the tribal land. Effective colonial rule, then, required administrators to thread the needle between the consolidation of tribal authority and the development of exploitative economic practices.

Where strong structures of tribal authority and traditions of social solidarity did not exist, they had to be refashioned or recreated before their incorporation into political apparatus of

¹⁸ Gertrude Bell, "Mesopotamia: Review of the Civil Administration, 1914-1918," FO 371/5081 E 13898.

¹⁹ D.G. Hogarth, *The Arab Bulletin*, Vol. 1: 1916, no. 8, July 8, 1916 and "The Anazeh Tribes and Chiefs," *The Arab Bulletin*, Vol. 1: 1916, no. 32, November 26, 1916.

indirect colonial rule. British officials and administrators were satisfied that the pervasive traditions of tribal culture would facilitate this reformation even where tribal organization and authority had begun to collapse.²⁰ This does not, however, mean that British authorities “invented” tribes in order to facilitate their project of colonial rule or to suggest that “tribal culture” was a fantasy of the Orientalist imagination.²¹ The writings of Bell and Hogarth underscore the impressive breadth of knowledge about social and political difference between tribal groups and confederation and the remarkable stability of tribal cultures and solidarities across time and space through the waves of migration from Kut and ‘Amarah attests to the relative significance of these fundamental social and cultural distinctions. The more important significance of this manner of identifying and classifying tribal groups was the underlying assumption that the persistence of tribal culture offered sufficient grounds for reconstructing tribal authority within the contours of the colonial state. Colonial administrators assumed that proper governance and effective support for local tribal shaykhs would restore the natural balance of power and authority in traditional tribal cultures.²²

Despite their general awareness of a spectrum of social difference within the tribal sphere, however, colonial officials drew a sharp distinction between the urban populations of towns and villages and the rural tribal population. At the level of political policy, historical and ethnographic distinctions between tribal structures were effaced in a totalizing narrative of tribal culture. T.E. Lawrence prefaced a list of military instructions for dealing with the local

²⁰ Both Gertrude Bell and Arnold Wilson averred that the essential characteristics of tribal culture remained largely unaffected by the diminished power of local shaykhs and the extension of governmental authority. See Gertrude Bell, "Note on the Tribal Authority of the Sheikhs of Muhammarah and Kuwait in the Occupied Territories," *The Arab Bulletin Vol. 1: 1916*, no. 25, October 7, 1916 and A.T. Wilson, *Loyalties, Mesopotamia, Vol. 1: 1917-1920: A Personal and Historical Record* (London: Oxford University Press, 1930), 266.

²¹ Although there is no clear or easy parallel with what Terence Ranger and Nicholas Dirks have described as the invention of tribe and caste in colonial Africa and India, Paul Dresch's argument that Orientalist observations of Arabian modes of segmentary lineage came to dominate colonial ethnographies conducted elsewhere suggests that the ethnographic work conducted by the Arab Bureau during World War I tended to shape official conceptions of the "ideal tribe" and to mold official policy toward the restoration of that ideal in Iraq. Nicholas B. Dirks, *The Invention of Caste: Civil Society in Colonial India* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988), Paul Dresch, "Segmentation: Its Roots in Arabia and Its Flowering Elsewhere," *Cultural Anthropology* 3:1 (Feb. 1988), 50-67, Terence Ranger, "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 211-262.

²² Samira Haj's critique of "tribal essentialism" in both colonial discourse and modern historical analysis is an instructive ideological intervention here but perhaps misdirected as a critique of social history. The fundamental problem with colonial and post-colonial tribal policies was not insufficient awareness of the spectrum of difference between various tribal groupings but rather a basic misconception about how official interference in tribal affairs would mediate the estranged relations of power between shaykhs and tribes. Haj, "The Problems of Tribalism" and *The Making of Iraq*, 13-22.

population with the caveat that his notes were only relevant for interactions with the tribal population. Noting that the tribesmen and townspeople “hate each other,” Lawrence declared that urban populations “require totally different treatment.”²³ Kinahan Cornwallis, who would remain an influential voice in Iraqi politics until the end of World War II, likewise insisted that animosity between tribes and towns was rooted in an intrinsic incompatibility of tribal and urban culture rather than political and economic rivalries between tribal and urban elites. Writing from Najaf after the collapse of Ottoman rule in 1916, Cornwallis noted that while “the Mujtahids were jealous of the Sheikhs, who were jealous of one another... still more acute was the rivalry between the towns and the tribes outside the towns.”²⁴ Arnold Wilson, the British Civil Commissioner in Iraq between 1918 and 1920, illustrated the curious contradictions of the colonial narratives of tribal romanticism and Ottoman despotism in his own conclusions about the hostility between towns and tribes. Wilson blamed the “jealous hostility” between tribes and towns on Ottoman policy, which, “on the principle of playing off faction against faction, did nothing to allay” such sentiments.²⁵

Given the presumption of natural hostility between towns and tribes, British administrators endeavored to break with what they saw as a malicious Ottoman policy pitting the two social blocs against one another by reformulating a divide and rule strategy that emphasized structural segregation over physical confrontation. Cornwallis viewed the hostility between tribes and towns as an opportunity for expanding colonial power and cultivating local loyalties, arguing that urban notables and religious clerics were clamoring for British protection from the tribes.²⁶ While he acknowledged that many of the local complaints appeared on closer inspection as exaggerations or fabrications concocted as demands for financial compensation, Cornwallis and his colleagues never questioned the underlying reality of social antithesis.²⁷ This perception of an insurmountable gulf between the tribal and urban populations would eventually lead to the

²³ T.E. Lawrence, "Twenty-Seven Articles," *The Arab Bulletin*, Vol. 2: 1917, no. 60, August 20, 1917.

²⁴ Kinahan Cornwallis, "The Najaf-Karbala District," *The Arab Bulletin*, Vol. 2: 1917, no. 62, September 8 1917.

²⁵ A.T. Wilson, *Loyalties, Mesopotamia, Vol. 1: 1917-1920: A Personal and Historical Record* (London: Oxford University Press, 1930), 266.

²⁶ Kinahan Cornwallis, "General Maude and Shiah Holy Cities," *The Arab Bulletin*, Vol. 2: 1917, no. 51, May 23, 1917 and "Museiyib, Kербela, Nejef and Hillah," *The Arab Bulletin*, Vol. 2: 1917, no. 55, June 28, 1917.

²⁷ Less anecdotal historical accounts of tribal relations with the provincial towns have taken a decidedly more balanced and nuanced approach, noting that while periodic conflict between tribes and towns was an endemic problem, the cultivation of relations between the Shi'a clerics of the shrine cities and the local tribes helped bring about considerable social and economic integration well before the dawn of colonial rule. See Yitzhak Nakash, "The Conversion of Iraq's Tribes to Shi'ism," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26:3 (Aug. 1994), 443-63.

adoption of different criminal codes, military conscription policies, electoral procedures, and land settlement policies in tribal and urban regions during the mandatory period.

This logic of tribal difference likewise underscored the alien nature of modern urban politics to tribal conceptions of power and authority. The colonial thesis of Oriental despotism did not apply to the shaykhs and their tribes, who were viewed as ignorant, unsophisticated, and inevitably prone to anarchy.²⁸ This inclination towards anarchy, though, carried the beneficial inclination that the tribes were by nature apolitical and anti-nationalist and therefore far more readily influenced by colonial alliances at the local level. Arnold Wilson insisted that tribal disorders “had little political significance” but were instead “the blind protests of ignorant men who desired better things which they knew not how to attain” and even composed a nostalgic couplet memorializing this political ambivalence:

Perhaps their loves, or else their sheep
Was all that did their silly thoughts so busy keep.²⁹

This fundamental denial of political agency to tribal nomads and cultivators would help shape British policy towards the tribes throughout the mandatory period in a manner that laid down the essential foundations for an anachronistic rural feudalism.

Social Order and the Rule of Law in Colonial Tribal Policy

British conceptions of the ideal tribal society and the essential social and cultural differences between tribe and town had profound implications for the development of rural policies. Alongside the establishment of the monarchy and the introduction of an indirect electoral process that ensured the parliamentary dominance of what Samira Haj has branded the “monarchic-oligarchic regime,” colonial tribal and land settlement policy would leave behind the most significant structural impact on the development of the post-mandatory state.³⁰ British administrators were forced to confront a fundamental contradiction of colonial ideology in weighing the respective consequences of reversing the deleterious effects of Ottoman despotism

²⁸ See, for example, Kinahan Cornwallis, "Museiyib, Kerbela, Nejef and Hillah," *The Arab Bulletin*, Vol. 2: 1917, no. 55, June 28, 1917, T.E. Lawrence, "Nationalism among the Tribesmen," *The Arab Bulletin*, Vol. 1: 1916, no. 32, November 26, 1916, and A.T. Wilson, *Loyalties, Mesopotamia, Vol. 1: 1917-1920: A Personal and Historical Record* (London: Oxford University Press, 1930), 295.

²⁹ A.T. Wilson, *Loyalties, Mesopotamia, Vol. 1: 1917-1920: A Personal and Historical Record* (London: Oxford University Press, 1930), 2.

³⁰ Haj, *The Making of Iraq*, 27-38.

and misrule through a more just and effective land reform regime and demonstrating the stability and superiority of British rule to local notables by vigorously upholding the rule of law and existing legal contracts.³¹ It was this central ideological contradiction that ultimately shaped the development of feudalism as an unintended consequence of tribal policy. Initial conflicts between an Orientalist romanticism that looked to reconstruct the noble traditions of tribal culture and a civic rationalism that sought to transform the anarchic tribes into loyal citizens through the incentives of free markets and the rule of law evaporated as proponents of the latter view realized that they could not simply ignore or revoke established title claims.

The entire colonial approach to the land problem in southern Iraq was shaped to a considerable extent by historical interpretations of the Ottoman land reform efforts. In an effort to limit the power of the dominant tribal shaykhs and to stabilize land revenue receipts, the Ottoman Land Code of 1858 abolished the *iltizam* tax farming system and granted *tapu sanad* title deeds to individual cultivators.³² While acknowledging the judicious civic intentions of the reforms, Gertrude Bell concluded that the measure was “like all things Turkish, a theory rather than a fact.” The estate boundaries listed on title deeds were ambiguous or undefined, the confirmation of customary claims to land tenancy was distorted by endemic bribery and corruption, and the inability of tribal cultivators to understand the alien concept of land ownership led to the concentration of registered titles in the hands of tribal shaykhs and enterprising urban speculators. In ‘Amarah, Kut, and Nasiriyah, Ottoman authorities never made an effort to stabilize land holdings, but instead auctioned off five year leases at exorbitant rates, pitting rival tribal shaykhs against one another in a bid for social prestige guaranteed by large land holdings. The policy encouraged a cyclical trajectory of debt and destruction as shaykh lessees “would pass from rebellion to imprisonment and exile, the lands and houses of the surety would be confiscated, and the estate would be put up afresh for auction and farmed for a still higher and more impossible rent to the rivals of the supplanted man.”³³ For Bell, Ottoman

³¹ Radhika Singha has noted a similar conflict in the struggles of the East India Company to synthesize a “cognitive reassessment of the state and its agencies at various social levels” with conflicting claims of sovereign rights “through the existing agencies of order and information.” Radhika Singha, *A Despotism of Law: Crime and Justice in Early Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 36.

³² For a detailed analysis of the Ottoman land reforms and their consequences, see Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 22-27, and Albertine Jwaideh, “Aspects of Land Tenure and Social Change in Lower Iraq During the Late Ottoman Times,” in *Land and Social Transformation in the Middle East*, ed. Tarif Khalidi (Beirut: American University of Beirut Press), 33-56.

³³ Gertrude Bell, “Mesopotamia: Review of the Civil Administration, 1914-1918,” FO 371/5081 E 13898.

misrule thus created two distinct problems of land settlement and tribal policy along the Tigris and the Euphrates. Tribal anarchy in the Euphrates valley was a product of the conversion of the Sa‘dun shaykhs to landlords and the Muntafiq tribes to tenants, while conflicts along the Tigris were the consequence of divide and rule policies that discouraged both profit and stability. Particularly significant in this interpretation was the fact that ‘Amarah shaykhs were viewed by colonial administrators as victims of Ottoman despotism – in stark contrast to the enterprising Sa‘dun shaykhs – with “just grievances” against excessive government demands.

This historical logic of victors and victims influenced the trajectory of British tribal policy in southern Iraq. Along the Tigris, British administrators moved quickly to demonstrate the financial benefits of colonial rule by stabilizing lease arrangements and dramatically curtailing revenue demands. Relieved by their liberation from the economic cycle of auction, debt, and dispossession, the ‘Amarah shaykhs quickly emerged as the most ardent supporters of British rule in Iraq. As Gertrude Bell proudly noted in a review of colonial tribal policy, “We have never experienced any serious disturbances on the Tigris.”³⁴ On the Euphrates, where land tenure had already been stabilized to the benefit of leading shaykhs, British efforts to leave their own mark of colonial stability on the tribes produced far more serious repercussions. In the Muntafiq, colonial administrators eventually moved to collect a limited share of land revenue on behalf of the Sa‘dun shaykhs, who had already been forced out of the region by the rebellious clans in the late nineteenth century. While this intervention won Britain the enduring support of the Sa‘duns, it provoked fierce enmity from the now independent clans who chafed against the re-imposition of previously severed bonds.³⁵ Along the middle Euphrates, a bid to correct what was seen as Ottoman favoritism of certain tribes led to changes in the regulations of water from the Hindiyyah Barrage in favor of the Hillah tribes and to the detriment of the Shamiyyah confederations.³⁶ While cultural and ideological factors governing the relationship between the Euphrates tribes and influential Shi‘i clerics from Najaf and Karbala, it is not surprising that the new losers of the colonial tribal reforms in the Muntafiq, Shamiyyah, and Diwaniyyah regions formed the backbone of the anti-colonial insurrection of 1920 and that the grateful shaykhs of ‘Amarah, Kut, and Hillah either actively colluded with the British army against the rebel tribes,

³⁴ Gertrude Bell, "Mesopotamia: Review of the Civil Administration, 1914-1918," FO 371/5081 E 13898.

³⁵ ‘Abdullah al-Fayyad, *Mushkilat al-Arabi fi Liwa al-Muntafiq* (Baghdad: 1956).

³⁶ Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 174-75.

stood aside with passive indifference, or reluctantly and unwillingly allowed their tribes to drag them into the conflict.³⁷

The tribal insurrection of 1920 underscored the considerable costs of maintaining colonial control of Iraq in the face of mass resistance to the occupation. While the arrival of Indian reinforcements ensured that the British army would decisively defeat the rebel tribes and reassert colonial authority in the rural regions where it had been cast off, British officials were chastened by the experience and moved quickly to promote a form of acceptable national governance and to rapidly transition to less visible and more indirect form of colonial rule. For the tribes of southern Iraq, this meant that resistance to British authority was increasingly dealt with by dispatching squadrons of airplanes to bomb rebels into submission and that political authority and economic obligations were overwhelmingly delegated to the tribal shaykhs. The use of air power against the tribes decisively broke the pattern of tribal resistance to colonial rule but tended to leave the political and economic grievances of the rebel shaykhs and tribes intact and festering, which ensured that the eventual end to colonial rule would entail an historic reckoning between the tribes and the central government as the interested parties sought to reverse or maintain the losses and gains of the colonial era.³⁸ The delegation of authority to the tribal shaykhs, on the other hand, tended to reinforce preconceived notions of essential tribal difference by reversing historical processes that saw traditional notions of the tribal domain gradually replaced by conceptions of individual private property and the authority of the tribal shaykh gradually undermined by that of the central government.

In the aftermath of the tribal rebellion, colonial officials were forced to reassess the consequences of tribal policies and to consider the most appropriate path forward. The question of how to best confront the distinct challenges of land tenure in the Tigris and Euphrates regions pitted administrators into two distinct camps. On one side stood officials like Henry Dobbs, John Glubb, and Stephen Longrigg, who were influenced by romantic conceptions of tribal society, infuriated by the obstruction and resistance they faced from urban elites, and seduced by the possibilities of integrating the tribes into the structure of colonial patriarchy. On the other side stood a minority opposition influenced by Lord Cromer's political philosophy in Egypt and led

³⁷ Vinogradov, "The 1920 Revolt in Iraq Reconsidered," 123-39.

³⁸ On the use of air power against the tribes, see Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, 131-56, Rudi Lindner, "What Was a Nomadic Tribe?," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 24:4 (Oct. 1982), 689-711, and David E. Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control: The Royal Air Force, 1919-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 18-38.

in Iraq by Ernest Dowson which embraced an individualist ethos of capitalist modernity in urging the creation of a local class of small landowners.³⁹ Dowson, whose experience working for Lord Cromer in Egypt made him the British Empire's most respected land expert, argued that extant land codes and registered titles were so fraudulent, defective, and ambiguous that colonial officials should use their own discretion in settling claims for the benefit of social order. Like Bell and Hogarth, he was acutely aware of the vast differences in economic conditions and modes of distribution and exploitation between various tribal groupings and urged the careful study of these differences as a foundation for future policy. Where traditional tribal order and solidarity remained relatively intact and the shaykhs continued to derive their power from the consent of their tribe and distribute tribal resources equitably, the colonial administration should uphold their power. On the other hand, where tribal solidarities had already begun to break down and shaykhs owed their power and authority to dubious legal documents and governmental intervention, the administration should prevent the further descent into feudal conditions by upholding the rights of individual cultivators.⁴⁰

The confluence of ideological and pragmatic concerns of indirect colonial rule insured the marginalization of Dowson and his allies and the gradual consolidation of a tribal policy that ceased to differentiate between the political and economic conditions of the Tigris and Euphrates valleys. The British need to reward old tribal allies and to ensure consistent support for colonial policies under the veneer of electoral democracy led to the packing of parliament with tribal shaykhs.⁴¹ The introduction of a consumption tax capped the radical revision of land revenue policies throughout the colonial period and ensured that agricultural landowners were almost completely exempt from taxation.⁴² The impact of this policy on the tribal peasants of southern Iraq may be traced through the poetry of the region, which began to reflect the increasingly oppressive conditions of peasant life during the 1920s and 1930s. Already by 1925, the Najafi poet 'Ali Sharqi would condemn the shaykhs' oppression of their peasants in his celebrated poem

³⁹ Toby Dodge has discussed this ideological conflict of empire in great depth. Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, 63-129.

⁴⁰ Ernest Dowson, *Government of el 'Iraq: An Enquiry Into Land Tenure and Related Questions with Proposals for the Initiation of Reform* (Letchworth: Garden City Press, 1931).

⁴¹ Tribal shaykhs constituted nearly thirty-five percent of the first constituent assembly in 1924 and remained between fifteen and twenty percent throughout the remaining years of the mandatory regime. The fact that many of the deputy shaykhs were illiterate and otherwise uninterested in political affairs that did not concern their own economic interests lent them an outsized voice in parliamentary debates about tribal matters as other politicians maneuvered for their support. Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 99-110.

⁴² Peter Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq: Contriving King and Country, 1914-1932* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 178-80.

"The Peasant's Sickle." The poem opened with a stirring depiction of the Iraqi peasant as arbiters of not only the nation's agriculture produce, but in fact the national destiny:

Do you see me, between the village and the fields
With my lamp in my hand, roaming in the afternoon
Searching for means to reinvigorate the homeland
And inspecting her affairs from every side and angle
For if this land is ever satisfied there will then appear
In every village welcome signs of relief and satisfaction⁴³

Sharqi's correlation of soil and homeland clearly yoked the destiny of the peasantry with that of the nation and drew an implicit metaphor between the foreign occupation and the peasant's plight. After a vivid depiction of an idyllic rural lifestyle that was meant to symbolize the pre-colonial past, Sharqi turned to address the imposition of the consumption tax and the wholesale theft of peasant labor:

O meek and poor one, the official counseled you
But you turned away from the advice of these counselors
Your sword did not acquit you for he is a lion
But you stood before him armed only with patience
If you we penetrate the heart of that meaning
We find that we was stricken with grievous injuries

Despite the peasant's steadfast resistance to the new regimes of agricultural commoditization, he remained powerless to prevent his already meager resources from being siphoned toward the repayment of new debts.

The introduction of usurious interest rates to the old equation of debts guaranteed by tribal shaykhs ensured that peasants without access to land titles or capital were left without the means to escape from under the increasingly onerous burden of repayment schedules. In a more caustic and sarcastic passage, Sharqi drew a sharper contrast between this new economic burden on the peasant and the richness of the soil:

From his river and his canals has been bestowed
Some base and lowly pasturage and shallow water
While in the surrounding meadows a gentle babble

⁴³ 'Ali al-Sharqi, "The Peasant's Sickle," *al-'Iraq*, July 27, 1926 and *Diwan al-Sharqi* (Baghdad: Dar al-Rashid li al-Nashr, 1979), 163-64. See also Yusuf 'Izz al-Din's commentary on the poem in 'Izz al-Din, *al-Ishtirakiyah wa al-Qawmiyah wa Atharahuma fi al-Adab al-Hadith* (Cairo: Jami'at al-Duwwal al-'Arabiyyah, 1968), 106-8.

From the mouth of every gay beast to his fellow
And is it any wonder that these beasts sing with joy
While the peasant and his people are reduced to wail?

This depiction of wretched peasant and sated beast emerged as a regular trope in the rural poetry composed by the Najafi poets during this period, the juxtaposition of images serving to confirm the continued fertility of the soil and blessing of nature while pointing instead to the injustice of colonial agrarian arrangements. Sharqi closed the poem with a metaphor comparing the inundation of the peasant's home and land by the floodwaters of the Euphrates to the colonization of Iraq:

The rafters now rose above the sinking walls
As the home floated away on drunken timbers
And I happened to see his furnishings afloat
Nothing but a straw mat and some shabby clothes

While colonial officials, whether romanticists or modernists, had frequently maneuvered to prevent the worst abuses of power by the landowning shaykhs, colonial policy ensured that the power of the shaykhs would remain unchecked after the nominal conferral of independence in 1932. Scarcely one year later, tribal shaykhs succeeded in forcing a bill through parliament that legally bound peasant cultivators to the land and virtually enshrined feudal practices as realities.

Post-Colonial Anachronisms: Tribalism and Nationalism in Anti-Colonial Politics

The 1935 Rebellion and the Legacy of Tribal Anti-Colonialism

Less than three years after the official end of colonial rule in Iraq, a tribal rebellion along the middle Euphrates valley brought down two successive governments and resurrected the long dormant hopes for a return to the pre-colonial state of affairs that had been crushed with the defeat of the tribal insurrection of 1920.⁴⁴ The depth of popular resentment toward the privileged tribal shaykhs who capitalized on the marginal victories of the 1920 Revolution by demonstrating their utility as loyal clients of the colonial state and consolidating control of the region's lucrative land titles was passionately expressed by the radical Najafi poet Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulum. In "The Peasant's Revolution," one of the most memorable of several dozen poems composed by Bahr al-'Ulum in support of the new rebellion, the poet excoriated those

⁴⁴ The political trajectory of the uprisings and their aftermath is analyzed in depth in Chapter 1, "The Tomb Stirs': Populism and the Poetics of Resistance in Post-Colonial Iraq," 12-22.

opportunistic landed shaykhs and directly addressed the oppression and exploitation of the rural peasants:

You, O Peasant, have endured this affliction
While others have reaped the fruits of your labor
You toil through the night to provide the wealthy
With the luxury of comfort, pleasure, and delight⁴⁵

For Bahr al-‘Ulum, armed revolution was the only possible means of restoring the promise of 1920 and returning to the peasant's their rightful share of the national produce and wealth:

Leave your fields and throw away your sickle
And drench this fertile soil in ruin and blood
Hold the government to account with your sword
For among them your right has turned to plunder

Like Bahr al-‘Ulum, many young reformers and radicals hoped that the old tribal heroes of the 1920 Revolution would lead the peasants toward this promised redemption and salvation. The eventual collapse of the tribal rebellion and the defection of the rebel shaykhs to the government camp, however, would convince both peasant and poet alike that further resistance in search of the lapsed rural utopia was futile. As Bahr al-‘Ulum and the other young Najafī poets moved on to Baghdad to participate in the burgeoning nationalist political struggle, the haunting imagery of "The Peasant's Revolution" would prove only partially prescient.⁴⁶ The oppressed and increasingly disillusioned peasants of southern Iraq would indeed leave their fields and tribes and abandon agricultural production, but they would do in search of a new opportunities in the new urban utopia.

Rural poetry produced after 1935 took on an increasingly pessimistic - sometimes bordering upon nihilistic - stance towards agrarian problems and peasant suffering until it eventually faded away as a poetic genre. This tendency is perhaps most apparent in the writing of Ahmad al-Safi al-Najafi, a prominent poet from Najaf who expressed a keen and passionate interest in peasant life before going into exile in Lebanon and Syria in the late 1930s.⁴⁷ Safi's

⁴⁵ Muhammad Salih Bahr al-‘Ulum, *Diwan Bahr al-‘Ulum* (Baghdad: Matba‘at Dar al-Tadamun, 1968), 1:60.

⁴⁶ On the relationship between the Najafi peasants and the peasants of southern Iraq, see Yusuf ‘Izz al-Din, *Poetry and Iraqi Society, 1900-1945* (Baghdad: Matba‘at al-‘Ani, 1962), 33-39.

⁴⁷ On the life and work of al-Safi, see Yusuf ‘Izz al-Din, *Poetry and Iraqi Society, 1900-1945* (Baghdad: Matba‘at al-‘Ani, 1962), 38-39 and Salma Khadra Jayyusi, *Trends and Movements in Modern Arabic Poetry* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1977), 1:193-97.

celebrated poem "The Peasant" opened with a sympathetic expression of solidarity and understanding with the peasant's plight:

Be kind and gentle to yourself, O Peasant
For your struggle but in your efforts there is no salvation⁴⁸

The poem proceeds with a vivid depiction of peasant poverty and misery found in most works of this genre but includes a far more complete depiction of the ruinous financial burden placed upon the peasant by colonial land settlement reforms:

Here are your doubts, and some have not been paid,
For you are unable, so how can you pay the interests?
The wrinkles of your face are a canvas of hardships
And the creases of your forehead are tablets of misery
The sweet sweat of life pours from you like pearls
Only to become adornments for the sash of the wealthy man
But can you dare confront this army of greedy men
When you have nothing to defend you but your cries?

Perhaps in response to the radicalism of Bahr al-'Ulum, al-Safi details the impossibility of both revolution and reform before reaching his sad conclusion:

O planter of fruit, full of hope for reward
Abandon your effort for its fruit is sadness
Uproot it, for the delicious fruit is forbidden
For the planter and permissible only for the strong

Like Bahr al-'Ulum, al-Safi could not have failed to leave an indelible impression upon his peasant audience. The collapse of the tribal rebellions removed the last vestige of hope for either revolution or reform and lead many peasants to begin contemplating escape and emigration.

While the historical significance of the uprising has been relatively marginalized over the past several decades as historians have turned their attention to the development of nationalist and radical political ideologies and movements that would dominate the history of Iraq after the 1940s, the rebellion and its aftermath marked several fundamental shifts in the social and political structures of the post-mandatory state. At the level of national politics, the uprising marked the first time that opposition political parties managed to use military intervention to

⁴⁸ Ahmad al-Safi al-Najafi, *al-Amwaj* (Bayrut: Dar al-'Ilm li al-Malayin, 1961), 8-13. For further commentary on the poem, see 'Izz al-Din, *al-Ishtirakiyah wa al-Qawmiyah*, 103-4.

facilitate their rise to power. Bakr Sidqi's coup d'état offers a much more violent example of the military's intervention in politics, but the refusal of Army Chief of Staff Taha al-Hashimi to heed orders from Prime Minister 'Ali Jawdat al-Ayyubi and his successor Jamil al-Midfai to crush the tribal uprising was the crucial factor in bringing down those two administrations and securing the rise to power of his brother, Yasin al-Hashimi. On a sectarian level, the aftermath of the uprising ensured the final retreat of the Shi'i mujtahids from the political arena as a result of the simultaneous weakening of their authority over the leading tribal shaykhs and the incorporation of the shaykhs into the political apparatus of the central government.

For the tribes, though, the ramifications of the uprising were even more dramatic, underscoring both the end of the historical legacy of tribal anti-colonialism and the segregation of political and tribal politics. While the rebellions initially assumed an implicitly anti-colonial character, with tribal and clerical representatives demanding fundamental political reforms to the post-mandatory state and aligning themselves closely with the anti-colonial politicians of the National Brotherhood Party and with rebellious and loyal tribes almost exactly replicating their roles in the uprising of 1920, the development of events laid bare the superficial nature of those similarities.⁴⁹ Leading rebel shaykhs like 'Abd al-Wahid al-Hajj al-Sikkar received favorable land settlements and readily accepted parliamentary posts in Yasin al-Hashimi's regime, and those who held out for similar terms or more fundamental structural reforms were brutally crushed by Bakr Sidqi and the Iraqi Army. As Hanna Batatu has noted, the "ease and grim rapidity" of the military assault presaged the end of the "tribal era" in Iraq and ensured that any future tribal rebellions would now erupt as local "risings not under the shaikhs, as in the previous decades, but against them."⁵⁰ This historical shift was accompanied by a corresponding severance of tribal and national politics as the army's military superiority undermined the logic of political alliances based on the threat of tribal violence. When prominent rebel shaykhs like 'Abd al-Wahid rejoined the political apparatus of the modern state and the Bakr Sidqi coup d'état of the following year further cemented the new political alliance of the old anti-colonial politicians of the National Brotherhood Party and the pro-British stalwarts of the old regime, the transition to a new political framework of the post-mandatory period was completed. The most

⁴⁹ Muhsin Abu Tabikh's recollection of events emphasized the "sectarian bigotry" of the Sunni political elite but quickly devolves into an attack on the "effendis who lacked the racial stock and sentiment to speak in the name of the Iraqi people." Muhsin Abu Tabikh, *Mudhakkirat al-Sayyid Muhsin Abu Tabikh, 1910-1960: Khamsun 'Amman min Tarikh al-'Iraq al-Siyasi al-Hadith* (Bayrut: al-Mu'assassah al-'Arabiyyah li al-Dirasat wa al-Nashr, 2001), 312-18.

⁵⁰ Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 118-19.

prominent landed shaykhs now found it more politically expedient and financially profitable to acquiesce to their new position as feudal allies of the monarchy than to openly challenge the sovereignty of the central government and the lesser shaykhs simply receded from the political landscape.

The historical trajectory of ‘Abd al-Wahid’s relationship with the Iraqi anti-colonial movement offers a particularly instructive illustration of the long decline of tribal anti-colonialism.⁵¹ As a prominent shaykh of the al-Fatlah tribe, ‘Abd al-Wahid rose to national prominence for his role in coordinating tribal insurrections in the Euphrates valley during the anti-British uprising of 1920. After the uprising was successfully put down, colonial authorities confiscated ‘Abd al-Wahid’s profitable Rak al-Haswah estate and the shaykh subsequently forged a political alliance with National Brotherhood politicians Yasin al-Hashimi and Rashid ‘Ali al-Kaylani in the hope of recovering his estate. His instrumental role in leading the tribal uprisings that brought Yasin to power in 1935 was rewarded by the new administration’s decision to return to him control of the estate, but the Bakr Sidqi coup d’état of the following year brought to power political opponents of the National Brotherhood Party who once again confiscated the estate and transferred the title to rival shaykhs. Unfortunately for ‘Abd al-Wahid, the assassination of Bakr Sidqi and the return to power of the exiled conservative politicians did not bring forth a similar reversal of fortune. While tribal rivalries and land disputes had previously played out as a function of national anti-colonial politics, with rival tribal shaykhs alternately identifying as pro-British or anti-British, new political developments broke this cycle. The alliance of leftwing intellectuals and non-Arab politicians in support of the Bakr Sidqi coup d’état thrust together a new and short-lived political alliance of the pro-British and anti-British political factions of the nascent pan-Arabist movement. The anti-colonial tribal shaykhs, who were never particularly interested in the national politics of pan-Arabism, found that they had lost their political utility and been abandoned by their old political allies.

As Batatu has noted, “this background of resentment and disappointed hopes” made ‘Abd al-Wahid a natural ally of the radical nationalists who came to power in the coup d’état organized by Rashid ‘Ali and the Four Colonels in April 1941. With ‘Abd al-Wahid’s assistance, the Rashid ‘Ali administration moved against the pro-British tribal shaykhs, confiscating the properties of any who were known to be on familiar terms with local British officials and

⁵¹ On the life of ‘Abd al-Wahid, see Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 115-16 and Nakash, *The Shi’is of Iraq*, 120-23.

distributing them to their rivals.⁵² In the aftermath of the Rashid ‘Ali movement, British officials ordered Salih Jabr, the new Minister of Interior, to arrest ‘Abd al-Wahid and send him to the new internment camp at Fao. ‘Abd al-Wahid not only lost any hope of recovering the Rak al-Haswah estate but now watched as British officials at the Ministry of Interior transferred control of his Abu Wawiyah estate to a rival shaykh of the al-Fatlah tribe.⁵³ While old nationalist allies like Minister of Justice Sadiq al-Bassam agitated for ‘Abd al-Wahid’s release, the British Embassy was now committed to decisively breaking the power of the anti-colonial shaykhs and permanently pacifying the tribal south. With the able assistance of their staunch allies Nuri al-Sa‘id and Salih Jabr, British officials succeeded in stifling tribal dissent by arresting and interning any shaykhs who publicly supported ‘Abd al-Wahid.⁵⁴ After his eventual release from internment, ‘Abd al-Wahid found that the center of gravity in the anti-colonial movement had shifted from the conservative nationalism of the National Brotherhood Party to the leftist politics of the National Democratic Party and the Iraqi Communist Party. Now recognizing that the old convergence of nationalist politics and economic self-interest had been permanently ruptured, ‘Abd al-Wahid made his peace with the new political order and “ended as an undistinguished supporter of the policies of Nuri al-Sa‘id.”⁵⁵

In the midst of these structural transformations of the political order, rank and file tribesmen saw their own material prospects deteriorate as rural political stability reinforced the feudal laws and practices developed during the colonial era. The Law of the Settlement of Land Rights passed in 1933 had effectively codified the conversion of tribal cultivators to peasant serfs legally tied to the land, but the end of tribal feuds and the relative stabilization of land titles to the major agricultural estates now solidified in practice the total political and economic dominance of the major landowners. In the past, economic exploitation had been held in check to a certain extent by the necessity of tribal solidarity under threat of war, which forced rebel tribal shaykhs to maintain a reasonably consensual relationship with their tribal subjects. The end of anti-governmental tribal rebellions effectively reduced the economic leverage of tribal cultivators

⁵² Amara Consulate, Report for the Month of January 1949, FO 838/8.

⁵³ Amara Consulate, Report for Period Ending September 12, 1941 and Report for Period Ending September 26, 1941, FO 838/1.

⁵⁴ The internment of the minor al-Fatlah shaykh Sabgan al-‘Abbadi in retaliation for his advocacy for ‘Abd al-Wahid in the land disputes helped to tamper further tribal meddling on this subject. Amara Consulate, Report for Period Ending October 25, 1941, Report for Period Ending November 1, Report for Period Ending November 11, 1941, and Report for Period Ending November 23, FO 838/1.

⁵⁵ Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 118.

by removing obligations of war from their job descriptions. The al-Fatlah tribal cultivators who worked the Abu Wawiyah estate thus bitterly fought the transfer of the estate title from 'Abd al-Wahid to the sons of his rival, Hassan al-Sikkar, who had no interest in the cultivators' martial capabilities and therefore considerable leverage over the new terms of employment. Only the introduction of a massive police force by the Ministry of Interior succeeded in forcing the cultivators to either vacate their land or to accept the considerably worse terms.⁵⁶

With the possibility of the type of violent revolution against oppressive landowners advocated by Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulam effaced by Yasin al-Hashimi's brutal repression of the 1935 tribal rebellions and the possibility of radical land reform and redistribution forestalled by the collapse of the Bakr Sidqi regime, some sympathetic poets sought to further the cause of a more moderate vision of rural reform by representing the peasant's plight in stark language but without incendiary political commentary.⁵⁷ The best known of these works was Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri's "Feudalism," which bluntly underscored what many Iraqis saw as the regressive transformation of social life in the countryside:

Is there no power capable of repelling injustices
And reviving the people from this degradation?
Is there no notable willing to receive the people
Falling into this mire of poverty with a glance of pity?
Is what brings hope to the reformers now narrating
The very opposite of reality or some chimera of dreams?
For the hand of feudalism rises until it paralyzes
The hand of the governor from the work of governing⁵⁸

Jawahiri then turns to illustrate the plight of the peasant in vivid poetic language:

The beams of the huts receive their shadows
As the murky well transforms light into darkness
The whips writhe above the back of the beasts
A wickedness borne from commensurate flagellation
The stomachs of the famished go to sleep in hunger
While others are gorged in the most splendid restaurants
Have these citizens of our nation become prepared
To receive the world with the resolve of the assailant?!

⁵⁶ Amara Consulate, Report for Period Ending November 30, 1941, FO 838/1.

⁵⁷ On Jawahiri's tendency to persuade the authorities towards reform in the countryside, at least prior to his increasing radicalization over the course of the 1940s, see 'Izz al-Din, *Poetry and Iraqi Society*, 37.

⁵⁸ Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri, *Diwan al-Jawahiri* (Bayrut: Bisan, 2000), 2:329-31. For further commentary on the poem, see 'Izz al-Din, *al-Ishtirakiyah wa al-Qawmiyah*, 105-6.

Jawahiri closed the poem not with a call to violent revolution, but instead with a plea for government intercession and reform:

Are these empty souls a prayer and supplication
That we take pride in as equals on the day of collision?
Or is it from the languid, weak, and weary arm
Of an old woman that we seek property to steady our hold?!

The poet here sought to shame both government officials and the landed shaykhs into taking some pity on the impoverished peasants, but the call would go unheeded.

In the post-war period, the political power of prominent shaykhs was increasingly contingent on his relations with the national political elite rather than his local tribal influence. In 'Amarah, local land disputes were settled in favor of pro-government shaykhs and rival claimants were in several cases arrested and imprisoned as a political demonstration of the central government's power.⁵⁹ Shaykhs who enjoyed seats in parliament, like Muhan al-Khayrallah of the al-Shuwaylat and Sagban al-'Ali of the al-Khafaja, exploited their power and influence in Baghdad to expand their land holdings. While both shaykhs were considered anti-British because of prior political alliances with 'Abd al-Wahid and Rashid 'Ali, their willingness to accept the post-war political order underscored the new anachronistic nature of tribal anti-colonialism. British efforts to oust the pair from parliament were firmly rebuffed by Nuri al-Sa'id, who was convinced that financial interests were paramount for the shaykhs and that their lack of any national political ambition rendered them particularly effective political allies. Muhan and Sagban coordinated propaganda for Nuri among local shaykhs in 'Amarah and the Muntafiq and eventually joined Nuri's Constitutional Union Party in 1949.⁶⁰ Muhan used his influence in Baghdad to increase his personal wealth, digging a small channel through barren lands to the east of his Muntafiq estate into 'Amarah and sowing an acre of crops every mile or so in order to construct new facts on the ground in anticipation of an eventual legal battle. The local provincial governors attempted to put a stop to these unauthorized encroachments on government land, but Muhan was able to convince his allies in Baghdad to remand their orders.

⁵⁹ Amara Consulate, General Report, June 24, 1941, FO 838/2.

⁶⁰ Amara Consulate, Report for the Month of December 1946, FO 838/3 and Correspondence with Baghdad Embassy, November 1, 1947, FO 838/4.

His own tribal cultivators complained to local officials of their “considerable dissatisfaction” with his oppressive practices of exploitation.⁶¹

By the end of the 1940s, the process was complete, and there were no longer any prominent rebel shaykhs in southern Iraq. The elimination of rivals allowed the victorious shaykhs to amplify and accelerate the processes of title consolidation. As Salih Haider has described in vivid detail, the landed shaykhs' reliance on government forces to enforce rent payments reduced the need to cultivate tribal consent and thus served to transform the hegemonic nature of tribal society into something more closely resembling an amalgamation of antiquated feudalist and modern capitalist means of agricultural production and social organization. The increasing use of agricultural machinery, coupled with the utter exhaustion of peasant resources, led many landed shaykhs to reconsider the utility of binding their peasants to the land and prompted many to evict those who could not pay their debts. This flagrant disregard for tribal conventions led to a startlingly rapid disintegration of tribal solidarities and identities in many parts of southern Iraq.⁶² While the communal bonds of tribal confederations were severely weakened, solidarities between members of various social units within the old confederations were strengthened. It was the tribal or "sub-tribal" chiefs of these families and clans who now began to challenge the authority of the paramount shaykh and, in many cases, to lead their members toward the more promising horizon of Baghdad.⁶³ The landed shaykhs, meanwhile, began to seize the opportunity to fully exploit colonial conceptions of “tribal democracy.”

Tribal Democracy in the Neo-Colonial Political Order

The same political impulses and historical processes that contributed to the gradual decline of tribal anti-colonialism laid the foundations for an increasingly autonomous form of “tribal democracy” in the countryside. The Rashid ‘Ali movement and the Anglo-Iraqi War of May 1941 prompted a serious political crisis that forced British officials to reevaluate the utility of existing political alliances in the interest of future stability. The return of an older generation of colonial officials like Kinahan Cornwallis and John Glubb helped to revive romantic conceptions of tribalism that viewed tribal autonomy as an apolitical ideal for local justice and imperial cooperation. The proportion of tribal shaykhs in parliament increased dramatically in

⁶¹ Amara Consulate, Report for the Month of May 1949, FO 838/8.

⁶² Salih Haider, "Land Problems of Iraq," Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation (London: University of London, 1942).

⁶³ On this point, see Isam al-Khafaji, *Tormented Births: Passages to Modernity in Europe and the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 51-52.

the post-war period – reversing the political trends of the past two decades that saw the consolidation of the central government’s authority under Faysal and Ghazi – as the monarchy, the British Embassy, and the landed shaykhs arrived at a political consensus that traded tribal support for Britain and the monarchy in exchange for the tacit promise of non-interference in tribal affairs.⁶⁴ These neo-colonial efforts to reform the political structures of the modern state ignored the vast social changes of the previous decades and thus further cemented the oppressive relations of tribal feudalism.

While many younger British officials urged democratic reforms to thwart the future development of “fascist” ideologies, the older generation of officials returning to Iraq to oversee the new military occupation drew upon their experiences in the colonial period and argued that the appearance of fascism in the Arab world was the product of colonial experiments in democratic governance. Foremost among these officials was John Glubb, commander of the Jordanian Arab Legion, whose own success in forging an alliance between the tribes, the monarchy, and the British Embassy in Jordan lent his advice on the internal dynamics of Iraqi politics an air imperial authority.⁶⁵ After speaking with numerous disgruntled tribal shaykhs in southwestern Iraq en route to Fallujah and Baghdad, Glubb concluded that despite the similarity in form between constitutional democracy in Britain and Iraq, “nothing could be more undemocratic than the result.” For the past two decades, political power in Iraq had been monopolized by “the same old crowd” of politicians who “all became very rich, and most of them became owners of great landed estates, at the expense of the fellaheen and the small farmer.” Glubb argued that “electoral machinery” perverted democracy in the Arab world and urged reforms modeled on tribal society, where “the ordinary cultivators and tribesmen live on terms of social equality with their sheikhs and leaders.” Britain must accept that “the Arabs were freer and more democratic before we presented them with a model of the British constitution,” and accordingly encourage a dramatic increase in the representation of shaykhs in parliament and a dramatic expansion of power for the King and the British Ambassador.⁶⁶

These efforts to restructure local relations of power and authority paid immediate dividends, as landed shaykhs began appealing for a more vocal and visible British presence in

⁶⁴ Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 99-110.

⁶⁵ On Glubb’s role in Jordan, see Yoav Alon, *The Making of Jordan: Tribes, Colonialism and the Modern State* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 84-109.

⁶⁶ John Glubb, "A Report on the Role Played by the Arab Legion in Connection with the Recent Operations in Iraq," June 10, 1941, CAB 106/512.

shaping official policy.⁶⁷ By the end of the war, one prominent tribal shaykh and senator privately assured the British Ambassador that the tribes “were first loyal to the British and then to the regent.”⁶⁸ Some shaykhs exploited their new influence with British officials occupying key advisory positions at the Ministry of Interior in order to extend their own landholdings. Shaykh Muhammad al-‘Araybi of the Albu Muhammad managed to reverse the losses he suffered during the mandatory period when colonial officials transferred nearly half of his profitable Shahalah estate to his rival Shaykh Falih al-Sayhud.⁶⁹ ‘Araybi reported frequently on the anti-British activities of his rivals and in return secured control of a critical plot of land controlling the crucial water resources of the Shahalah through the intervention of his British contacts.⁷⁰ The loss of access to water forced the heirs to Falih al-Sayhud’s portion of the Shahalah to drop their claims in exchange for a nominal sum and ensured ‘Araybi’s total control of the estate.⁷¹ The national political elite quickly followed the example set by British officials in trading economic favors for political support, though many politicians demanded access to the spoils of wealth. By the end of the decade, after approving a favorable land deal for ‘Araybi, Nuri al-Sa‘id dispatched his son Sabah to ‘Amarah to collect a horse and nearly one hundred and fifty tons of rice from the shaykh.⁷²

At the level of electoral politics, increased representation for tribal shaykhs was achieved by offering the most prominent shaykhs direct control over the electoral process, without even superficial recourse to the practices and protocol of rigged elections in urban areas. When an official from the ‘Amarah Consulate asked Shaykh Mutlaq al-Salman how many of “his” peasants voted in the September 1943 elections, the shaykh, “obviously preserving patience at my stupidity, explained that of course none of them went or heard about the matter.” Mutlaq, like other tribal shaykhs across the Iraqi countryside, merely presented the provincial governor with a list of secondary electors who were supposed to have been elected by the males of his tribe. Despite the official’s bemusement at the open “breach and defiance of the written electoral law,” he noted that such practices of electoral fraud were “to some extent made necessary by the ignorance of the majority” and suggested that the country would be better served by an electoral

⁶⁷ Amara Consulate, Report for Period Ending August 21, 1941, FO 838/1.

⁶⁸ Basra Consulate to British Embassy, February 4, 1947, FO 838/4.

⁶⁹ Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 91.

⁷⁰ Amara Consulate, General Report, August 31, 1942, FO 838/2.

⁷¹ Amara Consulate, General Report, August 7, 1942, FO 838/2.

⁷² Amara Consulate, Report for the Month of February 1949, FO 838/8.

law “not produced in the abstract from the ideal of democracy but shaped from the tested basis of the living facts of education, developments, and the requirements of the people.” His chief complaint was not the betrayal of democratic ideals but rather the open betrayal of electoral law, which he feared would only inhibit the government’s ability to enforce the rule of law in other arenas. When the governor of ‘Amarah declared that Iraqi elections “were free of course, free as they had ever been before” at a local meeting of the Brotherhood of Freedom, an organization ostensibly devoted to the cultivation of democratic ideals, the gathered shaykhs and notables erupted in laughter and applause.⁷³

In the southern provinces of ‘Amarah and the Muntafiq, the collusion of the British Embassy, the national political elite, and the rural shaykhs in the electoral process caused a sharp reduction in the number of non-tribal parliamentary deputies.⁷⁴ Both British officials and the national political elite somehow managed to convince themselves that this delegation of power and authority to the shaykhs was a necessary element of political reform. Patriarchal conceptions of the authority of tribal shaykhs led urban politicians and foreign officials to conclude that tribal peasants would invariably back their own shaykhs in free and fair elections. The fact that the rural tribes, defined in the broadest possible sense, constituted a demographic majority of the national population meant that true democracy would inevitably produce a tribal dictatorship. By carefully dividing secondary electors in the rural provinces between the loyal sirkals nominated by the most prominent shaykhs and the urban notables nominated by provincial governors, the central government could insure an equitable division of power between the cities and the tribes. This reduction of peasant politics to tribal hierarchies thereby served as justification for the denial of democracy in the interests of assuring the administration of “progressive” governance.⁷⁵

This conception of the empowerment of landowning shaykhs in national politics as a progressive political reform was echoed at the local level, where tribal policies that consolidated land ownership in the hands of the most prominent shaykhs were seen as necessary initiatives to promote general economic welfare by introducing a measure of political and financial stability. Ignoring the historical evidence that pointed to the startling enrichment of the major shaykhs

⁷³ Amara Consulate, General Report, September 25, 1943, FO 838/2.

⁷⁴ Amara Consulate, Report for the Month of December 1946, FO 838/3 and Report for the Month of February 1947, FO 838/5.

⁷⁵ Amara Consulate, General Report, September 25 1943, FO 838/2.

since the dawn of the colonial era, British officials viewed tribal policy in the post-mandatory period as part of an historical continuum of enlightened colonial practices and policies designed to balance the interests of rival shaykhs and to support peasant claims to the land. As one British official argued, if local peasants failed to appreciate the material benefits of these efforts to construct “a new order of things,” it was due to the “fatuous” inability of local officials to properly articulate and publicize the aims of those policies.⁷⁶ The complaints of provincial officials that constant British interference in local and tribal matters was functioning as a pretext for a national “policy of stagnation” were likewise dismissed by British officials, who contended that they merely offered advice and carefully refrained from infringing on national sovereignty.⁷⁷

The rise of mass political protests in Baghdad and other urban areas in response to the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty signed at Portsmouth in January 1948 only strengthened the alliance between Britain, Nuri al-Sa‘id, and the shaykhs. While some British officials expressed concern about the long-term danger of maintaining an alliance with “the protagonists of reaction” and contemplated the idea of a “moderate” political reform party, the need for reliable parliamentary votes precluded the immediate adoption of such a scheme.⁷⁸ Both tribal shaykhs and the urban political elite rejected the prospect of any alliance with the “new blood” of the reformists “with a steadfastness which would be laudable if it were not so stupid.”⁷⁹ Leading tribal shaykhs assured the British Embassy that they were deeply embarrassed by the nationalist opposition and averred that “whichever was good enough for His Majesty’s Government was good enough for them.” Some shaykhs even privately offered to rally their tribes and march on Baghdad to crush the protestors.⁸⁰ When new elections were conducted in June 1948, the landed shaykhs and government officials demonstrated a notably greater level of cooperation and coordination that reflected a shared interest in maintaining the old political regime. The shaykhs sought out local governors “for fatherly advice” on which of them was most deserving of political office and began to contemplate the prospect of modern education for their sons so that they could participate in parliamentary debates.⁸¹

⁷⁶ Amara Consulate, General Report, August 23, 1942, FO 838/2.

⁷⁷ Amara Consulate, General Report, September 25, 1943, FO 838/2.

⁷⁸ Bernard Burrows to Henry Mack, March 23, 1948, FO 371/68447 E 3894/27/93.

⁷⁹ Douglas Busk to Foreign Office, April 5, 1948, FO 371/68448 E 4592/27/93.

⁸⁰ Amara Consulate, Report for the Month of January 1948, FO 838/7 and Henry Mack to Foreign Office, March 29, 1948, FO 371/68448 E 4291/27/93.

⁸¹ Amara Consulate, Report for the Month of June 1948, FO 838/7.

Peasant dissatisfaction with the rule of the tribal shaykhs, though, was by this point undeniable and forced British officials to reevaluate their own role in hindering the progress and development of the tribes. After noting that the vast majority of tribesmen lived and worked “in conditions which cannot be very different from those which obtained a century ago,” one British official surmised that colonial patronage and the preservation of the *iltizam* system had combined to preserve an antiquated social order.⁸² That antiquated social order, though, was sustained not only by feudal policies but also by policies that enforced a rigid cultural isolation between tribes and towns.

Ideologies of Cultural Space: The Segregation of the Tribal Sphere

Tribal policy in the post-war period was increasingly marked by an overarching opposition to the assimilation of tribal and national politics. As tensions between tribal cultivators and landowning shaykhs increased, both the British Embassy and the nation political elite took concrete steps to prevent the spread of subversive political ideologies among the peasantry. In addition to ending the cooperation between the erstwhile rebel shaykhs and the nationalist political parties and delegating electoral authority to the landed shaykhs, government authorities now moved to prevent the integration of subaltern tribal and urban political currents by restricting rural access to urban newspapers and crafting a new rural educational curriculum that minimized potentially subversive subjects like poetry and history. These processes coincided with a notable reorientation of political and intellectual interest in the rural tribes as prominent nationalist poets based in and around Najaf moved to Baghdad to participate in the new arenas of mass politics.⁸³ Intellectual trends in the post-war period illustrated the stark reality of the new cultural isolation of the countryside as intellectual engagement with tribes and peasants was transformed into an intellectual discourse about the rural problem.⁸⁴

The impetus to segregate tribal and urban cultural spheres was a crucial element of British colonial policy, as Toby Dodge has shown in great detail.⁸⁵ This impetus, however, was aided in a crucial respect by the efforts of many urban Iraqi intellectuals, whose scarcely veiled

⁸² D.J.D. Maitland to Henry Mack, April 14, 1950, FO 838/9.

⁸³ On the historical significance of daily interactions between the Najafi poets and the peasants of the Euphrates valley, see ‘Izz al-Din, *Poetry and Iraqi Society*, 33-39.

⁸⁴ Orit Bashkin’s analysis of Iraqi intellectual discourse illustrates the extent to which post-war developments shaped a more academic and distant intellectual construction of tribal peasants as political subjects. Bashkin, *The Other Iraq*, 194-228.

⁸⁵ See Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, 63-82.

contempt for tribal ignorance and backwardness served to undermine their stated goal of rural reform. These intellectual and literary constructions of tribal and rural space as ignorant and backward contributed to the further alienation of not only rural peasants and tribal leaders, but in fact the alienation of many peasants from rural society in general. At the same time that compulsory education and literacy were expanding across the countryside, the national cultural discourse was being transformed to promote an increasingly urbanized vision of national community where tribal and peasant issues were framed as problem and pathologies to be disciplined and reformed. While novelists and short story writers like Dhu al-Nun Ayyub, ‘Abd al-Majid Lufti, ‘Abd al-Malik Nuri, and Mahmud Ahmad al-Sayyid showed considerable sympathy for peasant trials and tribulations in dealing with these problems, their narratives nevertheless contributed to the growing construction of rural society as social pathology.⁸⁶ Orit Bashkin has noted the angst and ambivalence of so many of these young intellectuals - and particularly those hailing from rural backgrounds - towards the backwardness of rural society and callousness of the city.⁸⁷ Unmistakable here, though, is the fact that these intellectuals never returned to their villages and that while the city may have been constructed as an unfulfilled promise, the village always remained a corrupted and bygone utopia. It was no wonder, then, that many rural peasants came to see the city as their future.

The initial impetus to “protect” tribal cultivators from the subversive influence of nationalist politics emerged in conjunction with the popularization of “communism” as a pejorative label collectively affixed to the ideologically diverse political parties. As one British official in ‘Amarah noted, “It appears that anybody lables [sic] any one whom he does not like as a Communist.” Noting that the southern tribes were predominately Shi‘a and that the leaders of the opposition parties were largely Sunni, the official conjectured that local shaykhs were taking advantage of sectarian tensions by spreading rumors “that Karl Marx is of greater importance than Muhammad” to the urban intellectuals.⁸⁸ Intelligence reports indicated that the nationalist parties continued to court the shaykhs with attacks on British support for Zionism and that the leftist parties sought to build support among local peasants “along the usual Communistic

⁸⁶ Dhu al-Nun Ayyub, *al-Athar al-Kamilah li Athar Dhu al-Nun Ayyub* (Baghdad: Wizarat al-I‘lam, 1978), ‘Abd al-Majid Lufti, *Qalb Umm* (Baghdad: Matba‘at al-Sabah, 1944), ‘Abd al-Malik Nuri, *Nashid al-Ard* (Baghdad: Dar al-Shu‘un al-Thaqafiyah al-‘Ammah, 1954), and Mahmud Ahmad al-Sayyid, *al-A‘mal al-Kamilah li Mahmud Ahmad al-Sayyid* (Baghdad: Dar al-Hurriyah, 1978).

⁸⁷ Bashkin, *The Other Iraq*, 222-28.

⁸⁸ Amara Consulate to Basra Consulate, July 17, 1946, FO 838/3.

lines.”⁸⁹ The Iraqi Communist Party eventually gained a small but significant degree of peasant support, but the local shaykhs never demonstrated serious interest in the events in Palestine. When the opposition parties organized an Anti-Zionist national strike on May 10, 1946, several prominent shaykhs visited the British Consulate at ‘Amarah and “expressed bewilderment at the British Government ‘permitting’ this anti-British demonstration.”⁹⁰ Fueled by fear of the rising political activism and steadfast opposition to proposed land reforms, the shaykhs proved instrumental in arranging for the liberal administration of Tawfiq al-Suwaydi to be replaced by the reactionary stalwart Arshad al-‘Umari.⁹¹ When the crisis in Palestine reached its fever pitch at the end of 1947, several prominent shaykhs were forced, “much to their disgust,” to serve on national anti-Zionist committees, but most privately assured British officials that they would do nothing except pay “some lip service” to the nationalist cause.⁹²

As political and technological modernization facilitated the spread of ideas and institutions in the rural south, local officials and notables were forced to grapple with new realities of political awareness that extended beyond the domain of elite politics. The Public Relations Reading Rooms established during the war by Freya Stark and the Brotherhood of Freedom in order to distribute propaganda “which had a steadying effect on the populace” and to function as a “rallying point for the pro-British elements who in turn influenced large sections of the people” emerged as a potent target for both pro-British and anti-British forces in the post-war period.⁹³ The British Embassy chose not to host the Reading Rooms at the local consulates in order to dispel suspicions that the cultural institutions were part of a coordinated political policy and to address concerns that many in the targeted population would prove unwilling to be publicly seen frequenting consulate grounds.⁹⁴ The local population, though, initially viewed the Reading Rooms as scarcely disguised British spy outposts, leading one friendly shaykh to warn consular officials that espionage should be conducted more discreetly.⁹⁵

As the local population grew more accustomed to presence of the Reading Rooms and more convinced that they were not functioning as bases for espionage, concern shifted towards

⁸⁹ Amara Consulate to Basra Consulate, July 17, 1946 and November 5, 1946, FO 838/3.

⁹⁰ Amara Consulate to Basra Consulate, June 8, 1946, FO 838/3.

⁹¹ Amara Consulate to Basra Consulate, June 29, 1946 and November 5, 1946, FO 838/3.

⁹² Amara Consulate to Baghdad Embassy, September 8, 1947 and November 1, 1947, FO 838/4.

⁹³ Baghdad Embassy to Amara Consulate, April 1, 1947, FO 838/4.

⁹⁴ Baghdad Embassy to Basra Consulate, April 28, 1947 and Basra Consulate to Amara Consulate, May 3, 1947, FO 838/4.

⁹⁵ Amara Consulate to Basra Consulate, November 7, 1946, FO 838/3.

the content of the reading material made available. British officials in 'Amarah, Nasiriyah, and the Muntafiq complained about the presence of "anti-British" newspapers published in Baghdad. One official noted that local students who frequented the Reading Rooms only appeared interested in the nationalist and anti-colonial politics of Baghdad and warned that Britain was unwittingly aiding the corruption of rural youth by providing them access to inflammatory reading material. He suggested replacing the popular nationalist papers with pro-British journals and attaching all newspaper to stands positioned in the middle of the room as a disciplinary measure: "One of the advantages here would be that the reader could not take a paper, sit in a chair and go to sleep." Other British officials concluded that the political threat posed by literacy campaigns was too great and turned instead toward mobile cinema, which could be controlled much more effectively, as the dominant mode of public propaganda.⁹⁶ Attendance dropped markedly after the changes were introduced and students attacked the local buildings with homemade fire bombs in several locations.⁹⁷ By May 1949, the British Consul at 'Amarah suggested closing down all of the local Reading Rooms, noting that "they do us much more harm than good." He warned that the Reading Rooms in the countryside were frequented by "young fellows" who "appear to be much more unfriendly to the British than the vast majority one meets casually on the roads and elsewhere." Efforts to educate the local population, he argued, could only be truly effective under war conditions, "when propaganda is much more affectively [sic] controlled." He noted, furthermore, that local Communists tended to frequent the Reading Rooms when they came under suspicion from the government in order to throw local officials off their trail.⁹⁸

The events of the *Wathbah* sparked new fears among British officials stationed in the rural south where they observed a "great fundamental change in the political attitude" of the peasants. Long dismissed as mere pawns of the landowning shaykhs, the peasants had now become "politically conscious" and the spread of communism in the countryside was regarded as a serious threat to the political stability of the Anglo-Iraqi alliance.⁹⁹ While street protests raged in Baghdad, schoolchildren and peasants in Nasiriyah organized huge demonstrations to protest Lieutenant-Colonel Berkeley's tour of the tribal regions. Shaykh Zamil al-Manna' of the Ajwad,

⁹⁶ Baghdad Embassy to Amara Consulate, April 1, 1947, FO 838/4.

⁹⁷ Basra Consulate to Amara Consulate, March 10, 1948, FO 838/6.

⁹⁸ Amara Consulate, Report for the Month of May 1949, FO 838/8.

⁹⁹ Amara Consulate, Report for the Month of June 1948, FO 838/7.

who was in Baghdad at the time, later apologized privately to Berkley for the actions of “the ignorant children” and assuring him that he would have “taught them a good lesson” if he had been present.¹⁰⁰ Nearly every major nationalist newspaper wrote in support of the children’s demonstration against the influence of imperialists on “the weak spirits of the tribal chiefs.”¹⁰¹ The crowds, which included hundred of peasant sharecroppers, impoverished workers, disgruntled students, and nearly one hundred local women, chanted against colonialism, capitalism, and feudalism and denounced both British officials and prominent local shaykhs by name. More worrying to British officials was the fact that many reportedly chanted in support of communism and the Soviet Union. Frightened American officials at ‘Amarah requested an armed police guard and (inaccurate) local rumors quickly spread that the British Consul had fled the area in fear of the crowds.¹⁰² British officials at the ‘Amarah Consulate were likewise impressed by British Embassy reports that huge numbers of peasant migrants played a significant role in the mass uprisings that rocked the capital.¹⁰³

Peasant protests continued even after the suppression of street protests in the urban centers as the convocation of new elections prompted the disenfranchised rural masses to demand their right to vote. At one polling station in ‘Amarah, police sought to suppress voter turnout by drawing up the bridge that the local inhabitants used to cross the Chahala creek on their way to town. Only after securing the support of local students and the prominent leftwing lawyer ‘Abd al-Razzaq al-Zubayr were the peasants able to put together a crowd large enough to force the police to open the bridge, and the ensuing struggle outside of the station claimed the life of one peasant. Local intelligence reports claimed that ‘Abd al-Razzaq’s popularity among the local peasants was drawn from the fact that he had already privately drawn up plans for the redistribution of the large estates to the landless peasants.¹⁰⁴

British officials concluded that the expansion of education without concurrent modernization had produced a new class of disaffected youth alienated from agrarian traditions and increasingly drawn to the radical politics of the Iraqi Communist Party, which had now

¹⁰⁰ Amara Consulate, Report for the Month of March, 1948 and Zamil al-Manna’ to Lt. Col. Berkeley, n.d., FO 838/7.

¹⁰¹ *Al-Ahali*, March 4, 1948, *al-Salam*, March 7, 1948 and March 16, 1948, *al-Watan*, March 10, 1948, *al-Ra’i al-‘Amm*, March 16, 1948, *al-Istiqlal*, March 20, 1948, *al-Wadi*, March 20, 1948, and *al-Watan*, March 25, 1948.

¹⁰² Amara Consulate, Report for the Month of February, 1948, FO 838/7.

¹⁰³ Amara Consulate, Report for the Month of June 1948, FO 838/7.

¹⁰⁴ Though British sources identify ‘Abd al-Razzaq as a Communist, he was then head of the local branch of the NDP. Amara Consulate, Report for the Month of February 1948 and Report for the Month of May 1948, FO 838/7.

gained “a firm hold” in several rural districts.¹⁰⁵ As they turned their attention for the first time in decades to the economic problems of peasant life, British officials found that any reform initiatives were blocked by suspicious local officials. Provincial governors warned British officials on numerous occasions, either explicitly or implicitly, that they were not permitted to visit the tribes without prior authorization.¹⁰⁶ The landowning shaykhs, on the other hand, were too closely associated with Britain to propose any reforms without provoking allegations of foreign conspiracy. One British official concluded that efforts to spread propaganda among the tribes were “pointless” and noted that “the tribes are all with us and our great difficulty is to avoid making officials jealous of our friendship with them.”¹⁰⁷ Another official worried that the shaykhs’ relations with British officials “have been so friendly that they amount to treachery” in their total repudiation of local authority.¹⁰⁸ Lacking faith in both the local shaykhs’ commitment to reform and the central government’s competence to properly institute economic reform, British officials now saw the creation of an independent development board staffed with British and American economists as the only real solution to the rural problem.

Developing the Slums of Baghdad: Economic Development and Mass Migration

Agrarian Problems and Theories of Economic Development

The spread of Communist influence and agrarian unrest across the tribal south in the late 1940s forced British officials to reassess the historical legacy of colonial land reform and to explore new paths of economic reform that could simultaneously address peasant grievances and preserve the now crucial political alliance with the landowning shaykhs. British officials, convinced that the economic injustices of the entrenched social order had driven pre-war support for fascism, had begun to urge serious structural reforms immediately following the resumption of military occupation. The rising popularity of the Iraqi Communist Party during the war years only confirmed the impression that serious reforms were necessary to forestall further political radicalization. British pressure on ‘Abd al-Ilah and Nuri al-Sa‘id helped to ensure the rise to power of successive liberal administrations led by Hamdi al-Pachachi and Tawfiq al-Suwaydi. While the liberals’ halfhearted commitment to serious economic reform was effectively blocked

¹⁰⁵ Amara Consulate, Report for the Month of June 1948 and Report for the Month of October 1948, FO 838/7.

¹⁰⁶ One British report admitted that local officials were now fully aware that the tribal shaykhs would “say nasty things about them which will be reported to Baghdad.” Amara Consulate to British Embassy, April 29, 1947, FO 838/4 and Amara Consulate to Basra Consulate, December 9, 1947, FO 838/5.

¹⁰⁷ British Embassy to Amara Consulate, March 22, 1947, FO 838/4.

¹⁰⁸ Amara Consulate, Report for the Month of February 1950, FO 838/10.

by the parliamentary opposition of conservative shaykhs with vested interests in preserving the semi-feudal structures of rural power, Pachachi did manage to secure the passage of the Miri Sirf Development Law.¹⁰⁹ The measure, which provided for the distribution of state land on the Dujayla settlement project to small farmers, would serve as the historical model for virtually all official development proposals over the coming decade.

The Dujayla settlement scheme, though, was severely limited in scope and barely one thousand farmers had been settled on project lands by 1950. Conservative opposition blocked any effort to expand the project in other rural areas and effectively stalled the political impetus for land reform. Forced to admit that soil fertility and agricultural production had dramatically declined since the end of Ottoman rule, British officials initially concluded that the root of the agrarian problem was the fundamental instability of land tenure and the discouraging prospects for capital investment. As one official report asked:

Who, on a three or five year lease granted by a known fickle and hostile [government], is going to spend money – dream and imagine, conceive and construct, beautify and fulfil [sic] the possibilities of the soil? It is a thousand times worse than the old disaster of entailed land in England.¹¹⁰

Land leases were renewed in the middle of the harvest season, when the central government's leverage over the landholders was at its peak.¹¹¹ While some political administrations adopted lax attitudes in collecting land revenue in order to curry favor with the shaykhs, others moved quickly to arrest and imprison indebted leaseholders.¹¹² Government pressure on the shaykhs led some to confiscate the entire tribal harvest, in addition to the tribe's buffaloes and even the women's jewelry, in order to avoid imprisonment.¹¹³ Structural deficiencies of rendered the shaykhs both victims and villains:

The result of this practice is that because of insecurity of tenure not only are no improvements made to the land but also that in their hundreds cultivators flee... The shaikhs of Amarah should be very wealthy people but because of their

¹⁰⁹ Matthew Elliot, *'Independent Iraq': The Monarchy and British Influence, 1941-1958* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996), 51-55 and Joseph Sassoon, *Economic Policy in Iraq, 1932-1950* (London: Frank Cass, 1987), 171-74.

¹¹⁰ Amara Consulate, General Report, August 23, 1942, FO 838/2.

¹¹¹ Amara Consulate, General Report, November 12, 1942, FO 838/2.

¹¹² Amara Consulate, General Report, May 1947, FO 838/5.

¹¹³ Amara Consulate, Report for the Month of November 1948, FO 838/7.

mismanagement and extravagance practically all are heavily in debt privately and to the government.¹¹⁴

Without assurances that leases would be renewed by future administrations, landholders made little effort was made to improve the quality of soil and entirely abandoned crop rotation.¹¹⁵

The general instability of land tenure, British officials noted, was exacerbated by both official corruption and populist sympathies and inclinations. The necessity of continual lease renewal encouraged local officials to demand bribes from the landholding shaykhs, which siphoned off sizeable chunks of agricultural profits and further depressed peasant wages.¹¹⁶ An initial attempt at land reform promised to redistribute land to peasant sharecroppers by forcing leaseholders to either pay full taxes on the uncultivated portions of their lease holdings or to renounce their claims to the land. As the British Consul at 'Amarah noted, however, the only plots of land actually renounced lacked access to irrigation: "If land was of no use to a shaikh who could command capital, it would be useless to a man with no capital at all."¹¹⁷ On the other hand, government confiscation and redistribution of large estates enjoyed considerable popularity, not only from the standpoint of the rival landowners who benefitted from the policy shifts but also among the poor peasants and small landowners who were "always ready to applaud the detachment of wealth or its engines from any too favored individual." This populist attitude, fueled by resentment at the growing disparities of wealth during the war years, only further encouraged new administrations to shore up flagging popular support with redistributive maneuvers that pitted rival tribal shaykhs against one another.¹¹⁸ Any lasting land reform initiative, British officials concluded, would have to come from within an independent institution subject to neither the tumultuous politics of the national scene nor the corrupt inclinations of local officials.

Concerted British pressure on influential Iraqi allies finally achieved firm commitments to the establishment of an Economic Development Board that could plan and implement a coordinated agenda of economic development and reform. The Development Board was officially approved by the liberal Prime Minister Tawfiq al-Suwaydi in April 1950 and began

¹¹⁴ Amara Consulate, Report for the Month of June 1948, FO 838/7.

¹¹⁵ Amara Consulate, General Report, May 1, 1943, FO 838/2.

¹¹⁶ Amara Consulate to Basra Consulate, June 8, 1946, FO 838/3.

¹¹⁷ Amara Consulate, Report for the Month of March 1949, FO 838/8.

¹¹⁸ Amara Consulate, General Report, January 10, 1943, FO 838/2.

work by the beginning of the following year.¹¹⁹ The tremendous economic impact of the Development Board over the course of the 1950s was shaped by three crucial factors. First, the political independence of the Development Board, ostensibly designed to insulate the development agenda from the conservative opposition of landed political interests, also ensured that development initiatives would remain overly determined by macroeconomic fixations on growth and productivity and relatively immune to social critiques of impact of development on the peasantry. Second, the allocation of the entirety of oil revenues – later reduced to seventy percent – to the Development Board at a time when oil production was dramatically increasing and the renegotiation of oil contracts provided the Iraqi government with a significantly greater proportion of oil revenues rendered financial concerns virtually irrelevant and allowed the Development Board to pursue extravagant initiatives designed to radically alter the productive capabilities of the Iraqi economy. Third, the remarkable decision to offer two of the six seats on the Development Board to British and American economic advisors “whose judgment would be unaffected by local political considerations” meant that the Western powers enjoyed unprecedented latitude and informal power over the entire national economy.¹²⁰ These factors both ensured that economic development would leave a measurable impact on the lives of virtually every participant in the national economy and that Britain and the United States would be held publicly responsible for that impact.

An additional, often overlooked, implication of the establishment of the Development Board was the impact of rising American influence in economic policy. American interest and influence in Iraq, as in other areas of the Middle East, progressed in a somewhat contradictory manner over the course of the 1940s due to the simultaneous decline of the British Empire and emergence of the Anglo-American Cold War alliance. At the same time that American rhetorical support for national sovereignty was subordinated to the more pragmatic commitment to supporting British interests in the region, the British imperial retreat forced the United States to take on an ever greater role in the region.¹²¹ While American officials in Iraq in the early 1950s

¹¹⁹ On the political context of the Development Board, see Matthew Elliot, *‘Independent Iraq’: The Monarchy and British Influence, 1941-1958* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996), 30-36 and Paul W.T. Kingston, *Britain and the Politics of Modernization in the Middle East, 1945-1958* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 94-122.

¹²⁰ Edward S. Crocker to Department of State, September 11, 1950, USDS 887.00/9-1150.

¹²¹ William Roger Louis, *Imperialism at Bay, 1941-1945: The United States and the Decolonization of the British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) and *The British Empire in the Middle East, 1945-1951: Arab Nationalism, the United States, and Postwar Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

were committed to supporting British policy and generally uninterested in advancing American interests at Britain's expense, they were also encouraged to adopt a more vocal and active role in support of the Anglo-Iraqi alliance.¹²² American officials evinced a markedly more ambitious approach to economic development than their British counterparts, with one official confidently declaring that the development program in Iraq would "have influence on land reform and related programs throughout this area, and, indeed, throughout the world." Conversely, American officials insisted on differentiating their own assistance from colonial interventions by asserting the "firm policy of not placing American personnel in operating posts." This policy reflected the capitalist mantras that "development is a state of mind" and that foreign assistance should not constitute financial aid but rather "a program of can-do and know-how" that emphasized "the effectiveness of technical assistance and of the flow of private capital."¹²³ It also ensured that development initiatives would remain uncoordinated and sometimes contradictory as American advice was adapted to suit the needs of interested Iraqi parties.

American diplomatic officials and economic advisors looked to local informants to explain the cultural roots of rural poverty and agricultural inefficiency and to point out viable paths forward. 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Hilali's *Theories of Rural Reform* made a particularly strong impression on American officials, who had the book's core arguments translated and distributed to American economic experts employed by the Point IV mission.¹²⁴ Hilali advocated the development of a specialized rural educational curriculum and called for increased efforts to win over the shaykhs in supporting rural education by argument rather than coercion. He urged the creation of a Rural Board to organize communal life in the countryside as a separate culture sphere complete with its own local newspaper, rural radio station, and specialized entertainment. Most importantly, his plan for solving the land problem likewise rejected redistribution and

¹²² Historians interested in the diplomatic interplay between Britain, the United States, and Iraq have tended to accept the declared American interest in supporting British policy at face value and concluded from the generally dismissive remarks about American influence found in British archival sources that U.S. activities were of little historical importance. Frederick W. Axelgard, "US Support for the British Position in Pre-Revolutionary Iraq," in *the Iraqi Revolution of 1958: The Old Social Classes Revisited*, edited by Robert A. Fernea and William Roger Louis (London: I.B. Tauris, 1991), 72-94, Paul W.T. Kingston, *Britain and the Politics of Modernization in the Middle East, 1945-1958* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 94-122, and Nicholas G. Thacher, "Reflections on US Foreign Policy Towards Iraq in the 1950s," in *the Iraqi Revolution of 1958: The Old Social Classes Revisited*, edited by Robert A. Fernea and William Roger Louis (London: I.B. Tauris, 1991), 62-76.

¹²³ TCA Mission to Iraq, Budget for Fiscal Year 1954, August 1952, USDS 887.00-TA/8-2252.

¹²⁴ 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Hilali, *Nazarat fi Islah al-Rif* (Beirut: Dar al-Khashshaf, 1950) and E. Paul Tenney to Department of State, October 19, 1950, USDS 887.20/10-1950.

instead proposed the expansion of the Miri Sirf Land Development program as a market-based initiative to improve the peasant economic position. Far more than their British counterparts, who complained that the land settlement project was an economically inefficient “socially motivated policy,”¹²⁵ American officials came to see the program as a panacea for the rural problem: “If successfully carried out, this land settlement program will be the pilot flame from which the great fire of social and economic reform will be ignited consuming the tangled jungle of poverty, ill health, ignorance, insecurity, and stagnation which is now so firmly rooted in the Middle East.”¹²⁶

Circumscribing Rural Reform: Education, Reclamation, and Settlement

The Development Board’s first five year budget allocated over half of all revenue for agricultural development, with most of those funds earmarked for the Habbaniyah and Wadi Tharthar flood control and irrigation schemes recommended by British advisor F.F. Haigh¹²⁷ Haigh outlined a fifty year program to double the irrigated land area of the country and facilitate the conversion of peasant sharecroppers into small landowners.¹²⁸ Economic experts from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development argued that Haigh’s estimates were actually conservative, for the total area of cultivable land was well over twice the area of land presently cultivated. The reclamation and distribution of cultivable land was essential to alleviate the adverse social consequences of agricultural mechanization, which IBRD experts predicted would increase crop yields by nearly fifty percent but might displace thousands of peasant sharecroppers in the process. The IBRD declaration that its fundamental aim was “to increase production and standards of living and to diffuse the benefits therefrom as widely as possible among all classes and sections of the country” underscored this dual agenda of rural development. Foreign economists predicted that coordinated mechanization and reclamation efforts would simultaneously increase productivity and economic growth while dramatically

¹²⁵ Paul W.T. Kingston, *Britain and the Politics of Modernization in the Middle East, 1945-1958* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 104-5.

¹²⁶ TCA Mission to Iraq, Budget for Fiscal Year 1954, August 1952, USDS 887.00-TA/8-2252.

¹²⁷ General Programme of the Schemes of the Development Board, FO 371/91645 EQ 1106/1 and Draft Law of the General Programme of the Development Board Projects, FO 371/91645 EQ 106/2.

¹²⁸ Notes on Economic Development in Iraq, February 20, 1951, FO 371/91647 EQ 1112/2.

increasing peasant bargaining power by reducing the supply of cheap agricultural labor with the creation of a local class of small landowners.¹²⁹

The success of this agenda was contingent upon the actual reclamation and redistribution of land to the peasants. Salih Jabr convinced the American economist Dr. Ross Moore, who visited Iraq in February 1950 to explore the opportunities for Point IV intervention, that the introduction of a small land tax would supplement the settlement projects by forcing landowners to renounce their claims to vast tracts of uncultivated land.¹³⁰ ‘Abd al-Jabbar al-Chalabi likewise argued that land reform rooted in an expansion of the Dujayla settlement scheme could effectively circumvent the political opposition of the landed shaykhs. Chalabi explained that market strategies could definitively solve the rural problem:

“As an increasing number of landless cultivators are settled on newly-developed government land, farm labor will become scarce, and the tribal sheikhs (and urban landowners) will have to compete for it. They will thus ultimately be forced to offer better conditions to the farmers cultivating their land, and may, in the interests of self-preservation, become sympathetic to the introduction of health and social welfare measures among their tribesmen.”¹³¹

If, however, landowners managed to acquire titles to reclaimed land, the concurrent mechanization of agricultural labor would further depress peasant economic conditions. IBRD experts were well aware that prior land settlement initiatives had been exploited by the shaykhs and used to consolidate control over vast tracts of cultivable land but remained confident that the Miri Sirf Lands Development Law of 1951 would avoid a similar fate. They pointed to the Dujayla program, where peasant settlers were “conscious of their new-won independence and dignity,” as evidence of political responsibility and a precedent for future endeavors. Despite the shared belief that peasant welfare could be most effectively improved by abolishing feudal

¹²⁹ Confidential Draft of the Summary Findings and Recommendations of a Mission sponsored by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development in collaboration with the Iraqi Government, August 16, 1951, FO 371/91648 EQ 1112/11.

¹³⁰ Francis O. Allen, Memorandum on Point IV Discussion between Salih Jabr and Ross Moore, February 28, 1950, USDS 887.00 TA/2-2750.

¹³¹ Francis O. Allen, Memorandum of Conversations Regarding Point IV Program in Iraq, July 31, 1950, USDS 887.00-TA/7-3150

conditions, this confidence led development experts to pursue a short-term agenda that relied on market reforms to induce landowning shaykhs to improve peasant working conditions.¹³²

American officials privately expressed an interest in radical reforms to the land tenure system that would encourage independent initiative. One American official responded incredulously to the feudal conditions stipulated by the land tenure law of 1933: “This law has to be read for one to believe that such a burden could be actually imposed upon the cultivators of the land by a modern government in the year 1933.”¹³³ Subsequent conversations with British officials and Iraqi politicians, however, tended to affirm the necessity of maintaining the political independence and privileged social status of the tribal shaykhs. American experts employed through the Technical Cooperation Administration embraced the pilot projects of peasant resettlement on reclaimed state land as the logical solution to the impasse, noting that the projects would avoid a destabilizing confrontation with vested political interests while still ameliorating economic exploitation through “the example that they set to nearby landowners.”¹³⁴ The fact that new laws prohibited the renewal of land leases meant that “it will only be a matter of three or four years until there are millions of acres of miri sirf land occupied by cultivators under no tenancy rights.”¹³⁵ For many American experts, the program’s success was virtually insured by the fortuitous convergence of the surplus land, plentiful cash and credit, a pro-Western political elite, and American technical expertise.

The land settlement schemes, however, proved far more difficult to implement than the foreign experts who endorsed them had reckoned. The Development Board’s obsession with capital intensive projects meant that while the reclamation of cultivable land for provisional settlement projects was the ostensible goal of the major irrigation schemes, board members tended to lose interest in the actual project of organizing settlement colonies. The Iraqi government was eventually convinced to establish a Ministry of Agriculture in the summer of 1952 to address this problem, but in early years well over half of the ministry’s substantial budget was tied up in interminable research and survey projects that provided steady jobs to

¹³² Confidential Draft of the Summary Findings and Recommendations of a Mission sponsored by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development in collaboration with the Iraqi Government, August 16, 1951, FO 371/91648 EQ 1112/11.

¹³³ TCA/Iraq Report, "Land Reform in Iraq: Needs, Sentiments, Actions and Point IV Implications," May 26, 1953, USDS 887.16/5-2853.

¹³⁴ Economic Review of Iraq for 1952, January 3, 1953, USDS 887.00/1-353.

¹³⁵ Lewis H. Rohrbaugh, "TCA/Iraq Monthly Operations Report for December 1952," January 17, 1953, USDS 887.00-TA/1-1753.

foreign development experts but little else.¹³⁶ In many areas, land surveys served primarily to line the pockets of governmental officials, as surveyors were instructed to map land in a confusing and imprecise manner that would encourage disputes and private settlements. The surveyors were paid salaries far below subsistence wages and expected to satisfy their financial needs by soliciting bribes from landholders.¹³⁷ Most of the early settlement projects were located beyond the reach of irrigation, and as one American official noted, agrarian history “affords no instances of successful settlement of dry farming lands on a small holdings basis... Trends in dry land farming areas are toward mechanization, larger holdings, and reduced labor intensity.” The current settlement projects, he concluded, were “likely to lead to a discrediting of settlement projects in general at about the time when planned irrigation projects are completed and newly irrigated lands are available for settlement programs.”¹³⁸

When TCA officials finally visited the Dujayla project in July 1953, nearly three years after deciding that the project constituted an effective model for the entire development program, their confidence was shattered. The agricultural cooperative was a total failure, as retired civil servants used their political connections to monopolize access to communal tractors and the bulk of the cooperative dues had been embezzled by the appointed directors. The establishment of homesteads on individual plots signified a radical departure from the traditional patterns of communal life in southern Iraq and made the provision of potable water and electricity virtually impossible. Virtually all of the settlers were in debt to the local merchants in Kut and many had “assumed the habitual attitudes of the landlords they so recently despised” by hiring an “assistant farmer” and utilizing the labor of his children and those of migratory families to farm the land. High levels of soil salination led to the abandonment of a significant number of plots that lacked access to drainage canals. TCA officials were forced to conclude that “the Dujaila settlement project after eight years of operation is thus by no means the prototype for future attempts to solve Iraq’s land tenure problems.” Despite the fact that the subcontracting of labor was primarily confined to the retired civil servants, TCA officials concluded that “peasants were

¹³⁶ Economic Summary for the Third Quarter of 1953, USDS 887.00/11-753.

¹³⁷ Amara Consulate to British Embassy, January 25, 1951, FO 838/13.

¹³⁸ Lewis H. Rohrbaugh, "TCA Monthly Operations Report for October 1952," December 16, 1952, USDS 887.00-TA/12-1652.

more interested in becoming landlords or petty shaikhs than small farmers” and returned to the mantra that “development is a state of mind” by deciding to focus more attention on education.¹³⁹

The situation on the new settlement projects at Sinjar, Sharazoor, and Hawija was perhaps even worse. Many of the new plots were merely demarcated with plow furrows and assigned to a roster of applicants approved by the Council of Ministers. The irrigation canals and wells essential had not yet been dug, and in some cases ground water exploration had not even begun. On many of the settlements, the decision to distribute land before providing proper irrigation left hundreds of displaced peasants with access to land but no viable means of growing crops. In other cases, drainage problems caused a dramatic increase in soil salination levels and left huge tracts of land uncultivable. Just as problematic was the fact that settlers were selected through a political process that earmarked a significant percentage of plots for civil servants and religious figures, who secured better plots than peasant applicants. One TCA official complained that settlers would be stranded “without irrigation or drinking water for human and animal consumption, without housing which they have been promised, without agricultural guidance and assistance, and without the other essential programs such as health and education” and warned that “it is this general picture with which TCA/Iraq no doubt will be associated through publicity.”¹⁴⁰

By late 1952, TCA officials began to realize that the land settlement program “does not appear to have a very good chance of achieving its objective” and to admit that several million peasants “must in the end remain as tenants on farms and villages of large land operators.”¹⁴¹ The rate of population growth in the countryside was nearly forty times greater than the rate of settlement on the agricultural projects, which meant that settlement policies made virtually no impact on labor conditions.¹⁴² Self-help doctrines led American officials to conclude that “a program superimposed from the outside has little lasting value” and to work on implementing “a

¹³⁹ Burton Y. Berry, "The Dujaila Project: A Current Appraisal," July 16, 1953, USDS 887.16/7-1653 and "Annual Agricultural Report for 1953," April 15, 1954, USDS 887.20/4-1554.. Darwish al-Haydari had already noted many of these issues in the article he published three years earlier.

¹⁴⁰ TCA, "Revised Budget – Fiscal Year 1954," January 1952, USDS 887.00-TA/1-1253, J.D. Hancock, "Acceleration of Distribution of Miri Sirf Lands in Iraq," August 15, 1952, USDS 887.00-TA/8-2952, and Lewis H. Rohrbaugh, "TCA/Iraq Monthly Report for November 1952," December 27, 1952, USDS 887.00-TA/12-2752.

¹⁴¹ TCA Mission to Iraq, Budget for Fiscal Year 1954, August 1952, USDS 887.00-TA/8-2252 and Technical Cooperation Administration, "Functional Annual Plan of Work, Fiscal Year 1953," September 1952, USDS 887.00-TA/9-2752.

¹⁴² Muhammad Jawad Al-'Abusi, *Mushkilat al-Taqqaddum al-Iqtisadi fi al-'Iraq* (Cairo: Jami'at al-Duwwal al-'Arabiyah, 1958), 220-21.

cooperative process in which aid and stimulation from without are given so skillfully and effectively that the program is taken by all concerned to have been entirely a home-grown product.” This program was rooted in the “triple approach” of research, education, and extension characteristic of American land-grant institutions. Demonstration farms were developed at Hillah and Kut to educate peasants in the use of “new tools and techniques which will raise the peasant farmer step by step up the ladder towards the higher standards of the Western world.”¹⁴³

While settlement projects remained insignificant and ineffective, the TCA mission did make progress in reforming the rural educational curriculum. With the encouragement of Minister of Education Khalil Kannah, TCA officials adopted IBRD recommendations to introduce “more practical content” and emphasis on “manual skills and crafts” and “the dignity of manual labor” into a curriculum that was “too bookish and academic” and tended to “encourage a flight from the rural environment to the city.”¹⁴⁴ By the beginning of 1953, American experts in technical education had already managed to “overhaul” the curriculum for rural schools. In this self-professed “radical educational reconstruction,” syllabi were “simplified and culled of traditional subjects” like poetry, literature, and history and replaced with technical courses “based upon studies of skills needed, job analyses, and upon advice and cooperation from employers.” These reforms were rooted in the twin desire to promote “a new orientation from ‘book schools’ to ‘work schools’” and to achieve “the realization and acceptance that development is a state of mind.”¹⁴⁵ Some experts even expressed skepticism that expanded literacy was a worthwhile goal to pursue and worried that American methods might not “fit into the behavior patterns of an illiterate Moslem Arab rural or tribal community.”¹⁴⁶ American experts, though, soon found that there was little support for these technical education reforms in the Iraqi countryside. Officials complained that the effort to train teachers in the new rural curriculum was self-defeating because the very act of “giving the trainees an introduction to and desire for city occupation” discouraged them from accepting rural posts. Parents, meanwhile,

¹⁴³ TCA, “Revised Budget – Fiscal Year 1954,” January 1952, USDS 887.00-TA/1-1253.

¹⁴⁴ Confidential Draft of the Summary Findings and Recommendations of a Mission sponsored by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development in collaboration with the Iraqi Government, August 16, 1951, FO 371/91648 EQ 1112/11 and Philip W. Ireland, Notes on Conference with Khalil Kannah, February 11, 1952, USDS 887.00/TA-2-1352.

¹⁴⁵ TCA, “Revised Budget – Fiscal Year 1954,” January 1952, USDS 887.00-TA/1-1253, TCA, “Country Annual Plan of Work, Fiscal Year 1953, TCA Mission to Iraq,” August 1952, USDS 887.00-TA/9-852 and TCA Mission to Iraq, Budget for Fiscal Year 1954, August 1952, USDS 887.00-TA/8-2252.

¹⁴⁶ Francis O. Allen, Memorandum on Final Meeting between Dr. Ross Moore and U.S. Embassy Officials, February 20, 1950, USDS 887.00 TA/3-750.

demonstrated dissatisfaction with the new curriculum, for “a child, in their view, is to be educated so he can get out of, not stay in, farming.”¹⁴⁷ This growing disenchantment with the modernization and development agenda was further compounded by the economic repercussions of agricultural mechanization.

The Machinery of Politics and the Politics of Machinery

Agricultural mechanization in southern Iraq had long been associated with colonial policy and British financial interests. In the late 1940s, several prominent landowners begin to introduce the Massey Harris Harvester-Thresher to their rice plantations to recoup their investment by slashing peasant wages to a mere twenty percent of total crop yield.¹⁴⁸ The new machines were first introduced on an estate near Shaykh Sa‘d leased by an Iraqi Christian named Gorgis Yusuf in partnership with an ex-British military officer known as Major Grimley. Grimley quickly developed a reputation for licentious sexual behavior with local women, brutal treatment of the peasants who worked his land, and blatant manipulation of political connections to secure access to crucial water resources, and local peasants came to view mechanization as part and parcel of a colonial agenda that aimed to exploit Iraqi labor and resources for the benefit of Christians.¹⁴⁹ While Grimley was eventually forced out of Iraq, the association between colonialism and mechanism stuck, particularly after American TCA officials began coordinating mechanization efforts in the early 1950s.

The initial IBRD report on economic development in Iraq warned that if mechanization efforts proceeded rapidly without complementary efforts toward land settlement, peasants would see their wages further depressed and might even be displaced from their land.¹⁵⁰ TCA officials consequently pledged “to keep the program of mechanization in step with social and economic developments so that mechanization acts as a constructive, and not a destructive force in the Iraqi social economy.”¹⁵¹ Control over the importation and distribution of agricultural machinery, however, was entrusted to the Agricultural Machinery Board set up by the Ministry of

¹⁴⁷ TCA, "Functional Annual Plan of Work, Fiscal Year 1953," September 1952, USDS 887.00-TA/9-2752.

¹⁴⁸ Amara Consulate, Report for the Month of November 1946, FO 838/3

¹⁴⁹ Amara Consulate to Basra Consulate, June 29, 1946, FO 838/3, British Embassy to Amara Consulate, March 22, 1947, FO 838/4, Amara Consulate to British Embassy, September 26, 1947, FO 838/4, Amara Consulate, Report for the Month of March 1947, FO 838/5, and Amara Consulate, Report for the Month of July 1947, FO 838/5.

¹⁵⁰ International bank for Reconstruction and Development, *The Economic Development of Iraq* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1952), 19.

¹⁵¹ TCA, "Country Annual Plan of Work, Fiscal Year 1953, TCA Mission to Iraq," August 1952, USDS 887.00-TA/9-852.

Economics. The board's leadership reflected the political interests of the landed shaykhs in declaring that mechanization was the obvious solution to poor productivity levels and labor shortages and proceeded to quintuple the annual sale of tractors, plows, and harvesters between 1950 and 1955.¹⁵² TCA officials compounded the problem by organizing projects to train machinery technicians and restock spare parts. Prominent American corporations like Caterpillar, International Harvester, and John Deere displayed "whole-hearted cooperation" with TCA efforts by providing excess spare parts, training manuals, and experienced technicians to train local operators and mechanics.¹⁵³ Thus, at the same time that land settlement efforts ostensibly designed to create an artificial shortage of peasant labor were scaled back due to logistical obstacles, mechanization efforts proceeded towards a contradictory aim. Despite the fact that mechanization efforts almost immediately caused significant population displacement from the large southern estates, TCA officials nevertheless remained optimistic that "a proper coordination can be achieved between families leaving established villages to take up new homes and the displacement of men by machines."¹⁵⁴

Peasants appeared to view all development projects through the lens of self-interest, assuming, for example, that American engineers surveying land for the construction of a highway linking Basra and Baghdad were delineating plots for imminent redistribution: "This makes some of them happy while others protest that the engineers are making lines in the wrong places."¹⁵⁵ Further TCA efforts to increase agricultural productivity by demonstrating the efficiency of irrigating larger plots of land in order to save time and labor provoked fierce resistance from peasant laborers, who feared that increased efficiency would further reduce their wages.¹⁵⁶ American experts demonstrated that even with peasant labor costs averaging just twenty-three cents per day, mechanization could cut production costs to one third of their current level. TCA extension agents travelled to the major estates to illustrate these gains with small-scale demonstrations involving tractors, two-bottom plows, and land levelers. The extension

¹⁵² Lewis H. Rohrbaugh, "Director General Al Haidari's Talk on 'Agricultural Program in Iraq'," May 16, 1953, USDS 887.00-TA/5-1653 and Muhammad Jawad Al-'Abusi, *Mushkilat al-Taqqaddum al-Iqtisadi fi al-'Iraq* (Cairo: Jami'at al-Duwwal al-'Arabiyyah, 1958), 232.

¹⁵³ Lewis H. Rohrbaugh, "Activities of TCA/Iraq Individuals – Locher, Cranston, Morris, Fields," March 7, 1953, USDS 887.00-TA/3-753 and "TCA/Iraq Highlights of the Week, June 28 – July 4, 1953," July 7, 1953, USDS 887.00-TA/7-753.

¹⁵⁴ TCA, "Functional Annual Plan of Work, Fiscal Year 1953," September 1952, USDS 887.00-TA/9-2752.

¹⁵⁵ Lewis H. Rohrbaugh, "More on Activities of Individuals in TCA/Iraq – Ship," March 10, 1953, USDS 887.00-TA/3-1053.

¹⁵⁶ Lewis H. Rohrbaugh, "Highlights of the Week, Jan. 4-10, 1953," January 10, 1953, USDS 887.00-TA/1-1053.

agents reported significant opposition from the peasants, but they attributed this resistance to an obstinate reliance on “traditional practices which are deep-rooted” rather than material motivations.¹⁵⁷ Landlords, on the other hand, were more than happy to allow TCA agents to plow their land, and the Cooperative Project on Agricultural Machinery had to be abandoned in July 1953 after TCA officials discovered that their employees were “doing below-cost harvesting work for the large landlords.”¹⁵⁸

American officials, in fact, remained perpetually and naively optimistic about the political intentions of their local clients and allies, viewing the universal declarations of support for land support as “a healthy sign the land tenure problem is full recognized” rather than self-serving obfuscations.¹⁵⁹ Even the professed commitment to land reform by Nuri al-Sa‘id’s Constitutional Union Party, which was by that point heavily dependent on the political power of the landowning shaykhs, was interpreted as evidence of good intentions and changing tides. When the CUP stalwart and leader of the al-Mayyah tribe Shaykh ‘Abdullah Muhammad al-Yasin publicly announced his intention to distribute twelve thousand acres of land to his peasants, the U.S. Ambassador concluded that ‘Abdullah “saw the handwriting on the wall,” despite the fact that the offer consisted of uncultivated *lazma* grants that technically reverted to state control if left dormant for four years:

He wishes to forestall a violent and drastic change by giving away what he believes will be taken at a later date. In this way he makes his future position more secure because he will be known as an enlightened shaikh and will be treated more gently than might otherwise be the case for one of the largest landowners in Iraq.¹⁶⁰

A popular uprising three years later in Hayy, where ‘Abdullah and his brothers controlled more than a third of the cultivable land and gained a reputation for oppressive exploitation, prompted brutal reprisals from ‘Abdullah’s forces and underscored the severity of that misjudgment.¹⁶¹

A similar misjudgment ensued when Shaykh ‘Abdullah Mahmud Majid offered to allow TCA to use five thousand acres of land for an experimental project that would offer “some sort

¹⁵⁷ Lewis H. Rohrbaugh, "Information on Point IV Activities in Iraq," March 3, 1953, USDS 887.00-TA/3-353.

¹⁵⁸ Paul E. Smith, "Termination of Agricultural Machinery Project," July 21, 1953, USDS 887.00-TA/7-2153.

¹⁵⁹ *Al-Zaman*, April 20, 1952 and Philip W. Ireland to Department of State, May 28, 1952, USDS 887.16/5-2852.

¹⁶⁰ Burton Y. Berry to Department of State, May 8, 1953, USDS 887.16/5-853.

¹⁶¹ Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 754-57. Batatu concludes, "In brief, at the times of the event under study, the shadow of the shaikh lay, as could well be imagined, like a curse on Hayy and its unfortunate inhabitants."

of demonstration of an idealized landlord-tenant arrangement,” provided that he still received the customary “landlord’s portion” of half the produce.¹⁶² TCA officials were eager to accept the offer as a means of “showing that land tenure reform within the framework of landlord-tenant system can be improved.”¹⁶³ In a meeting with TCA officials, Shaykh ‘Abdullah complained that government bureaucrats would never advance beyond the planning stage and repeatedly invoked the axiom that “the Arab believes what he sees.” TCA officials reported enthusiastically that ‘Abdullah “quite understands the US viewpoint that the landowner has an incentive, the tenant does not” and that he was willing to sell his entire lazma holdings to TCA. The fact that ‘Abdullah had been attempting to sell the land for some time, offering it first to the Iraqi government and then to the foreign firm Murdock & Brooks, made little impression on TCA officials, who sought to make the land the basis for an experimental rural improvement project.¹⁶⁴ ‘Abdullah made a significant profit on land that he feared would be confiscated at some point in the future and retained his claim to the far more profitable lands leased from the government. Likewise, when Shaykh Ahmad ‘Ajil al-Yawir of the Shammar declared himself a “land use convert” and began to protest the settlement of his peasants on the Sinjar project, TCA officials congratulated themselves on the “good missionary work” and failed to consider that Ahmad may have been safeguarding his own access to cheap labor.¹⁶⁵

Political efforts to alleviate peasant misery and exploitation confronted opposition from the landowning shaykhs, who were coming to view Western military intervention in Latin America and Asia and the growing importance of Iraqi oil in the global economy as evidence that Britain and the United States would never permit a successful Communist revolution in Iraq.¹⁶⁶ An effort by Fadhil al-Jamali to guarantee peasant sharecroppers half of their crop yields provoked a fury of outrage from the shaykhs in early 1954. Jamali’s initiative was designed to mollify public anger over the misuse of oil revenue before a planned crackdown on Communists and “those who try to fish in troubled waters.”¹⁶⁷ The vocal opposition of the CUP shaykhs to the proposed reforms, however, forced Jamali to dramatically curtail the proposed reforms. Nuri al-

¹⁶² J.D. Hancock, Monthly Report for May 1952, USDS 887.00-TA/6-752.

¹⁶³ J.D. Hancock, "Proposition of Sheikh Abdullah Mahmoud Majid," June 5, 1952, USDS 887.00-TA/6-1952.

¹⁶⁴ Lewis H. Rohrbaugh, "Land Reform and Village Improvement Conference with Sheikh Abdullah Mahmoud Majid, Lewis H. Rohrbaugh, and J.D. Hancock," June 12, 1952, USDS 887.00-TA/6-1952 and TCA Mission to Iraq, Budget for Fiscal Year 1954, August 1952, USDS 887.00-TA/8-2252..

¹⁶⁵ Lewis H. Rohrbaugh, "TCA/Iraq Monthly Program Summary, April 1953," May 29, 1953, USDS 887.00-TA/5-2953.

¹⁶⁶ John M. Troutbeck to Foreign Office, February 10, 1954, FO 371/110988 VQ 1015/13.

¹⁶⁷ John M. Troutbeck to P.S. Falla, January 27, 1954, FO 371/110988 VQ 1015/9.

Sa'id argued that Iraq should "follow her own traditional way of arranging matters" and leave the ownership of land in the hands of shaykhs "who were better able to understand the problems of farming and marketing." Despite Nuri's constant obstruction of even moderate reform measures, some reformist politicians ironically came to see Nuri as the only possible solution to the problem. If electoral politics were suspended and Nuri entrusted with a platform of mild reform, they argued, Nuri's sense of statesmanship and responsibility would compel him to "change his tune." Nuri did in fact revive the 'Amarah Land Law, which he had initially blocked as a means of dislodging Jamali, but political manipulations ensured that virtually no land was transferred from the shaykhs to the peasants.¹⁶⁸

The failure of the Economic Development Board to make any significant progress toward the alleviation of rural poverty fueled popular anger against the development initiative. TCA officials admitted that the Point IV program had accomplished virtually nothing and that Iraqis were now becoming aware of the immense gulf between the aid packages allocated for Europe and those designated for the Arabs.¹⁶⁹ Prominent local informants in Basrah reported that it was "widely believed" that the entirety of oil revenues allocated to the Development Board was used to fund salaries and allowances for American Point IV officials.¹⁷⁰ Conspiracy theories about an "imperialist agenda" that aimed to use schools as barracks, highways as military bases, and water reservoirs as airbases for foreign troops became so widespread that then Prime Minister Fadhil al-Jamil was forced to publicly refute the charges in a speech broadcast over Radio Baghdad.¹⁷¹ Arshad al-'Umari, then Chairman of the Development Board, bitterly complained that political criticism of their efforts was so great that "if a woman fails to conceive she is likely to blame it on the Development Board."¹⁷²

Some American officials began to realize that the conjunction of unimpeded progress towards mechanized agriculture and the obstacles confronting the settlement projects would have

¹⁶⁸ John M. Troutbeck to Foreign Office, February 3, 1954, FO 371/110988 VQ 1015/11, February 10, 1954, FO 371/110988 VQ 1015/13, and November 3, 1954, FO 371/110991 VQ 1015/79. Matthew Elliot's complaint that "the role of the landed classes in monarchical Iraq has often been attacked, and their contribution rarely acknowledged" obscures these realities by arguing that on land reform, "ultimately, as in so many other areas, Nuri al-Said made headway where others failed." Matthew Elliot, *Independent Iraq: The Monarchy and British Influence, 1941-58* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996), 31.

¹⁶⁹ Lewis M. Rohrbaugh, "Point IV Information Activities," February 21, 1952, USDS 887.00-TA/3-152.

¹⁷⁰ James N. Cortada, "Misconceptions in Basra Regarding Point Four," April 17, 1953, USDS 887.00-TA/4-1753.

¹⁷¹ Philip W. Ireland to Department of State, May 1, 1954, USDS 887.00/5-1546.

¹⁷² Memorandum of Conversation between Arshad al-'Umari and Lewis H. Rohrbaugh, February 28, 1953, USDS 887.00-TA/3-153.

devastating short-term effects on peasant economies. The tax expert Dr. Charles Donald Jackson recommended the immediate abolition of consumption taxes and the adoption of general land taxes assessed and collected by public employees to fund welfare and relief efforts, but his recommendations were ignored.¹⁷³ Daniel Gaudin Jr. warned that development efforts would “make the lot of many [peasants] even worse that it is at present” and increase popular sympathy for communism. Gaudin proposed that some portion of oil revenues be used to provide family allowances for dependent children. While the plan would be publicly sold as an initiative to improve education and nutrition, Gaudin contended that it would stimulate the local economy that the funds would be spent internally and that “none of it would go to foreign engineering contractors or other agencies.” He admitted that the plan had a “socialist tinge” but argued that it would “help overcome our reputation as mechanized materialists, supporters in the Near East of the landlord-politician class, and builders of Israel only.” The proposal was dismissed out of hand as non-productive monetary redistribution would fail even as a stimulus measure because of the “lack of material goods and services” for peasants to purchase. State Department officials contended that the plan “would not be viewed by others as democratic” and would contradict the purpose of “self-help opportunities” designed to “not only initiate but perpetuate the creation of new resources and wealth.”¹⁷⁴

The Impact of Economic Development on the Tribes

The net effect of the rural development projects – irrigation schemes without proper drainage that destroyed soil fertility with excessive levels of salination, settlement projects that failed to deliver on their considerable promises, mechanization efforts that further reduced the already negligible value of peasant labor, and education initiatives that eliminated opportunities for social advancement – was to provoke several dozen peasant rebellions and, ultimately, to drive hundreds of thousands of peasant laborers off the land and into urban slums. The failure of the 1952 Law for the Settlement of the Miri Sirf Land Problem in ‘Amarah to actually transfer any state land to peasant sharecroppers confirmed to many that there was no viable solution beyond violence or emigration. The law proposed to convert all *miri sirf* state land to *lazma*

¹⁷³ Donald Charles Jackson, "Recommendations on Agricultural Taxation in Iraq," June 13, 1953, USDS 887.00-TA/7-2753.

¹⁷⁴ Gaudin, the American Consul at Basrah, was one of the few American officials conversant in Arabic and willing and able to speak with peasants and laborers rather than political officials and other notable elites. Daniel Gaudin Jr., "A Proposal for Supplementing Point 4 in Iraq," May 7, 1952 and David Bruce to Daniel Gaudin Jr., August 7, 1952, USDS 887.00-TA/5-752.

grants and to transfer half of the land to the primary leaseholders and the other half to the secondary tenants and sharecroppers. In practice, the law allowed tribal shaykhs to claim nearly all cultivable in their own name and in the name of various relatives while leaving only the uncultivable plots for the peasants. When Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser's announced a comprehensive land reform initiative in Egypt shortly thereafter, peasants in 'Amarah rioted in protest of the national disparities.¹⁷⁵

Minor peasant rebellions had in fact erupted in several areas before the impact of economic development was visible to the local population. Peasants at Fao rebelled in September 1950, demanding a more equitable share of profits from the annual date harvest.¹⁷⁶ More notable, though, were the Azairij revolt 'Amarah and the Diza'i revolt in Arbil in late 1952 and early 1953, which reflected an increasingly radical peasant consciousness and a more visible Communist influence.¹⁷⁷ The Communist Party devoted significantly more attention to political mobilization campaigns in tribal regions after the collapse of the 1952 *Intifadah*, establishing peasant associations across southern Iraq and generally eschewing radical cultural stances in favor of a calculated endorsement of Nasserist land reform. Communist students from provincial towns now joined disgruntled peasants in protesting landlord exploitation, which helped to bring together rural and urban protest movements and to turn national attention to peasant grievances. When the Shamiyyah peasants demanded half of the crop yield and launched a violent uprising against their landlords in February 1954, for example, Communist students convinced the peasants to march in front of government buildings in the provincial capital. Police moved swiftly to arrest the protestors and endeavored to separate students and peasants, imprisoning the former in Shamiyyah and the latter at Ghamas, but Communist lawyers maintained communication with peasant prisoners and peasant sympathizers brought food to the student prisoners. By the time of the tripartite invasion of Egypt by Israel, Britain, and France in 1956,

¹⁷⁵ Edward S. Crocker to Department of State, April 30, 1952, USDS 887.16/4-3052, Philip W. Ireland to Department of State, July 22, 1952, USDS 887.16/7-2252, and Doreen Warriner, *Land Reform and Development in the Middle East: A Study of Egypt, Syria, and Iraq* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1957), 152.

¹⁷⁶ Basra Consulate, General Monthly Summary, September 1950, FO 371/82404 EQ 1013/10.

¹⁷⁷ Amara Consulate to British Embassy, March 30, 1952, FO 838/13, Guy Clark, Monthly Reports for Kirkuk, Erbil and Sulaimania Liwas, May 1953, June 1953, August 1953, September 1953, and November 1953, "Political Reports (Consulates): Kirkuk," FO 624/221, and Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 664-65.

Communist organization and peasant support for Nasserist land reform combined to bring tens of thousands of armed peasants into the streets of provincial towns.¹⁷⁸

At the same time as this emergence of peasant protest movements, a much greater number of disgruntled peasants abandoned farming altogether. The brutal police suppression of the protests likely played a role in accelerating this rural exodus, as both violent and non-violent efforts to improving living and working conditions were effectively foreclosed, leaving little option to peasants but to suffer or to endure or to pack up their belongings and leave. Some British experts, like Michael Ionides of the Development Board, continued to view labor displacement as a positive development for the rural population, “since the departure of slave-labour will tend to put the relationship between Shaikh or landlord and his peasants on a better and more modern basis.” This theory, however, proved unsound as the introduction of agricultural machinery proceeded at such a rapid pace that wages were never seriously affected.¹⁷⁹ Other officials grew concerned that the rural exodus was proceeding far too rapidly and threatened to simultaneously undermine agricultural productivity and fuel urban radicalization.¹⁸⁰ One U.S. report warned that “the urban laborer, even when he cuts his ties with this paternalistic agricultural society and migrates to the city, is fundamentally unchanged and basically influenced by the semi-feudal traditions” and that the influx of peasant to the slums of the new “El Dorado” of Baghdad constituted “a potential source of dissatisfaction and unrest.”¹⁸¹

Urban migration was not an even process but rather reflected underlying social conflict. The vast majority of peasant migrants in the early 1950s hailed from just eleven tribes: the Bani Lam, Albu Muhammad, al-Suwaydi, al-Sudan, Albu Darraj, al-Azairij, and al-Bahadil tribes of ‘Amarah, al-Mayyah of Kut, Albu Amir and Bani Malik of the Muntafiq, and the ‘Ugail from north of Baghdad. The social significance of the predatory relationship between landlord and tenant in ‘Amarah was amplified by the introduction of irrigation pumps and machinery, which increased peasant debt and allowed shaykhs to slash wages. Shaykh ‘Abdullah Muhammad al-Yasin of al-Mayyah employed virtually identically methods with his own peasants and the Albu Amir, Bani Malik, and ‘Ugail tribes had all been disposed of traditional tribal lands over the previous century and forced to work as migrant laborers on the Bani Lam and Albu Muhammad

¹⁷⁸ ‘Adnan ‘Abbas, *Hadha ma Hadatha!: Mudhakkirat ‘Adnan ‘Abbas* (Damascus: Dar al-Kan’an, 2008), 28-53.

¹⁷⁹ Burton Y. Berry, "Annual Agricultural Report for 1953," April 15, 1954, USDS 887.20/4-1554.

¹⁸⁰ Baghdad Chancery to Levant Department, August 5, 1955, FO 371/115748 VQ 1015/11.

¹⁸¹ Philip W. Ireland, Labor Report for Iraq, 1952, USDS 887.06/2-453.

estates in 'Amarah. The singularity of the 'Amarah context is further magnified by analyses of population changes showing that nearly forty percent of the entire 'Amarah population migrated between 1948 and 1958, compared to just twelve and sixteen percent in the Muntafiq and Kut. Well over ninety percent of the 'Amarah migrants, furthermore, were born in tribal villages, whereas between one third and one half of migrants from neighboring provinces hailed from provincial capitals.¹⁸²

Before the outbreak of the *Wathbah* in January 1948, there were reportedly thirty thousand tribesmen working in Basrah and Baghdad.¹⁸³ These numbers increased significantly over the course of the following summer, when government efforts to mollify urban unrest by subsidizing bread and rice caused crop prices to tumble and forced peasants further into debt, but urban migration was not seen as a disruptive social process until the early 1950s.¹⁸⁴ By 1955, migration “assumed proportions in parts of Amara Liwa which amounted to a mass evacuation” as nearly half of the remaining Azairij cultivators and a third of the Albu Muhammad cultivators left 'Amarah during the summer months, with similar losses reported from smaller tribes like the Albu Darraj, al-Suwaydi, and al-Sudan.¹⁸⁵ Majid al-Khalifa and Muhammad al-'Araybi, the two wealthiest Albu Muhammad shaykhs, each lost nearly a third of their *hushiyyah* armed guards, a particularly striking figure given that “one would expect these men to be the last to leave.” Majid privately admitted that eight hundred of his peasants left over the course of a three month period and resident British officials estimated that the true figures were much higher.¹⁸⁶

The old romantic Orientalist Wilfred Thesiger complained that “the towns have become a sort of El Dorado and the movement from the country to the towns a sort of gold rush” and that peasants were seduced by the “cinemas and brothels round the corner” in Baghdad. He argued without much evidence that the peasants were “probably a good deal better off than their fathers were” but contended that growing political consciousness “has taught them to demand more.”

¹⁸² 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Hilali, *al-Hijrah min al-Rif ila al-Mudun fi al-'Iraq* (Baghdad: Matba'at al-Nijah, 1958), 48-56 and 169-71.

¹⁸³ Amara Consulate, Report for the Month of May 1947, FO 838/5.

¹⁸⁴ Amara Consulate, Report for the Month of June 1948 and Report for the Month of October 1948, FO 838/7.

¹⁸⁵ 'Imad Ahmad al-Jawahiri confirms that al-Azairij, al-Sudan, and al-Suwaydi tribes were reduced to agricultural mercenaries after their shaykhs lost title to tribal lands during the colonial land settlement process and virtually disappeared over the course of the later 1940s and early 1950s as members migrated to Baghdad. See 'Imad Ahmad al-Jawahiri, *Tarikh Mushkilat al-Arabi fi al-'Iraq, 1914-1932* (Baghdad: Wizarat al-Thaqafah wa al-Funun, 1978), 107-11.

¹⁸⁶ Wilfred Thesiger, The Mass Movement of Tribesmen from Amara Liwa to Baghdad and Basra, July 18, 1955, FO 371/115748 VQ 1015/11.

Even comparatively wealthy peasant families with sufficient savings to weather the bad harvest, he noted, were selling off the animals and taking the savings to Baghdad. Those who left, he noted, “are becoming increasingly hostile to the shaikhs, as is shown by the songs which they are now singing in Baghdad and Basra, and which soon find their way back to Amara.” Thesiger blamed the education system for corrupting peasant youth: “For six or seven years they have spent their time sitting about in school. When they leave it they have neither the inclination nor possibly the physical capacity to work all day under a hot sun planting our rice or clearing out an irrigation ditch.” Despite the fact that the expansion of education was a relatively recent phenomenon, Thesiger contended that “many families have boys and young men in them who are urging their parents the whole time to leave for the towns.”¹⁸⁷

Thesiger's analysis of the peasant migrations, though, moved well beyond this type of analysis of emerging peasant consciousness. He argued that the disintegration of tribal social structures was the single most important factor fueling the rural exodus. Noting that certain Muntafiq tribes suffered much more significant flood losses over the past two years without contributing a commensurate number of migrants, he argued that among the Albu Muhammad, Azairij, and other ‘Amarah tribes, “the shaikhs are no longer tribal shaikhs but landlords and their tribesmen are virtually serfs.” The peasants who worked Majid al-Khalifa’s land, for example, were no longer exclusively members of the Albu Muhammad but rather comprised a motley crew of those native to the soil and those fleeing from oppressive conditions elsewhere. He recalled Majid wailing at the funeral of his eldest son, “What will become of my land when I die?” The shaykh, he noted bitterly, “never wondered what would become of his tribe, for he could not care less.” Thesiger was stunned and appalled by the shocking dissolution of tribal practices, values, and mores:

It is disconcerting for one who is used to traditional Arab ways to go to lunch with one of these shaikhs. Lunch is brought in for the Shaikh and his guest, and the remnants are then carried out. There may be a hundred or more of the shaikh’s retainers and tribesmen sitting in the guest house. None of them will even get a glass of tea.

The Muntafiq shaykhs, by contrast, continued to “keep open house – anyone present at meal times gets fed and any tribesman can spend the night in the shaikh’s guest house” and continued

¹⁸⁷ Wilfred Thesiger, *The Mass Movement of Tribesmen from Amara Liwa to Baghdad and Basra*, July 18, 1955, FO 371/115748 VQ 1015/11.

to “regard their cultivation as a tribal matter, and the various problems are settled by discussion and agreement.”¹⁸⁸

The mass migrations of peasants to urban slums, of course, created new problems for economic experts, and municipal officials. By 1951, there were nearly sixty thousand *sarifa* dwellers in Baghdad and an additional twenty thousand in Basrah. Urban residents worried that the slums would spread infectious disease, depress urban labor markets, overwhelm urban infrastructures and city services, and destroy the city’s beauty. As ‘Abd al-Razzaq al-Hilali pithily noted of the *sarifa* dwellers, “It is perhaps sufficient here to point to the very simple problem of toilets, for it is well known about those individuals that they defecate in the open air.”¹⁸⁹ The IBRD Mission advocated various “self-help” measures – such as the state furnishing roof timbers or window frames for model houses in order to encourage completion – to address the health and aesthetic threats posed by urban slums. Municipal officials, on the other hand, attempted to rid themselves of the migrants by constructing new *sarifa* settlements outside of the city limits. One project to relocate thirty thousand *sarifa* dwellers outside of Baghdad was abandoned because the migrants refused to live so far outside of the city.¹⁹⁰ In the provincial town of ‘Amarah, thousands of peasant migrants revolted when the local governor ordered police to pull down their reed huts.¹⁹¹ British and American officials grew increasingly concerned that the dramatic increase of unskilled labor would depress urban wages and provide ample ground for Communist recruitment.¹⁹²

Landlords in ‘Amarah and Samawah instructed police to stop trucks packed with migrants and to return them to the feudal estates, which only increased the sense of urgency to flee.¹⁹³ Despite the squalid conditions of the *sarifa* settlements, the establishment of social networks of migrants removed psychological impediments to migration, as Thesiger noted, for peasants were now moving “not into the unknown but to places where Al Bu Muhammad and

¹⁸⁸ Wilfred Thesiger, *The Mass Movement of Tribesmen from Amara Liwa to Baghdad and Basra*, July 18, 1955, FO 371/115748 VQ 1015/11.

¹⁸⁹ ‘Abd al-Razzaq al-Hilali, *al-Hijrah min al-Rif ila al-Mudun fi al-‘Iraq* (Baghdad: Matba‘at al-Nijah, 1958), 75.

¹⁹⁰ Confidential Draft of the Summary Findings and Recommendations of a Mission sponsored by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development in collaboration with the Iraqi Government, August 16, 1951, FO 371/91648 EQ 1112/11.

¹⁹¹ Amara Consulate, Report for the Month of September 1947, FO 838/5.

¹⁹² Amara Consulate, Report for the Month of March 1949, FO 838/8 and James N. Cortada, *Basra Monthly Economic Report for May 1953*, USDS 887.00/6-253.

¹⁹³ F.A.G. Cook, *Monthly Summary: January, 1953, "Political Reports (Consulates), Basra,"* FO 624/20.

Azairij communities were already established and flourishing.”¹⁹⁴ ‘Abd al-Razzaq al-Hilali argued that the migrants were not fleeing an antiquated tribal past in search of an urban modernity, but rather sought to recreate tribal structures within the urban slums. Migrants from the Bani Lam and al-Sudan tribes created their own written contracts that reconstituted tribal political structures in the image of an idyllic past. Leaders were chosen by community consensus and financial penalties for various infractions against fellow tribesmen were carefully delineated. The documents illustrate the peculiar convergence of urban modernity and traditional culture, proscribing for example that if a tribesman ran over someone in a car that he owned, he would be responsible for the entire penalty, whereas if the accident occurred in a rented vehicle, the penalty would be divided equally among the members of the tribe. Hilali argued that the urban tribal contracts proved that “the tribal legal statutes and strictures were not the essential cause for the migrations.”¹⁹⁵

Cultural Alienation and the Poetics of Emigration

Thesiger's observations about the disintegration of rural solidarities and the growing allure of the city are largely supported by the cultural artifacts of this era. The poetry produced by rural migrants in Baghdad, Basra, and Kirkuk in the early 1950s reflected the significance of cultural politics in conjunction with economic oppression in fueling peasant disenchantment with rural life. There were, in fact, two countervailing forces at work in providing both explanation and confirmation of the cultural alienation of Iraqi peasants in this period. On the one hand, the old tradition of Najafi poetry about peasant and tribal life was decisively broken by the transformation of the political landscape and the growing involvement of prominent poets in national politics. The four major Najafi poets of the 1930s, each of whom had played an important role in mobilizing rural support for revolution and reform, had moved on to urban centers and ceased to write about trials and tribulations of rural life. Ahmad al-Safi al-Najafi moved into exile in Syria and Lebanon, where he became a staunch supporter of various anti-colonial national liberation movements, including the Rashid ‘Ali movement of 1941.¹⁹⁶ ‘Ali al-

¹⁹⁴ Wilfred Thesiger, *The Mass Movement of Tribesmen from Amara Liwa to Baghdad and Basra*, July 18, 1955, FO 371/115748 VQ 1015/11.

¹⁹⁵ ‘Abd al-Razzaq al-Hilali, *al-Hijrah min al-Rif ila al-Mudun fi al-‘Iraq* (Baghdad: Matba‘at al-Nijah, 1958), 64-73.

¹⁹⁶ On al-Safi al-Najafi, see *On the life and work of al-Safi*, see Yusuf ‘Izz al-Din, *Poetry and Iraqi Society, 1900-1945* (Baghdad: Matba‘at al-‘Ani, 1962), 38-39, Salma Khadra Jayyusi, *Trends and Movements in Modern Arabic Poetry* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1977), 1:193-97, Salma Khadra Jayyusi, ed., *Modern Arabic Poetry: An Anthology* (New York:

Sharqi ceased writing poetry altogether and moved into nationalist politics in Baghdad, where he became one of the most prominent independent Shi'i representatives in parliament.¹⁹⁷ Most notably, Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulum and Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri had moved on to Baghdad, where they helped to galvanize the street protest movement and lent their support to the burgeoning labor movement through their affiliation with the Peace Partisans.¹⁹⁸

On the other hand, the new generation of poets writing in Free Verse began to engage more directly with peasant experiences from the vantage point of migrants in the city. As Orit Bashkin incisively notes, 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati, who wrote about peasant life in greater depth and clarity than any other Iraqi poet in this era, was a native of Baghdad who came to an awareness of the subject through his encounters with rural migrants at the mosque of 'Abd al-Qadir al-Kaylani.¹⁹⁹ While Bayati's painstaking collection of peasant stories and songs gave his poems about rural life an air of authority and authenticity to rival that of the Najafi poets, his identity as an outsider nevertheless reinforced perceptions that stories and sentiments of rural life were now merely documented and archived by Iraqi poets. This same dynamic is evident to a lesser extent in the writing of poets like Badr Shakir al-Sayyab and Buland al-Haydari, both of whom hailed from rural backgrounds but conveyed an amalgamation of bittersweet nostalgia for childhood memories and intellectual angst over their inability to either contemplate a return to the stifling oppression of the village or to find comfort, happiness, and a sense of belonging in the confines of the city.²⁰⁰

Taken together, these two trends underscored a striking shift in the way peasant and countryside were represented in national cultural discourse. As the great neo-classical orators of Najaf moved onto Baghdad, they began to write about and for the urban working class, rather

Columbia University Press, 1987), 85-88, and Ra'uf al-Wa'iz, *al-Ittijahat al-Wataniyah fi al-Shi'r al-'Iraqi al-Hadith, 1914-1941* (Baghdad: Wizarat al-'Ilam al-Jumhuriyah al-'Iraqiyah, 1974), 304-8.

¹⁹⁷ On 'Ali al-Sharqi, see Yitzhak Nakash, *Reaching for Power: The Shi'a in the Modern World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 77-86.

¹⁹⁸ The lives of Bahr al-'Ulum and Jawahiri are analyzed in great detail in Chapters 3 and 5. See also Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan Bahr al-'Ulum* (Baghdad: Matba'at Dar al-Tadamun, 1968), 9-22, Muhammad Mahdi Jawahiri, *Dhikrayati*, 2 Vols. (Damascus: Dar al-Rafidayn, 1988), and Silvia Naef, "Shi'i-Shuyu'i Or: How to Become a Communist in a Holy City," in Rainer Brunner and Werner Ende, eds., *The Twelver Shia in Modern Times* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 258-67.

¹⁹⁹ Orit Bashkin, *The Other Iraq: Pluralism and Culture in Hashemite Iraq* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 225-26 and 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati, *Tajribati al-Shi'iriyah* (Beirut: Manshurat Nizar Qabbani, 1968), 11-25.

²⁰⁰ On this thematic in the poetry of Sayyab, see Orit Bashkin, *The Other Iraq: Pluralism and Culture in Hashemite Iraq* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 226.

than the rural peasantry. While peasants had once symbolized the Iraqi nation, with vivid descriptions of their oppression functioning as metaphors for the oppression of the nation by colonial forces and their local clients,²⁰¹ workers now stood as the symbols of national resistance to colonial and neo-colonial domination.²⁰² At the same time, the interest of the avant-garde modernist poets in rural life affirmed that peasant and tribal society were coming to be viewed as historical anathema. Unlike Bahr al-'Ulum, Jawahiri, al-Safi, and al-Sharqi, who offered advice and solutions to what they saw as the "peasant problem" in southern Iraq, the younger poets merely catalogued the pulverization of peasant society by the social dislocations of colonial feudalism and agrarian capitalism and noted the overwhelming and irrepressible desire of the peasants to flee toward an urban modernity that, despite its apparent flaws, offered some semblance of hope for the future.

'Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati's collection of poetry *Abariq Muhashshamah (Broken Pitchers)*, first published in 1954, included several poems that illustrated this new cultural dynamic. In "The South Wind," Bayati depicted a peasant unable to escape their oppressive conditions in the village for a better life in Baghdad:

The eye of the prisoner
From his earthen cellar, to the saddened star
From his earthen cellar, terrified by fate, the eye of the prisoner implores²⁰³

The young peasant desperately hopes for the means and opportunity to escape his life in the countryside and to join his comrades in the city. When a group of peasant migrants return to the village on a visit from the city and warmly greet their old friends and families, the trapped peasant can only think of his own sad fate to remain forever in the village:

Intimate conversations in the sad breeze
And from the eye of the prisoner escaped
Some tears

²⁰¹ This dynamic is particularly apparent in the work of Ahmad al-Safi al-Najafi and 'Ali al-Sharqi discussed earlier in this chapter.

²⁰² This latter dynamic is discussed in far greater detail in Chapter 5.

²⁰³ 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati, *Abariq al-Muhashshamah* (Beirut: Mansurat Dar al-Adab, 1967), 30-33.

Bayati's audience in the countryside could not have failed to recognize in themselves these same emotions and this same longing to forever flee the oppressive conditions of agrarian life and to embrace the opportunities of the city.

A better known poem from the same collection, "The Village Market," captures in better detail the poverty and misery of rural life:

The sun, the gaunt donkeys, and the flies
And the boots of an old soldier
Pass between hands, as a peasant gazes into space
"At the beginning of the new year
My hands will surely be filled with coins
And I will buy these boots"²⁰⁴

Bayati's depiction of the peasant's financial woes echoes the reflections of Ahmad al-Safi al-Najafi on the peasant's inability to pay his debts under the new system of colonial feudalism and underscores the extent to which an ordinary existence in the countryside has become a mere fancy. In a subsequent passage, the poet expands upon this imagery of rural poverty by depicting the inability of many peasants to attain sufficient food for themselves and their families from the harvest:

And the wearied croppers say:
"They sowed, and we have not eaten
And we sow, submissively, so that they can eat"

The most memorable section of the poem, however, grapples directly with the problem of rural migration and the impact of the city on these rural migrants:

And those who return from the city: O what a blind beast!
Its victims are our dead, the bodies of women
And the affable dreamers
And the mooing of cows, and the sellers of bracelets and perfume
Like beetles crawling around: "My dear skylark, O Sodom!
The perfumer will not mask what this oppressive era has spoiled"

While modernist poetry had grown less direct and less explicit - rejecting, for example, the contrapuntal discourse of the anti-colonial *qasidah*²⁰⁵ - Bayati's veiled indictment of the colonial regime and its tribal clients for the desecration of rural society is impossible to miss.

²⁰⁴ 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati, *Abariq al-Muhashshamah* (Beirut: Manshurat Dar al-Adab, 1967), 37-39.

Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, who wrote voluminously on the subject of city and village in heavily symbolic language that drew equally upon classical mythology and the modernism of T.S. Eliot, explored many of these same themes. In much of his poetic production, Sayyab's native village of Jaykur functioned as a metaphor for a utopian pre-colonial past and a contrast to the immoral modernity of urban landscapes.²⁰⁶ In "Jaykur and the City," a poem that Sayyab dated to March 18, 1958, just four months before 'Abd al-Karim Qasim's coup d'état that brought down the Hashemite monarchy, Sayyab signaled his own complex understanding of the relationship between colonialism and the transformation of rural society:

And Jaykur surrounded now with walls
 And a gate
 And enveloped in silence
 Who will breach the walls? Who will open the gate? His right hand bloodied on every
 latch?
 My right hand: It is no talon fit for the struggle, so I use it for my struggle in city streets
 And it is not a fist that can resurrect life from the soil
 Because it is itself a clump of clay
 And Jaykur surrounded now with walls
 And a gate
 And enveloped in silence²⁰⁷

As Terri DeYoung has explained, Sayyab was referencing in this passage a famous line from "The Tragedy of Damascus" by the famous Egyptian poet Ahmad Shawqi calling for armed resistance to the French bombardment of Damascus in 1925:

And freedom colored red has a gate
 Where every hand dyed with blood shall knock²⁰⁸

Sayyab's appropriate of the imagery underscores his commitment to viewing the destruction of his own rural utopia (symbolized by Jaykur) as part and parcel of the colonial legacy. Like so many of the other modernist poets, however, Sayyab's own pessimism about his inability to

²⁰⁵ See Hussein N. Kadhim, *The Poetics of Anti-Colonialism in the Arabic Qasidah* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), vii-xii.

²⁰⁶ The influence of Eliot (and particular *The Waste Land*) on Sayyab's conception of village and city has been explored by numerous critics, but most extensively and effectively by Terri DeYoung, *Placing the Poet: Badr Shakir al-Sayyab and Postcolonial Iraq* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 65-96.

²⁰⁷ Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, *Badr Shakir al-Sayyab: Hayatihi wa Shi'rihi* ('Amman: al-Ahliyah li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi', 2008), 389-92.

²⁰⁸ Ahmad Shawqi, *al-Shawqiyyat* (Cairo: Matba'at al-Istiqama, 1964), 2:76 and Terri DeYoung, *Placing the Poet: Badr Shakir al-Sayyab and Postcolonial Iraq* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 130. The translation of Shawqi's verse here is DeYoung's.

successful confront the forces of feudalism suffocating his beloved countryside leads to the inescapable conclusion that true resistance is now only possible in the city.

Equally striking was the work of Buland al-Haydari, a Kurdish poet who wrote in both Arabic and Kurdish and who hailed from a peasant family in northern Iraq, where the disintegration of tribal life largely followed the patterns present in southern Iraq. Haydari moved to Baghdad toward the end of the 1930s and, like many of the other prominent pioneers and practitioners of Free Verse poetry, he quickly joined the Iraqi Communist Party. Haydari, who withdraw from university studies to concentrate on political activism in the 1940s, was particularly popular among both Arab and Kurdish peasant migrants in Baghdad due to his masterful depiction of the pull between urban and rural life.²⁰⁹ In his poem "A Lost Step," Haydari depicted a peasant preparing to leave his village for Baghdad:

What will I do in the city..?
And she asked me
What will you do in the city..!?
Your foolish steps will be lost in the huge streets
And you will be consumed by the blind allies
Night will thrive in your numb and saddened depths
What will you do there
Without a friend
No
There is no friend in that city²¹⁰

Despite the trepidation and foreboding of his village companion, however, the peasant finds himself invigorated by the new sensations of the urban landscape upon his arrival, vowing never to return to his place of birth:

For whom should I return?!
For my village
Or for the winter that torments the railway platform
Or for the little lanterns in which our frugal village quivers
Or for the women dying from this life
No
I will not return
For whom should I return when my village has become a city?

²⁰⁹ On the life and work of Buland al-Haydari, see 'Ayidah Kan'an Mulhim, *Buland al-Haydari fi al-Shi'r al-'Iraqi al-Mu'asir: Dirasat* (al-Kuwayt: Dar Su'ad al-Sabah, 1998).

²¹⁰ Buland al-Haydari, *al-A'mal al-Kamilah li al-Sha'ir Buland al-Haydari* (Cairo: Dar Su'ad al-Sabah, 1993), 285-88.

The peasant here expresses his utter detachment and disillusionment with rural life and confirms the allure of urban life, as the city has taken the place of his village as a place of communal belonging and a symbol of home.

It was the poem's conclusion, though, that best captured the depths of the new generation's alienation from rural life:

Nothing knows me here
And there is nothing that I know here
Nothing that I remember and nothing that remembers me here
I will shuffle along in small steps through these big streets
And the blind allies will consume me
No...
I will not return
For my village has become... a city
It has become a city.

The sentiments expressed in these passages underscore the more universal aspects of angst and alienation in Iraq during this period, for Haydari is not only alluding to the peasant's disenchantment with rural life but also to the cultural and political dislocation of individuals in the expanding urban landscapes. While Haydari's depiction of urban life was certainly far from idealized, the allure of the city and the impossibility of a return to an antiquated rural existence emerges as the dominant thematic of much of his poetic production.

Conclusion

The peasant protests and tribal migrations provoked or accelerated by the economic development initiatives can be classified as anti-colonial movements only in a qualified sense. There is little available evidence to suggest that tribal peasants saw themselves as participants in a unified anti-colonial movement and, at least until the pro-Nasserist demonstrations of the early 1950s, virtually no evidence that peasants were motivated by or even cognizant of British influence in national politics and Anglo-American support for Zionism. On the other hand, the rural development program shaped and guided by British and American economic experts deeply altered the lives of millions of Iraqi peasants over the course of the 1950s in ways that more explicitly political interventions could not. The growing influence of the Iraqi Communist Party during this period helped to confirm local suspicions that the development agenda was an imperialist ploy to funnel oil revenue and agricultural profits into the pockets of foreign contractors. In the Communist lexicon, “feudalism” and “imperialism” were virtually

synonymous and in any case consistently complementary terms that confirmed the shared interests of political and economic exploitation. Peasant migrants to urban areas, furthermore, eagerly joined anti-colonial protest movements and constituted an essential social base for the Iraqi Communist Party. The story of urban anti-colonialism, in short, cannot be told without reference to this history of tribal anti-colonialism and the structural transformations of the countryside.

While foreign experts and advisors never possessed the necessary power and influence to force constructive progress on halfhearted land reform initiatives, their efforts to increase economic growth and production were extraordinarily counter-productive to the stated moral and humanitarian aims of economic development. The economist Doreen Warriner has argued that while engineers offered “a blue-print in land and water” for the economic development of the country, “except in so far as they provide labour, the people of Iraq do not enter into it.” The advice of foreign economists tended to overemphasize major projects and overlook essential measures like the provision of spare parts for tractors and drainage pumps for the new cooperative settlements. It was, Warriner argued, “an economist’s cloud-cuckoo land, in a Hayekian gap without a crisis, and building Keynesian pyramids without inflation or multipliers.” Contrary to the economists’ belief in the power of free markets to restore social equilibrium between peasant and shaykh by reducing the available supply of peasant labor, the mass migration of peasants merely propelled the landed shaykhs to increased investment in tractors and combines and agricultural production barely suffered. The true source of economic difficulties in Iraq, Warriner cogently argued, was the inequitable distribution of land: “Without [land reform], the big dams will be a succession of Keynesian pyramids, giving employment but not increasing production. The ‘resurrection of Babylonia’ was an engineer’s dream fifty years ago. In the meantime Iraq has acquired what an Iraqi jurist describes as ‘the feudalism of Hammurabi.’”²¹¹ What was perhaps most striking about Warriner's conclusions, however, was the fact that her initial diagnosis of the problem in the 1948 edition of *Land Reform and Poverty in the Middle East* had been so highly regarded and welcomed by American officials in Iraq.²¹² The combination of domestic political impediments to land reform, the popularization of modernization and development discourse in the early 1950s, and the sheer incompetence of U.S.

²¹¹ Doreen Warriner, *Land Reform and Development in the Middle East: A Study of Egypt, Syria, and Iraq* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1957), 113-83

²¹² See E. Paul Tenney, "Labor Report - Iraq, Enclosure No. 2" November 2, 1950, USDS 887.06/11-250.

efforts to coordinate incongruous reclamation and mechanization initiatives doomed the project to failure.

The tremendously disruptive impact of rural development on peasant life had a repercussive impact on anti-colonial intellectuals, activists, and laborers in urban areas, which will be explored in the following chapter. The allocation of the vast majority of oil revenue to expensive development projects that actively depressed peasant wages while enriching feudal shaykhs and foreign companies fueled urban support for the nationalization of Iraqi oil and dedication to economic reforms that would transform the priorities of political officials from capitalist development to humanitarian relief. The influx of disgruntled peasant migrants to the cities likewise strengthened radical movements by providing a mass of alienated and unemployed laborers that magnified the surplus of unskilled urban labor and further depressed wages. These forces ensured that the anti-colonial movement of the 1950s would continue to progress from an intellectual and ideological current into a mass political movement that would ultimately succeed in toppling the old regime.

CHAPTER FOUR

'A HORIZON LIT WITH BLOOD' PUBLIC POETRY AND MASS POLITICS, 1946-1952

The purge of the military during the second British occupation profoundly transformed both the nature and the locus of political opposition in post-colonial Iraq. During the short-lived era of formal independence, the army formally intervened at least a half dozen times between 1936 and 1941 to overthrow a sitting government, nearly always under the pretense of satisfying popular demands for political reform.¹ After the public executions of the Four Colonels, the imprisonment and internment of dozens of sympathetic officers, and the forced retirement of scores more, it would take another seventeen years before military officers were again confident enough to launch a political revolution.² The wholesale incorporation of the army into the institutional structures of what the novelist Gha'ib Tu'amah Farman has called the "Black Regime" in Iraq destroyed public faith in the possibilities of national salvation from above at the same time that the populist authoritarian model of military rule began to take shape in Egypt and Syria.³ While British troops had been gradually – though not completely – withdrawn from Iraq by the fall of 1947, the British Embassy retained effective influence, if not outright control, over the levels of power controlling economic policy, domestic security, and foreign policy and national sovereignty remained as circumscribed as it had been at any time since the end of the British Mandate in 1932. If the anti-colonial movement for national liberation was largely characterized by passive support for the revolutionary potential of the successive waves of military coup d'états during the pre-war years, the post-war period was increasingly characterized by the active interventions of the masses.

As the locus of political opposition to the post-colonial regime shifted from the barracks to the streets, new developments in Iraqi culture and society dramatically expanded the realm of political action. Despite the clear entrenchment of a political dictatorship controlled formally or informally by Nuri al-Sa'id, the emergence of a social sphere for mass politics in Baghdad in the post-war period exposed the fundamental contradictions of the old regime. While the basic facts

¹ Majid Khadduri, *Independent Iraq, 1932-1958: A Study in Iraqi Politics*, 2nd Edition (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 69-211.

² The short tenure of General Nur al-Din Mahmud as Prime Minister after the events of the *Intifadah* in November 1952 does not constitute a coup d'état because Mahmud was invited by the Regent 'Abd al-Ilah to steer the country through new parliamentary elections under the shadow of martial law.

³ Gha'ib Tu'amah Farman, *al-Hukm al-Aswad fi al-'Iraq* (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr, 1957).

of electoral fraud, political corruption, and illiberal rule of law remained remarkably stable between 1932 and 1958, the post-war years witnessed an abrupt erosion of the political legitimacy of the old regime. The emergence of political parties with mass followings laid bare the extent and scope of electoral maneuvering that regularly returned to power the followers and sycophants of Nuri al-Sa'id, easily the most unpopular political figure in the country. The myopic resort to fear and intimidation by successive administrations as a means of forcing unpalatable political agendas on an increasingly disaffected public served to cement the alienation of the politically conscious masses from the ruling class and to subordinate distinctions of class, sect, and ideology to an overarching commitment to popular revolution.

The rise of mass politics in Baghdad was made possible by five related developments that fundamentally alienated the politically conscious masses from the old politics of notables. First, the striking expansion of urban centers in the post-war period provided both the social space for political dialogue and debate and the crowds necessary to threaten governmental control of public space.⁴ Second, the notable increase in the number of university students and unionized workers provided a fertile ground for political mobilization and a structural base for partisan organization not subject to the same police surveillance and legal strictures that plagued the opposition political parties during this period.⁵ Third, the emergence of genuine opposition political parties organized on an ideological basis – rather than established to provide a political vehicle for enacting the parliamentary agenda of the new premier – shifted the national political debate from an antiquated approach predicated upon the competing interests of rival political elites towards a dialogue engineered to garner popular support.⁶ Fourth, the significant increase in the quantity and diversity of newspapers, coupled with the dramatic expansion of circulation made possible by notable improvements in urban literacy rates and the rise of a coffeehouse culture that opened the political sphere to the newly literate poor, helped to publicize regional and international political developments and forge imagined communities of national and global

⁴ 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'athists and Free Officers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 31-36 and 132-38.

⁵ For the growth of university student bodies during this period, see Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 476-78. For the dramatic expansion of the labor unions, see Samira Haj, *The Making of Iraq, 1900-1963: Capital, Power, and Ideology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 99-102.

⁶ On the development of political parties, see Haj, *The Making of Iraq, 1900-1963*, 81-99.

solidarities.⁷ Fifth, the increasingly public stances of radical poets like Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri, Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulum, and later Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, decisively subverted a cultural tradition that connected artists and intellectuals to the state through networks of political patronage and literary praise and fashioned in its stead an organic relationship between intellectuals and the public that depended on the mutual reinforcement of public politics and revolutionary art.⁸

Eric Davis has cogently argued that radical intellectuals failed to effectively demarcate their role in the Gramscian "war of position" during the late 1940s and 1950 because they could not "provide well-articulated counterhegemonic models to challenge existing forms of political praxis."⁹ This argument, though, is overly reductive in its efforts to explain the later descent into military dictatorship as a result of the radical intellectuals' unrequited celebration of 'Abd al-Karim Qasim's coup d'état of July 1958. The most impressive young Iraqi poets of the 1950s became increasingly indebted to the avant-garde aesthetics of European modernism, which paradoxically espoused the Sartrean ethos of literary commitment (*iltizam*) while undermining the traditional role of popular poetry in political revolution and effectively reifying an artificial distinction between mass culture and high culture that simultaneously privileged and alienated the poet from the masses. While it is certainly true, as Davis notes, that the Free Verse movement in Iraqi poetry contributed to a "broadening of political and intellectual culture," its leading practitioners also constricted the political possibilities of revolutionary art by privileging avant-garde aesthetics over "cultural authenticity," embracing metaphor and symbolism over contrapuntal discourse, and choosing lyrical innovation over rhythmic repetition. As the literary critic Jabra Ibrahim Jabra has written of the committed poet, "His poetry, once reveling in oratory, became more and more of a soliloquy, a dramatic monologue, which soon gave its speaker the look and manner of a rather incomprehensible 'hero,' an outsider at variance with his society."¹⁰ Compounding the political drawbacks of the new artistic innovations, the

⁷ Orit Bashkin, *The Other Iraq: Pluralism and Culture in Hashemite Iraq* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 96-100 and Eric Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 94-98.

⁸ Davis, *Memories of State*, 92-95. On Jawahiri's pivotal role in expanding the parameters of public dissidence in the post-war period, see Muhsin al-Musawi, "Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri (1901-1997)," in *Essays in Arabic Literary Biography*, Vol. 3, edited by Roger Allen (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010), 170-71.

⁹ Davis, *Memories of State*, 92-93.

¹⁰ Jabra I. Jabra, "The Rebels, the Committed and the Others: Transitions in Arabic Poetry Today," in Issa J. Boullata, ed., *Critical Perspectives on Modern Arabic Literature* (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1980), 193. Salih

introspection of Free Verse pioneers like Badr Shakir al-Sayyab and 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati was coupled with a partisan devotion to the Stalinist line of the Iraqi Communist Party, which hampered their ability to articulate political visions independently of the party.

Ironically enough, the new political potential offered by the emergence of mass politics in Baghdad was most effectively exploited not by the young practitioners of the innovative Free Verse poetry but rather by the aging icons of a fading neo-classical tradition. The *Wathbah* uprising of 1948 erupted as an historical anomaly at the temporal intersection of an emergent popular politics and a declining tradition of public poetry. Neo-classical poets like Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulum and Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri played pivotal roles in bringing radical politics into the streets and popularizing new visions of post-colonial revolution. Bahr al-'Ulum, as Bahjat al-'Attayah's secret police well understood, did more than anyone else to galvanize crowds of students and workers, stoke revolutionary fervor, and shape the public articulation of revolutionary demands. Jawahiri, for his part, was best able to articulate a new "horizon lit with blood" for the developing popular movement, as he put it in his historic public eulogy for his martyred brother Ja'far. Both poets used the anti-war rhetoric of the Peace Partisans movement to critically engage with the new technologies of state violence without seeking recourse to military intervention. In doing so, they reframed a traditional poetics of anti-colonial resistance as a popular struggle against terrorism and dictatorship that ceased to distinguish between foreign powers and the local ruling class as the source of domestic tyranny and oppression.

Several esteemed literary critics have argued that the eclipse of these neo-classical poets by the new practitioners of Free Verse revolutionized Arab and Iraqi political consciousness. Issa Boullata has argued that Free Verse poetry was necessary "in order to extricate Arab consciousness from the lethargy that had taken hold of it for centuries" and "to give expression to that society and its modernity."¹¹ Terri DeYoung has likewise contended that "Jawahiri's poetry could move a crowd to act in the heat of the moment, but it seemingly could not provide a structure capable of informing sustained resistance to the threat of colonial discourses of power,"

J. Altoma has also reflected critically on the "insistence on deemphasizing the sonorities and the ceremonial function of poetry" in the insularity of free verse poetry. See Salih J. Altoma, "Postwar Iraqi Literature: Agonies of Rebirth," *Books Abroad* 46:2 (Spring 1972), 211-17. Issa J. Boullata likewise points to the growing rupture between popular and avant-garde poetry when he follows his declaration that by the late 1940 "the Iraqi poetry of the neo-classical tradition had spent its energy and was hardly relevant to the contemporary scene any longer" with the qualification that nevertheless "it hung on tenaciously among the masses." See Issa J. Boullata, "Badr Shakir al-Sayyab and the Free Verse Movement," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 1:3 (1970), 248-58.

¹¹ Boullata, "Badr Shakir al-Sayyab," 251-52.

while the structural flexibility of Free Verse poetry offered "more effective strategies of resistance" and "new counter-discursive strategies."¹² These arguments foreground the emerging intellectual avant-garde symbolized by the Free Verse movement as the vanguard of political modernity and the cultural pinnacle of revolutionary aesthetics.

While these arguments accurately underscore the importance of structural innovations in poetry in opening up new intellectual horizons for a post-colonial Arab modernity, however, they tend to minimize the critical social agency of the radical practitioners of traditional and popular poetry. These poets helped to forge a new cultural unity between the intellectual elite and disaffected masses and to establish a new precedent for public defiance and resistance. This new revolutionary horizon was as much about the transformation of society as of the transformation of cultural aesthetics. At the level of popular politics, the public interventions of Jawahiri and Bahr al-‘Ulum were far more significant in the development of revolutionary political movements and mentalities. As the mass politics of the public sphere emerged for the first time in popular consciousness as a contested spatial landscape, the subversive act of unauthorized infringement and intrusion by poets and crowds underscored the centrality of public acts of resistance to the new revolutionary currents.

Politics & Society in Post-War Iraq

On January 4, 1946 at the Ghazi Cinema in downtown Baghdad, the central government held a memorial service commemorating the life of the nationalist icon Ja‘far Abu al-Timman. The event signified the final rupture of the tenuous anti-fascist alliance formed between the pro-British ruling class and the pro-Soviet leftist opposition and marked the resurgence of anti-colonial politics in the public sphere. The radical poets Muhammad Salih Bahr al-‘Ulum and Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri managed to offend Nuri al-Sa‘id and his allies so severely with eulogies that castigated the appropriation and betrayal of the nationalist legacy that their entire entourage stormed out of the theater during each recitation. Bahr al-‘Ulum drew a sharp distinction between nationalist patriots and national traitors:

These are the palaces of traitors and their progeny
While reserved for loyal patriots are gallows and graves
These noble souls are led as scapegoats to slaughter

¹² Terri DeYoung, *Placing the Poet: Badr Shakir al-Sayyab and Postcolonial Iraq* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 195.

In the name of "Protection" branded sinners and infidels¹³

"Protection" here referred to the Law for the Protection of National Peace and Security passed in 1941 in order to facilitate the trial and detention of nationalist supporters of the Rashid 'Ali movement. If the historical allusion was not clear enough, Bahr al-'Ulum turned directly to Nuri and thundered:

Cowardly fugitives, drink down this accusation
For you will find for yourself a stinging rebuke
Linger a bit, for the people have issued a judgment
The verdict passed down upon you is excommunication

As Nuri and his followers stormed angrily out of the theater, Bahr al-'Ulum improvised a final couplet in conclusion:

So goodbye and farewell, for truly I say,
As threatening herald, until we meet another day

Jawahiri's poem was scarcely less inflammatory in its condemnation of the hypocritical appropriation of the nationalist legacy by collaborationist politicians. Nuri and his followers again left the theater in humiliation when Jawahiri reached his climax:

Twenty-five years have passed as if they were
With their personalities an item from the news
We tired of them like a prisoner tires of his shackles
In excess of the burdens that they bore...
Who could reckon that it would last so long
A government founded on such a flawed basis?!
After all the atrocities that the people have faced
In the shadow of their constitution and slogans
The captive is obliged to demand from his captor:
Give us some information and loosen the straps!¹⁴

The public assault on tyranny and dictatorship marked a watershed in the modern political history of the country, and both Jawahiri and Bahr al-'Ulum resolved to further push the limits of political dissidence.¹⁵

¹³ Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan Bahr al-'Ulum* (Baghdad: Matba'at Dar al-Tadamun, 1968), 2:87-90.

¹⁴ *Al-Ra'i al-'Amm*, January 6, 1946 and Jawahiri, *Diwan al-Jawahiri* (Bayrut: Bisan, 2000), 3:52-57.

¹⁵ Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrayati* (Damascus: Dar al-Rafidayn, 1988), 1:421-26.

The enthusiastic popular reception to the public assaults prompted the resignation of Prime Minister Hamdi al-Pachachi and thwarted the efforts of Nuri to have the poets arrested. The liberal politician Tawfiq al-Suwaydi succeeded Pachachi and his Minister of Interior Sa'd Salih, a leading member of the leftist opposition, moved immediately to dismiss arrest warrants for the two poets.¹⁶ The new administration, however, would also fall victim to the force of political poetry after Jawahiri published the caustic poem "Tartarah," which satirized the ruling class. The poem – nearly untranslatable due to the abundance of original coinages and the centrality of alliteration – scandalized the political establishment by the directness of its frontal assault:

What prattle is this chattering to me
Pushing me forward and holding me back
Making me Shi'ī and then Sunni
Turning me Jewish and then Christian
Fashioning me a Kurd and then an Arab
Flinging at me false charges of racism
Internationalizing and then Anglicizing me
Portraying me first as rational and then delusional
My very being, as their eminences desire,
From the front of my face to the seat of my ass
Rendered suitable for Salih Jabr
And furnished for Arshad al-'Umari¹⁷

When Jabr and 'Umari failed to convince Sa'd Salih to have the poet arrested, they rallied their supporters in parliament to withdraw support for Suwaydi's administration and the government promptly collapsed.¹⁸

The liberalization of the press that flourished under Pachachi and Suwaydi was abruptly and violently reversed by their successor, Arshad al-'Umari. Less than three months after taking power, Arshad had shut down at least six newspapers, including the principal organs of four out of the five national political parties, and had numerous journalists and editors arrested and tried on exaggerated charges of publishing false reports. Kamil al-Chadirchi, by this point the most prominent progressive politician in Iraq, was sentenced to six months hard labor. Even Nuri complained that Arshad had "gone mad" in his assault on what he saw as an all-pervasive

¹⁶ Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan Bahr al-'Ulum*, 1:15.

¹⁷ *Al-Ra'i al-'Amm*, March 24, 1946 and Jawahiri, *Diwan al-Jawahiri*, 3:41-44.

¹⁸ Jawahiri, *Dhikrayati*, 1:435-36.

Communist threat.¹⁹ Even more alarming was Arshad's willingness to sanction state violence against the public. At his command, police opened fire on a peaceful demonstration against Zionism and British imperialism in Baghdad on June 28, 1946, killing one protestor. Two weeks later, police opened fire on striking oil workers in Gawurpaghi, just west of Kirkuk, killing ten workers and further contributing to the public perceptions that the local government was primarily interested in protecting British political and financial interests inside the country.²⁰

Despite Arshad's tenacity in silencing his critics, his policies were scarcely more effective than those of his predecessors. Suspended newspapers continued to reappear within weeks or even days under different names and occasionally different editors. Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri thus rechristened *al-Ra'i al-'Amm* as *Sada al-Dustur* and Nuri Din Da'ud transferred control of *al-Nida* to his friend Salim Na'imi under the title *al-Taqaddum*. Jawahiri managed to circumvent further press censorship by seeking recourse with the Regent 'Abd al-Ilah, who was happy to continue a long historical tradition of political patronage for illustrious poets.²¹ As before the war, newspapers continued to invite punishment from the Ministry of Interior when they publicly criticized British imperialism.²² Public pressure for liberal political reforms, though, was by this point too powerful for even Arshad al-'Umari and other reactionary politicians to resist.

While the renewed atmosphere of political repression under the rule of Arshad al-'Umari rolled back the advance of civil society under the liberal reforms of Pachachi and Suwaydi, the persistence of political dissent and the resilience of independent political parties attested to the reality of a new phenomenon of mass politics. The Istiqlal Party, led by Muhammad Mahdi Kubba and other erstwhile supporters of Rashid 'Ali, emerged as the leading nationalist party in the post-war period. The British Embassy, which took nearly five years to transition from an anti-fascist to an anti-Communist framework, kept dossiers on many of the Istiqlal Party leaders

¹⁹ Hugh Stonehewer Bird to Foreign Office, August 16, 1946, FO 371/52468 E 8113/8113/93 and Douglas Busk to Foreign Office, August 16, 1946, FO 371/52468 E 8334/8113/93.

²⁰ Batatu has argued that "the only significant achievement" of Arshad's tenure was that "government became with wide strata of the people a synonym for repression." Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 532-33.

²¹ Douglas Busk to Foreign Office, August 16, 1946, FO 371/52468 E 8334/8113/93 and Jawahiri, *Dhikrayati*, 1:443.

²² The anti-colonial line of the Basrah daily *al-Nas*, for example, drew sharp rebukes from the Ministry of Interior after a series of articles attacking the date monopoly of Andrew Weir & Co. and accusing the company of colluding with the British Embassy to undermine the nationalist agenda. Basrah Consulate to British Embassy, May 8, 1947, FO 371/61682 E 4351/3524/93 and November 24, 1947, FO 371/61682 E 11870/3524/93.

in box at the embassy labeled "Bad Men."²³ While the partisans of the Istiqlal Party were generally rightwing and anti-Communist, the editor of the party organ *Liwa al-Istiqlal* publicly proclaimed the party's willingness to "hand ourselves over to communism" before surrendering to the forces of Zionism and imperialism. British officials read the declaration as a statement of principle rather than a rhetorical turn of phrase and embarked on an ill-fated propaganda campaign to portray the Istiqlal Party as stooges of the Soviet Union.²⁴ Ironically, the efforts of the local government in coordination with the British Embassy to conflate nationalists and Communists in their efforts to marginalize all independent opposition only contributed to the consolidation of an ideologically diverse spectrum into a united popular front.

The liberal National Democratic Party, lead by Kamil al-Chadirchi and the moderate wing of the old Ahali Group, emerged first as the natural rival to the Istiqlal Party and then as its unlikely collaborator. The transparent fraud of the new parliamentary elections conducted in early 1947 brought the two parties together in opposition to the government. While the British Embassy dismissed allegations of electoral corruption as "the natural consequence of the imposition of a democratic constitution on a society which has only partially and recently emerged from tribalism," the nationalist political parties proved willing to quickly push aside ideological divisions in the interests of a resurgent anti-colonial alliance. The Istiqlal Party grew gradually more receptive to the argument for economic reform advanced by the National Democratic Party, while the latter proved increasingly interested in the politics of anti-Zionism advanced by the Istiqlal leadership.²⁵ The merger of the two popular demands in the slogans and mottos of a united popular front underscored the emergence of a new mass politics centered for the first time around a concrete set of political aims articulated by workers and intellectuals rather than the authority and charisma of the political elite.

Perhaps most significant to the dramatic transformation of the political atmosphere, however, were the underground activities of the Iraqi Communist Party, which continued to build a base of popular support among the workers who suffered most severely from the deterioration of economic conditions. The price of food, clothing, rent, and other essential goods had increased nearly six-fold since the beginning of World War II and again jumped significantly

²³ Letter from Malcolm Walker to John Richmond, February 13, 1948, FO 371/68446 E 1921/27/93.

²⁴ *Liwa al-Istiqlal*, December 30, 1947 and M.T. Walker, "Foreign Office Minute," February 26, 1948, FO 371/68447 E 4099/27/93.

²⁵ Basrah Consulate to British Embassy, April 29, 1947, FO 371/61682 E 3524/3524/93 and "Political Review for the Year 1947," FO 371/58443 E 834/27/93.

in late 1947. Under the leadership of Fahd, the Communists consolidated control of the nascent labor movement and succeeded in politicizing the working class through a series of highly visible strikes. Not even the arrest of Fahd in January 1947 and the subsequent power struggle between Yahuda Siddiq and Malik Sayf managed to diminish the Communist surge.²⁶ Like the National Democratic Party, the Communists increasingly framed their economic agenda in the discourse of anti-colonial politics. One leaflet distributed in Basrah condemned the poor quality of local bread as the product of a conspiracy orchestrated by Nuri al-Sa'id and Salih Jabr to smuggle local wheat to Iran and Kuwait and substitute sand, seeds, and date stones in local supplies. The leaflet accused the assistant governor, the police inspector, the British Army Supply Officer, the notorious smuggler 'Abd al-Majid, the dancing girl Salimah, and various Iranian officials of complicity in the plot, a potent amalgamation of corrupt officials, foreign imperialists, and moral degenerates.²⁷ It was in this context of economic distress and resurgent anti-colonialism that Prime Minister Salih al-Jabr attempted to renegotiate the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930.

The Portsmouth Negotiations and the *Wathbah* of 1948

The agitation of the political parties for the revision of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty in the spring of 1947 forced Salih Jabr to publicly announce his intention to open revision negotiations. While British officials were confident in Jabr's willingness to preserve essential British interests in the country, they worried that parliamentary deputies, the vast majority of whom did not belong to political parties and were therefore highly susceptible to fluctuations in popular opinion, might balk at the final moment and "irresponsibly" refuse to ratify the revisions.²⁸ Given the extreme hesitance to participate in a political process whose outcome had not been determined in advance, the British Ambassador endeavored to ensure a favorable outcome. He urged the Foreign Office to exclude Tawfiq al-Suwaydi, a pro-British politician then at odds with Salih Jabr, from the negotiations on the grounds that "his legalistic mind would be tiresome." He argued for the exclusion of Nuri, on the other hand, because popular antipathy towards his "well known pro-British proclivities" led to the inescapable conclusion that his participation would

²⁶ Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 465-82 and 523-44.

²⁷ Basrah Consulate to British Embassy, September 23, 1947, FO 371/61682 E 8399/3524/93 and Basrah Consulate to British Embassy, November 24, 1947, FO 371/61682 E 8399/3524/93.

²⁸ Douglas Busk to Foreign Office, April 30, 1947, FO 371/61675 E 3841/1621/93.

raise a public outcry against an obvious conspiracy.²⁹ Even pro-British politicians like Nuri and Suwaydi, however, were far less pliant to colonial commands than was popularly assumed, and the ambassador's suggestion thus proved impossible to enact.

The negotiations opened in Britain under a shadow of recriminations and intimidations as British and Iraqi officials clashed over how the negotiations would be packaged and sold to the domestic audience. The British Ambassador expressed strong reservations over Salih Jabr's decision to inform a select majority of parliament – opposition figures were excluded – of his intention to travel to Britain for negotiations. Only after he received assurances that the Prime Minister would not acquaint parliament with the details of the negotiations did he finally accept that the Prime Minister knew best how to handle the local situation.³⁰ Iraqi officials were impressed, if not explicitly instructed, on the fact that negotiations would revolve around formal adjustments of phrasing in the text prepared by the British Foreign Ministry. The poet Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri, who was actually in London at the time of the negotiations as part of a delegation of journalists, later recounted his astonishment at the immense scope of power accorded to Britain in the draft treaty shown to him by 'Abd al-Ilah, with whom the poet enjoyed close relations at the time, at his London hotel. 'Abd al-Ilah explained to the poet that British diplomats were using the threat of Communist aggression to secure concessions: "What can we do? They frighten us, Jawahiri, by bringing up the bogey every now and then."³¹

British diplomats, well-versed in the art of negotiating colonial alliances with subordinate powers, managed to manipulate a process ostensibly designed to affirm local sovereignty in order to secure imperial interests in the region. While the revised treaty conceded ownership of military bases and installations in the name of local sovereignty, it remained riddled with language that ensured effective British control in times of crisis. The initial annexure to the treaty's first article, for example, read in part:

"In the event of either High Contracting Party becoming involved in war, or of a menace of hostilities, His Majesty The King of Iraq will invite His Britannic Majesty to bring immediately to Iraq the force of all arms necessary for the effective defence of Iraq and of the Middle East as a whole, and will furnish to His Britannic Majesty on Iraqi territory all the facilities and assistance in his

²⁹ Douglas Busk to Foreign Office, December 31, 1947, FO 371/68441 E 27/27/93.

³⁰ Douglas Busk to Foreign Office, December 31, 1947, FO 371/68441 E 27/27/93.

³¹ Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrayati* (Damascus: Dar al-Rafidayn, 1988), 1:469-72.

power, including the use of railways, rivers, ports, aerodromes and lines of communication."³²

Iraqi negotiators succeeded in striking the clause "necessary for the effective defence of Iraq and of the Middle East as a whole" from the final draft, but the net effect remained the same. Faced with even "the menace of hostilities" anywhere in the Middle East, Britain was entitled to occupy Iraqi military bases.³³ Britain was given control of the technical staff, installations and equipment at the military bases of Habbaniyah and Shaybah, as well as perpetual "access to and use of" those bases. Furthermore, a secret annexure to the treaty obligated Iraq to maintain additional installations across the country for Britain in case of the necessity of "resuming occupation of them in the event of war."³⁴ National sovereignty, in other words, was officially subordinated to the needs of the British Empire.

The British formula for diplomatic success was predicated upon a clear distinction between bilateral relations in war and peace. Britain would enjoy nearly unlimited access to Iraqi military bases in times of war, and British diplomats therefore sought to define "peace" in such an abstract manner that its advent would remain perpetually on the horizon while simultaneously insisting on complete clarity in the articulation of Iraqi obligations in the event that "peace" was threatened by the "menace of hostilities." Iraqi representatives naturally feared that the expansive language of the British draft revisions would permit foreign troops to remain indefinitely in the country and at first insisted on a defined timetable for the troop withdrawals, arguing that the local population required tangible changes to mark the official end of the wartime occupation.³⁵ The earliest British draft stipulated that the Iraqi government would grant the British Royal Air Force use of Iraqi airbases "until such times as the High Contracting Parties shall agree that the state of security in the Middle East no longer requires it." When the Iraqi delegation balked at the transparent British attempt to retain veto power over any effort to end the military occupation, Britain agreed to a new formulation that defined peace as "fully in force when the Allied Forces are withdrawn from the territories of all ex-enemy states." Convinced of the American intention to retain military bases in Germany for the foreseeable future, British officials were confident enough in the impossibility of such "peace" that they goaded the Iraqi delegation to waste their

³² Foreign Office Minute enclosing Anglo-Iraqi Treaty Draft, January 1, 1948, FO 371/68441 E 42/27/93.

³³ Anglo-Iraqi Treaty, January 14, 1948, FO 371/68441 E 597/27/93.

³⁴ Foreign Office Brief, "Discussion with the Iraqi Delegation," January 9, 1948, FO 371/68441 E 454/27/93.

³⁵ Foreign Office Minute, "Meeting with the Iraqi Delegation," January 7, 1948, FO 371/68441 E 409/27/93.

own political capital securing meaningless concessions for a post-war peace forever delayed by the advent of the Cold War.³⁶

British diplomats managed to further divert the attention of the Iraqi delegation from the essential aspects of the military occupation by forcing their counterparts to haggle over numerous marginal issues. Nuri, in particular, was much more concerned with his government's ability to forcefully suppress popular uprisings than with his own ability to negotiate the departure of occupation forces and was consequently deeply troubled by draft language effectively limiting the military's access to British weapons by making such access contingent on "availability." Nuri warned his British counterparts that the military hierarchy in Iraq remained suspicious of British intentions because of previous transactions that forced obsolete equipment, like defunct Anson aircraft, onto the Iraqis and reminded them that the defection of the Four Colonels to the anti-British contingent led by Rashid 'Ali was partially a product of those resentments. British officials candidly explained that availability would depend on the domestic needs and economic exigencies but maintained that the British and Iraqi armies would "be as one." While the relevant articles were eventually revised to provide reassurance to the Iraqi delegation, the revisions reflected a difference only in the degree of opaqueness and assured plausible deniability in the future.³⁷

Further discussions were held over various economic and legal issues surrounding the official presence of British agents and representatives on Iraqi soil. The Iraqi delegation wished to abrogate the Anglo-Iraqi Agreement of March 1, 1936, which accorded virtual ownership of national railways to Britain and stipulated the employment of British officials at the highest levels of the Railway Directorate. As Fadhil al-Jamali argued, Iraqi officials wished to retain British advisers but wanted to mollify their domestic constituents by claiming the right to invite those advisers on their own accord, rather than as a condition of an imposed treaty. Britain insisted that railway negotiations were an entirely separate matter from the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty and could not be dealt with until after the present negotiations were concluded, relenting only

³⁶ Foreign Office Brief, "Discussion with the Iraqi Delegation," January 9, 1948, FO 371/68441 E 454/27/93 and Anglo-Iraqi Treaty, January 14, 1948, FO 371/68441 E 597/27/93.

³⁷ J.R.C. Hamilton to B.A.B. Burrows, January 1, 1948, FO 371/68441 E 156/27/93, Foreign Office Minute, "Meeting with the Iraqi Delegation," January 7, 1948, FO 371/68441 E 409/27/93, and Foreign Office Brief, "Discussion with the Iraqi Delegation," January 9, 1948, FO 371/68441 E 454/27/93.

after the Iraqi delegation agreed to drop objections to more central treaty articles.³⁸ Iraqi objections to the considerable legal privileges and immunities granted to foreign troops were defused by a practically meaningless British offer of parallel capitulations for Iraqi troops in Britain.³⁹ On the other hand, both sides agreed that British assistance in guiding economic development and providing technical advisors was essential to preventing the spread of communism in the country.⁴⁰

After the two sides agreed on a final draft, British officials went to great lengths to trumpet their concessions to the Iraqis in official publicity statements as evidence of the final liquidation of colonial relations and the establishment of a bilateral partnership on an equal footing. As one official warned, Britain must avoid at all costs the appearance "that we have tricked the Iraqis into letting us continue our military occupation in practice at the expense of a few concession."⁴¹ Several weeks later, when the congratulatory spirit had been extinguished by the massive uprising and bloodshed in Baghdad, colonial officials adopted a more self-righteous pose. Britain had in fact "conceded almost every request made by the Iraqi negotiators and went very far to meet them on all others." The revised treaty was therefore a statement of "genuine equality which recognises on the one hand Iraq's desire for absolute sovereignty and on the other her desire for some security in the uncertain conditions of the world to-day."⁴²

The revised treaty was signed at Portsmouth on January 15, 1948 by the five members of the Iraqi delegation and their British counterparts. Despite the fact that nearly all parliamentary deputies owed their seats to the goodwill of the government, the announcement prompted an immediate revolt. Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri, who had finally gained his long coveted parliamentary seat just weeks earlier, led with the opposition against Salih Jabr. When his cousin, the renowned poet 'Ali al-Sharqi, asked why Jawahiri did not simply abstain from the debate in order to preserve his seat, Jawahiri dismissed the suggestion as incompatible with his

³⁸ Foreign Office Minute, "Meeting with the Iraqi Delegation," January 7, 1948, FO 371/68441 E 409/27/93 and Foreign Office Brief, "Discussion with the Iraqi Delegation," January 9, 1948, FO 371/68441 E 454/27/93.

³⁹ Even this largely formal offer betrayed colonial hypocrisy and obfuscation – despite the fact that the Colonial Office warned British diplomats that any capitulations negotiated bilaterally were not legally binding on the metropolitan government, British diplomats chose not to fully explain the legal ramifications of the agreement to the Iraqi delegation and instead obscured the issue in vague phrasing. A.B. Acheson to L.F.L. Pyman, January 9, 1948, L.F.L. Pyman to A.B. Acheson, January 9, 1948, FO 371/68449 E 5647/27/93, and Foreign Office Brief, "Discussion with the Iraqi Delegation," January 9, 1948, FO 371/68441 E 454/27/93.

⁴⁰ Foreign Office Minute, "Meeting with the Iraqi Delegation," January 7, 1948, FO 371/68441 E 409/27/93.

⁴¹ Foreign Office Minute, "Publicity on Iraqi Treaty," January 12, 1948, FO 371/68441 E 541/27/93.

⁴² Douglas Busk to Foreign Office, January 29, 1948, FO 371/68444 E 1369/27/93.

commitment to anti-colonial politics: "I remain, dear cousin, as you have always known me, a bedouin in Paris."⁴³ On January 19, the leftist poet Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulum published the defiant poem "The Colonial (Portsmouth) Treaty":

O Portsmouth Covenant, we as a nation
 Reject an alliance with the treacherous enemy
Stay at your own border, for Iraq possesses
 Tremendous volition to crush any reckless fool
Have you forgotten the days of the Euphrates
 And come to me disgraced to face another day?
The Tigris will show you, with her tyranny
 Towards our enemies, the face of a wrathful people⁴⁴

Bahr al-'Ulum's warning would prove prophetic as crowds surged through the streets of Baghdad in unprecedented numbers, though this time the Tigris would be filled with the bodies of dead Iraqis.

The Wathbah

On January 5, 1948, while the Iraqi delegation haggled over the definition of "peace" with British officials in London, students from the College of Law organized spontaneous demonstrations in response to the leak of treaty details by Foreign Minister Jamil al-Midfa'i. The students intended to march from campus to the Council of Ministers, the Royal Palace, and both the British and American Embassies but were prevented by police from leaving the university buildings. Police fired shots in the air while students hurled bottles and stones at police from their besieged location.⁴⁵ Students shouted slogans against not only British imperialism, but also against the inaction of Arab governments toward the crisis in Palestine.⁴⁶ The official regime mouthpiece *al-Sha'b* alleged that the demonstration was organized by "persons with destructive principles" and declared the entire movement a "plot" intended to undermine the Iraqi government's hostility to Zionism and to enervate the negotiating standpoint of the Iraqi delegation in London.⁴⁷ Nationalist papers, like Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri's *al-Ra'i al-*

⁴³ Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrayati* (Damascus: Dar al-Rafidayn, 1988), 1:480-81.

⁴⁴ Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan Bahr al-'Ulum* (Baghdad: Matba'at Dar al-Tadamun, 1968), 2:129.

⁴⁵ G.C. Pelham to Foreign Office, January 7, 1948, FO 371/68441 E 585/27/93.

⁴⁶ Douglas Busk to Foreign Office, January 5, 1948, FO 371/68441 E 265/27/93.

⁴⁷ *Al-Sha'b*, January 8, 1948.

‘*Amm*, dismissed the accusations as nonsensical and fiercely criticized police brutality against the students.⁴⁸

While the student protests soon subsided under the weight of political repression, the publication of the revised treaty thrust the independent political parties into open opposition. An editorial penned by Istiqlal Party leader Muhammad Mahdi Kubba in *Liwa al-Istiqlal* laid bare the nationalist critique. Kubba argued that the original treaty was only tolerated as the necessary price of national independence and charged that the revised treaty signified the formal annexation of Iraq by the British Empire. His editorial seized upon the vague phrasing of treaty provisions, carefully crafted by British officials to mask the scope of imperial privileges, in order to demonstrate the total absence of either temporal and spatial constraints on British rights to military bases and installations. Kubba argued that the revised treaty actually magnified British power in Iraq by sanctioning the right to maintain a standing army, whereas the original treaty had merely accorded ownership of the airbases at Habbaniyah and Shaybah. He presciently noted that the definition of "peace" as a contingency of third-party peace treaties was a "trick" that would sanction a permanent occupation while U.S. troops remained in Germany and Japan. Kubba sarcastically dismissed the reciprocal arrangement of capitulations for British and Iraqi troops as a "British propaganda trick" and an empty gesture based on the knowledge that Iraqi troops would never benefit from its provisions. He concluded that the treaty was nothing short of a "national catastrophe" orchestrated by "an unrepresentative delegation" and handed off to "an unrepresentative parliament."⁴⁹

Kubba's chief complaint, though, focused on the Joint Defence Board tasked with enforcing the treaty provisions. Critics of the treaty were painfully aware of the implications of British rights in the country and the memory of the Rashid ‘Ali movement, which most opposition figures remembered as a conflict between incompatible national and imperial interests, underlined fears that Iraq would again become involuntarily embroiled in the affairs of the British Empire. The Iraqi delegation's insistence on the *de jure* recognition of national sovereignty over military bases and installations was in many ways beside the point. Nationalists were not interested in title deeds, which they alleged merely transferred maintenance costs from Britain to Iraq, but rather demanded the recognition of the sovereign nation's right to dissent

⁴⁸ Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrayati* (Damascus: Dar al-Rafidayn, 1988), 2:17.

⁴⁹ *Liwa al-Istiqlal*, January 18, 1948.

from the imperial agenda. On that point, the Joint Defence Board was widely seen as a step backwards, enshrining the ambiguities of the previous version in explicit language that simultaneously mandated Iraqi involvement in British wars and lifted prior restrictions on the scope and extent of the mandated cooperation.⁵⁰

Popular demonstrations finally erupted on January 20 when students managed to evade police blockades by arriving at main streets in small numbers rather than large groups. Armed with sticks, they engaged local police in pitched battles when the latter attempted to disperse the crowds. At least two protestors were killed when the police opened fire on a group of students attempted to storm armored trucks with mounted machine guns. Police officials informed the government the following day that they would be unable to control the crowds unless they were authorized to open fire at their own discretion. By that point, the crowds were no longer chanting only against the administration of Salih Jabr and the Portsmouth Treaty but also against 'Abd al-Ilah and the monarchy. The Ministry of Interior responded to the public disorder by banning "irresponsible" newspapers like *al-Yaqdha*, which had criticized the absence of Salih Jabr from the country with a "scarcely veiled allusion" to the flight of 'Abd al-Ilah and Nuri al-Sa'id to 'Amman in 1941, but popular mobilization was now taking place in the streets rather than cafes.⁵¹ Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulum improvised a poem of defiance for the crowds on Rashid Street:

A draft law sent to pave the path for the invader
The propositions of this bill sanctioned invasion
Employing the language of bullets to impose itself
And compelling cooperation from the barking dogs
While the people prepare for the tribulations of night
A language for understanding the occupation of yesterday⁵²

The unprecedented size of the crowds quickly overwhelmed the local police force, whose inexperience in the logistics and tactics of crowd control allowed the protestors to take advantage of urban geography in staking their claim to public space. Police were not trained in the use of tear gas and the variability of pressure in the city's water mains precluded the use of hoses for

⁵⁰ G.C. Pelham to Foreign Office, January 17, 1948, FO 371/58443 E 834/27/93 and January 22, 1948, FO 371/68444 E 969/27/93.

⁵¹ G.C. Pelham to Foreign Office, January 21, 1948, FO 371/68443 E 932/27/93 and January 25, 1948, FO 371/68446 E 2217/27/93..

⁵² Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan Bahr al-'Ulum*, 2:129.

crowd control. The British Embassy urged officials at the Ministry of Interior to allow the crowds to demonstrate in peace during the day and then to move swiftly in the evening to defang the movement through mass arrests, but stubborn Iraqi officials were unwilling to concede any ground to the crowds. The crowds, meanwhile, succeeded in totally paralyzing the movement of people and commerce in the city by blocking the intersection of al-Ma'mun Bridge with Rashid Street and Ghazi Street, the two major thoroughfares parallel to the Tigris River upon which nearly all city traffic relied. Protestors targeted the offices of the pro-British *Iraq Times*, which had earlier described the protestors as "a mob of looters," and the headquarters of the notorious Criminal Investigations Division.⁵³

As the demonstrations intensified, acting Prime Minister Jamal Baban failed to convince allies in parliament to back a police assault on the protestors and advised 'Abd al-Ilah to publicly disavow the treaty. British officials ignored the substantive complaints of the demonstrators and instead criticized Salih Jabr's failure to properly defend the treaty. Forgetting his previous complaint about Jabr's decision to brief a select group of parliamentary deputies on the treaty revisions, the British Ambassador now attacked Jabr for "not giving more details about the proposed treaty" to parliament. By the evening of January 21, Radio Baghdad announced that 'Abd al-Ilah and a group of leading nationalist politicians had "unanimously agreed" that the revised treaty "does not realize the aspirations of the country" and decided against ratification. British officials branded the decision to negotiate with "enemies" as a public concession of weakness and even considered forcing the regent's abdication. One official, though, noted that crowds had totally overwhelmed an increasingly nervous police force and argued that Baban was "a stupid, lazy and extremely venal man, but he does not lack courage" in justifying the concession.⁵⁴

'Abd al-Ilah's public repudiation of the treaty, though, did not dampen popular enthusiasm for the protest movement as intended. Poets seized the opportunity to publicly celebrate the achievement of the crowds and then to intensify popular demands for radical

⁵³ G.C. Pelham to Foreign Office, January 21, 1948, FO 371/68443 E 880/27/93, January 21, 1948, FO 371/68443 E 892/27/93, and January 25, 1948, FO 371/68446 E 2217/27/93, and Douglas Busk to Foreign Office, January 30, 1948, FO 371/68446 E 2254/27/93.

⁵⁴ G.C. Pelham to Foreign Office, January 22, 1948, FO 371/68443 E 932/27/93, January 22, 1948, FO 371/68443 E 949/27/93 and January 25, 1948, FO 371/68446 E 2217/27/93, Ernest Bevin to Douglas Busk, January 26, 1948, FO 371/68444 E 1163/27/93, Douglas Busk to Foreign Office, January 30, 1948, FO 371/68446 E 2254/27/93 and Henry Mack to Foreign Office, February 24, 1948, FO 371/68447 E 3243/27/93.

political reform. Jawahiri eulogized the fallen martyrs before massive crowds on Rashid Street in his poem "Halt at the Graves of the Victims":

Halt at the graves of the victims and do not let fall
Your tears upon them nor cry extemporaneously
Do not dishonor the covenant of masculinities
That abhors weakness and rejects infirmity
Lay upon the wreath some budding flowers
Above that blossom of glistening conscience
Allow it fall to from your outstretched arms
And then narrate, if you wish, proclaiming:
O You who now rest from your wanderings
You made pleasant the abode and perfumed the area
Every one of us envies you, for you have indeed
Seized the opportunity for honor before advantage⁵⁵

The protestors celebrated not only the collapse of the reviled treaty concessions, but also the imminent fall of the extraordinarily unpopular government, which could not be expected to endure in the face of 'Abd al-Ilah's public repudiation. Acting upon British advice, however, the Ministry of Interior ordered the arrest of numerous opposition figures, which undermined faith in the government's intentions.⁵⁶

On January 22, crowds again turned out in central Baghdad in even larger numbers than on previous days, in order to demand further concessions. As many as one hundred and fifty thousand protestors marched through the streets behind the casket of Shamran 'Alwan, a Communist student killed by police the previous day. The crowds hoisted Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulum on their shoulders as he regaled the procession with improvised poems of defiance like "O Believers in the People":

O Believers in the people and the revolution
Rise up and condemn the covenant of the slave
In struggle you are destined to liberate the people
And to obtain glory through the illustrious struggle
For we remain as in the past courageous and bold
In the face of tyranny and oppression in every age
We stand ready to wade into the deluge of death
As we sing to the people a melody of immortality⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Jawahiri, *Diwan al-Jawahiri*, 3:149-51.

⁵⁶ G.C. Pelham to Foreign Office, January 25, 1948, FO 371/68446 E 2217/27/93.

⁵⁷ Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan Bahr al-'Ulum*, 2:130.

In front of the trade union headquarters near the mosque of Sayyid Sultan 'Ali just off Rashid Street in central Baghdad, Bahr al-'Ulum improvised the poem "Labor Unions, Preserve the Honorable People":

Labor Unions, preserve the honorable people
And erect for the workers some triumphal arches
The signs have begun and so their nobility proceeds
In this movement, the *Wathbah*, what a wonderful effect
Glory and honor to her, for she has united the nation
By decree of fate, and at her front, glory and honor to man
The scars of the June catastrophe had not healed
And so January came to us shrewder and stronger⁵⁸

While Iraqi officials justified their capitulations to the crowds by privately explaining to British officials that they feared an imminent massacre of Jews, Bahr al-'Ulum publicly celebrated the diversity of the popular movement as a cathartic national reconciliation healing the wounds of the *farhud* of June 1941.

As the crowds wound their way through Rashid Street to the Ministry of Defense, Bahr al-'Ulum serenaded military officials with the poem "Salutations from the People to the Army":

O Army of Iraq, if my heart composed
A verse for you it would scarcely be sufficient
You shaped your people's glory with righteousness
And so your creation has emerged so beautiful
Preserved in my mouth an anthem for you narrated
By the Land of the Two Rivers, generation after generation
You lived for the people, your power from their name
And the people revitalize their ever connected struggle⁵⁹

In the evening, atop the shoulders of the ebullient crowds, the poet improvised his most memorable poem, "The People's Leap," which helped to immortalize the popular uprising as the *Wathbah* ("leap"):

O *Wathbah* of the People, rend apart
With your maledictions this stupid treaty
For the Portsmouth Treaty is a chain
The fetters of an unconditional occupation⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan Bahr al-'Ulum*, 2:130.

⁵⁹ Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan Bahr al-'Ulum*, 2:131.

He drew upon the historical lineage of anti-colonial resistance to exhort the fury and the passions of the crowds against the oppressive treaty:

O *Wathbah* of the People, send away
The grief and sadness of sheer evil
That descends upon us, for Iraq
Is the death of every stuttering fool
The stronger logic lies in the struggle of the resisting people
So Bevin will be shut up just as the villain Churchill was muzzled

The struggle against the treaty, though, had now been decisively won, and so the attention of the crowds would soon turn toward the treachery of national politicians.

On January 23, Bahr al-'Ulum increased the intensity of his attacks on the local regime, branding them now as national traitors in his poem "The People Curse the Rule of Traitors":

The cunning colonizer prepares the snares of treason
For the suspicious and idiotic to tumble in humiliation
And everyone whose efforts contradict his tongue is disrobed
The people curse the rule imposed upon them in betrayal⁶¹

The shift in tone from a purely anti-colonial critique to a direct attack on the old regime forced the government's hand, and Bahr al-'Ulum was arrested that evening and severely tortured at the al-Bataween police station.⁶² While the brutal torture nearly killed him and left him bedridden for nearly a year and a half, his prison poetry reflected his pride in the accomplishments of the national uprising:

Bevin and Satan clapped their hands together
In delight at the thought that crossed Bevin's mind
To squander the dignity and honor held so dear
By the people of the valley with a camouflaged treaty
The band at Portsmouth envisioned in Baghdad
Exultation and jubilation at the sale of the nation
But the people exploded and hurled forth their reply
To the treaty and her leaches in the brothels of London⁶³

⁶⁰ Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan Bahr al-'Ulum*, 2:132-34.

⁶¹ Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan Bahr al-'Ulum*, 2:134.

⁶² Batatu's lengthy citation of the Bahjat 'Attiyah's police report from January 23 underscored the police obsession with the poet, who provoked the "vehement passion" of the crowds as they carried him through the streets, stopping only occasionally to listen to another "inflammatory speech." Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 552-54.

⁶³ Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan Bahr al-'Ulum*, 2:135.

The state violence deployed against the protestors remained relatively sporadic until January 27, when massive crowds marched towards parliament to protest the return of Salih Jabr and Nuri al-Sa'īd from London. When the working class crowds from al-Karkh attempted to cross al-Ma'mun Bridge to join the student protestors in al-Rusafa on the eastern bank of the Tigris River, police opened fire from armored cars and rooftops. The students then managed to drive away police from their side of the bridge and tried to cross over to al-Karkh, but they too were gunned down by the waiting police. Participants and eyewitnesses described a scene of unspeakable carnage, as bodies littered the bridge and surrounding streets, as well as the Tigris River. Official death tolls were rendered useless by the well-known fact that police had been arresting relatives of the *Wathbah* victims when they attempted to collect corpses at the hospital and thereby forced most families to bypass official channels for burial.⁶⁴ While most historians have put the casualty figures somewhere between three and four hundred, the British Embassy stubbornly insisted weeks later that only eight protestors had been killed on the bridge. Three cabinet ministers and numerous deputies resigned in protest, finally securing the collapse of Salih Jabr's government.⁶⁵

Aftermath of the Uprising

The collapse of Salih Jabr's government threw the British Embassy and the Iraqi political establishment into disarray. 'Abd al-Ilah, who wanted to make Salih Jabr a scapegoat for the political debacle in order to obscure the substantive claims of the crowds, recommended "a colourless Government under a respected non-partisan personality" which would allow the treaty to be considered "on its own merits."⁶⁶ The British Embassy, on the other hand, wanted a strong administration capable of forcing the treaty through parliament in the face of popular opposition and supported the return to power of either Arshad al-'Umari, eager to resume his anti-Communist campaign of 1946, or Tawfiq al-Suwaydi, who was tainted by his own role in the Portsmouth negotiations. Suwaydi proved uninterested, and even Nuri understood that "those who have been agitating against Saleh Jabr were not working to put [a] notorious reactionary like

⁶⁴ For a full account of the events of January 27, see Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 554-57.

⁶⁵ Douglas Busk to Foreign Office, January 27, 1948, FO 371/68444 E 1231/27/93 and February 4, 1948, FO 371/68445 E 1708/27/93, and James Renton to Foreign Office, February 5, 1948, FO 371/68445 E 2693/27/93.

⁶⁶ G.C. Pelham to Foreign Office, January 23, 1948, FO 371/68444 E 1043/27/93, Douglas Busk to Foreign Office, January 29, 1948, FO 371/68444 E 1296/27/93, and Henry Mack to Foreign Office, March 29, 1948, FO 371/68448 E 4291/27/93.

Arshad into [the] premiership."⁶⁷ In the end, they turned to Muhammad al-Sadr, the longtime President of the Senate and an old nationalist icon famed for his role in the anti-British uprising of 1920.

Sadr privately assured the British Embassy that he did not oppose the revised treaty and promised to refrain from publicly criticizing its contents and consequences, but he argued that it could not possibly be ratified without reigniting popular fury and indicated that he only wished to remain in power until peace and order had been restored. Sadr moved quickly to secure an emergency shipment of wheat from Britain in order to alleviate the bread crisis and dampen popular enthusiasm for protests. When the British Ambassador attempted to use the wheat shipments as leverage to force Sadr to introduce the treaty to parliament for ratification, the Prime Minister responded by suspending parliament for fifty days in order to forestall the emergence of new political controversies that might further energize and politicize the daily funeral processions for martyrs during the forty day mourning period.⁶⁸

The political opposition, though, scarcely needed additional cause to turn the funeral processions into an open denunciation of the old regime. Most notable in this regard was the funeral of Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri's brother Ja'far, who was among those who fell on al-Ma'mun Bridge. Just before he finally succumbed to his injuries on February 4, Ja'far pled with his older brother for "three lines of poetry in remembrance." The funeral procession the next morning brought forth tens of thousands of mourners, including significant delegations from Najaf and Karbala. While the procession remained peaceful, a massive presence of security forces stood watch in preparation to intervene at any moment of tension. Jawahiri later claimed that the supporters of Salih Jabr prevented mourners from approaching Ja'far's tomb and even climbed on top of the structure in order to cover the wreaths of condolence.⁶⁹ More memorable, though, was the memorial ceremony held for Ja'far on February 14 at the Haydarkhanah Mosque on Rashid Street. After the ceremony, Jawahiri stood on the steps of the mosque and without warning took up a loudspeaker and began reciting the now iconic poem "My Brother Ja'far":

⁶⁷ G.C. Pelham to Foreign Office, January 25, 1948, FO 371/68444 E 1049/27/93 and Douglas Busk to Foreign Office, January 28, 1948, FO 371/68444 E 1252/27/93.

⁶⁸ Douglas Busk to Foreign Office, January 29, 1948, FO 371/68444 E 1369/27/93, January 30, 1948, FO 371/68444 E 1371/27/93, January 31, 1948, FO 371/68444 E 1391/27/93, February 3, 1948, FO371/68445 E 1600/27/93, and February 5, 1947, FO 371/68446 E 1717/27/93.

⁶⁹ Jawahiri, *Dhikrayati*, 2:22-27.

Do you know or do you not know
That the wounds of the fallen are a mouth?
A mouth not like that of the charlatan
Nor like that of the one who solicits
It calls upon the hungry and wretched
To spill your blood to feed yourself
And shouts at the band of sycophants
Curse your villains to find your honor⁷⁰

By the end of the fourth stanza, Rashid Street had filled with thousand of onlookers, grinding traffic to a complete and total halt. The crowds were reportedly to tears at the poem's memorable climax:

I see a horizon lit with blood
As the stars vanish from sight
A rope from the earth to ascend
As the stairs eject their climbers
If a hand reaches out it is in betrayal
Interfering to obstruct the conclusion
Piled around it is a pile of corpses
Whose size is eclipsed by its honor
A hand stretches from behind the veil
And draws on the horizon what is to be
One generation passes and another one rises
While the fire they face continues to burn

The poem was carried on the front page of nearly every opposition paper the next day and contributed essentially, as Salma Khadra Jayyusi has suggested, to "preparing the Iraqi people emotionally for the advent and the eruption of revolution."⁷¹ While Bahr al-'Ulum played a more significant role in actually leading the crowds in the heat of the uprising, Jawahiri's greater public stature assured an unprecedented degree of publicity for the public act of political defiance.

While nationalist politics took on an increasingly mass character, with crowds failing to disperse despite the mass arrest of opposition party leaders, the British Embassy remained fixated on the partisan rivalries of elite politics. Ignoring entire weeks of public protest, the British Ambassador now contended that the situation spiraled out of control only when a faction of the "old gang" of elite politicians conspired to bring down the government of Salih Jabr by

⁷⁰ Jawahiri, *Diwan al-Jawahiri*, 3:155-59.

⁷¹ Salma Khadra Jayyusi, *Trends and Movements in Modern Arabic Poetry* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1977), 1:200.

convincing ‘Abd al-Ilah to publicly disavow the treaty. ‘Abd al-Ilah's concession, he argued, emboldened the leadership of the Istiqlal Party, who organized demonstrations that gained popular credence "because of the present bread crisis and the standing resentment against Palestine partition."⁷² Because the treaty had fallen victim to partisan disputes that were "scarcely at all" anti-British, as the ambassador lectured Foreign Minister Hamdi al-Pachachi, Iraqi politicians must make amends and "educate Iraqi public opinion" on the merits of the imperial alliance. This vertical conceptualization of political agency, which viewed the political elite as the driving force behind popular movements, undergirded imperial efforts to seek solutions by nominating new personalities and forging new alliances rather than addressing substantive demands.⁷³

Efforts to rekindle ratification talks were complicated from the outset by the fact that the new government was overwhelmingly comprised of politicians from traditional backgrounds untainted by prior collaboration with Britain whose inability to speak English hindered communication with the British Embassy. While representatives of the new administration privately apologized to the British Embassy for publicly rejecting the treaty, they were unwilling to criticize specific provisions. Hamdi al-Pachachi, who "illogically enough" contended that the revised treaty did not go far enough insisted that the rejection of the treaty was merely "formal" and helpfully offered that British planes could land on the roof of his house in the event of war. Despite the confusion, the British Embassy remained optimistic that the treaty could be salvaged by strong leaders capable of "educating public opinion in the right way." One official argued that they ought to simply change the name of the "Joint Defence Board," insert abstract language defending national sovereignty, and confine any troublesome provisions to unpublished annexes.⁷⁴

Daily protests that commemorated the martyrs of the national uprising throughout February and March, however, precluded the possibility of pushing through such patently deceptive measures. While the processions were as a rule peaceful, the British Embassy

⁷² Even the ardent anti-Communist Arshad al-'Umari found the claim that the demonstrations were "fomented" by opposition political figures impossibly facile given the massive size of the demonstrations. Arshad al-'Umari to Douglas Busk, February 22, 1948, FO 371/68447 E 3239/27/93.

⁷³ Douglas Busk to Foreign Office, January 29, 1948, FO 371/68444 E 1369/27/93, January 31, 1948, FO 371/68446 E 2019/27/93, and February 4, 1948, FO 371/68445 E 1649/27/93.

⁷⁴ Douglas Busk to Foreign Office, January 31, 1948, FO 371/68445 E 1467/27/93, February 4, 1948, FO 371/68445 E 1649/27/93, February 5, 1948, FO 371/68446 E 2611/27/93, and April 3, 1948, FO 371/68448 E 4701/27/93.

continued to view official tolerance of the public protests as a sign of weakness and humiliation. After the British Ambassador was forced to travel from the embassy to Iraqi government offices by a detour that "took ten or fifteen minutes longer" than usual by the crowds that gathered to listen to Jawahiri's eulogy for his martyred brother, he personally urged the government to put down the demonstrations with force. Muhammad al-Sadr, a long-time friend and patron of Jawahiri, refused the suggestion, arguing that the demonstrations would fade away if ignored and offering to resign if he were proven wrong. By the end of March, the announcement of a treaty concluded by Britain and Transjordan provoked new demonstrations that coincided with massive labor strikes. Sadr still steadfastly refused British exhortations to prohibit the demonstrations, clamp down on the press, and conduct mass arrests of political organizers and agitators.⁷⁵

The deterioration of the situation in Palestine in early April, though, pushed local officials beyond their breaking point as crowds continued to swell. Major demonstrations organized by both the Istiqlal Party and the Iraqi Communist Party erupted on April 13 and featured chants against both Zionism and the poor quality of bread in Baghdad. Nationalist newspapers now openly denounced Jewish influence in Iraq and carried reports of Iraqi Jews caught fighting with the Haganah forces, while crowds now began chanting against the Jews in general. Only the three leftists newspapers, *al-Ra'i al-'Amm*, *Sawt al-Ahali*, and *al-Watan*, mounted a serious defense of the Iraqi Jewish population, denouncing the new spirit of anarchy that threatened to derail the protest movement in tragic sectarian massacres. The radical nationalist papers, particularly *al-Sijil* and *al-Nahda*, struck back, branding Kamil al-Chadirchi the "saint of criminal Zionism" and printing a Haganah statement congratulating the Iraqi left for its defense of the Iraqi Jews. As tensions increased, Kamil Qazanchi and Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri, who were not members of the Iraqi Communist Party but were dedicated leftists generally sympathetic to the party line, personally led street demonstrations with slogans of, "We are friends of the Jews but enemies of the Zionists!"⁷⁶

On April 14, Jawahiri recited his poem "Day of the Martyr," a grueling eulogy of nearly two hundred stanzas in commemoration of the martyrs of the *Wathbah*, in al-Saba' Square in the Shaykh 'Umar district of Baghdad not far from al-Ma'mun Bridge. Like "My Brother Ja'far," the poem evinced a sense of optimism in the national unity forged through public protests:

⁷⁵ Henry Mack to Foreign Office, February 24, 1948, FO 371/68447 E 3239/27/93 and March 24, 1948, FO 371/68447 E 3880/27/93.

⁷⁶ George Wadsworth, "Baghdad Press Summary, April 11-17, 1948," USDS 890G.9111 RR/4-1948.

Day of the Martyr! Life would be sweet
If brotherhood and harmony were achieved
If those who are feuding came to agreement
A kinship of their emotions and their concerns
If after such a long separation there was a meeting
Between the shaykh, the rabbi, and the priest
And if we agreed on how to raise our voice
And how we might liberate our national flags!⁷⁷

As one eyewitness recalled, the poem provoked "a sea of workers and peasants [to] raise their machetes and pitchforks while they roared in one voice."⁷⁸ \

By early May, however, the Istiqlal Party newspaper, *Liwa al-Istiqlal*, now joined the more radical nationalist papers in branding the Iraqi Jewish community as a "fifth column" and calling for a general purge of Zionists and Communists from the government and their detention at the old concentration camps. These press attacks on the Jews coincided with the arrest and deportation of at least nine Iraqi Jews, including two journalists, and physical assaults on Jews in the working class Karkh district of Baghdad, in which at least one Jew was beaten to death by an angry crowd.⁷⁹ After a small demonstration of Iraqi Jews protested the arrest of several dozen of their friends and relatives as members of an "underground Zionist movement," *Liwa al-Istiqlal* came out in favor of ejecting all Jews from the country. *Al-Ahd*, a newspaper owned by Khalil Kannah, a relative and close political ally of Nuri al-Sa' id, likewise denounced the entire Jewish community for its alleged support for Zionism and efforts to undermine the national economy.⁸⁰

While the crisis in Palestine intensified both anti-colonial and anti-government sentiment, the opposition parties were ill-suited to coordinate public protests. The Communists, whose deference to Soviet policy had forced them to endorse the United Nations partition plan the previous fall and cost them a huge number of supporters and sympathizers, could not risk drawing further attention to that spectacularly unpopular decision by diverting attention from the local economy to Palestine.⁸¹ The Istiqlal Party, on the other hand, had always championed the Palestinian cause but was forced to restrain its members due to the fact that several party leaders

⁷⁷ Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri, *Diwan al-Jawahiri* (Bayrut: Bisan, 2000), 3:163-72.

⁷⁸ Ranyan al-Shawaf, "An Interview with Sargon Boulus," *Parnassus: Poetry in Review* 29:1/2 (2006), 47-48.

⁷⁹ George Wadsworth, "Baghdad Press Summary, May 2-8, 1948," USDS 890G.9111 RR/5-1048.

⁸⁰ Edmund J. Dorsz, "Review of the Iraqi Press, October 16-27, 1949," USDS 890G.9111 RR/10-2849.

⁸¹ *Al-Hurriyah*, September 4, 1959 and Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, *Kuntu Shuyu'iyān* (Cologne: Manshurāt al-Jamal, 2007), 103-8.

were now government ministers. The National Democratic Party was perhaps better placed to organize protests and demonstrations, but most of the impetus now came from below as crowds thronged in public squares to listen to anti-colonial orations by poets like Jawahiri. As the Arab armies in Palestine collapsed and popular anger at the Iraqi government's impotence spiraled out of control, the government moved to preserve order by declaring martial law on the evening of May 14, 1948. While the crisis in Palestine offered a convenient excuse for the declaration of martial law, however, it masked the secret collusion of the British Embassy and local government officials in exploiting the circumstance to launch an offensive against the Communists and to afford the government latitude in rigging the new elections.⁸²

Terrified by the prospect that the burgeoning national front in Baghdad would be swept to power on the back of popular support in the upcoming elections, the British Embassy desperately sought a solution that would suppress the increasingly radical popular demands. British officials clashed openly with members of Sadr's administration, who had been largely marginalized in the previous rigged elections and were therefore receptive to public calls for new elections. The British Embassy firmly opposed the idea, arguing that the opposition parties were in a position to exploit their new popularity and that the presence of notable opposition figures in parliament would make it difficult for the present administration to "act with the firmness that the situation demands." Equally concerned with escalating the protests by overreaching, British advisers began to privately encourage Nuri and 'Abd al-Ilah to permit the election of "a smallish number" of pliable candidates from opposition parties – "provided that there was no chance of their securing a majority" – in order to "act as a kind of safety-valve for the constitutional expression of feelings which could otherwise only be expressed in the streets." The Iraqi Ambassador in London suggested amending the constitution instead in order to dispense with parliament altogether.⁸³

The search for suitable opposition candidates provoked further ruptures between the British Embassy and the Iraqi political establishment. While Muhammad Mahdi Kubba and other Istiqlal Party leaders privately assured British officials that they were open to negotiating with Britain as part of an anti-Communist alliance, the British Embassy had not yet transitioned from

⁸² Henry Mack to Foreign Office, April 24, 1948, FO 371/68448 E 5143/27/93, May 13, 1948, FO 371/68449 E 6265/27/93, May 15, 1948, FO 371/68449 E 6339/27/93, and July 14, 1948, FO 371/68450 E 9745/27/93.

⁸³ Henry Mack to Foreign Office, February 18, 1948, FO 371/68446 E 2372/27/93, Foreign Office to Douglas Busk, March 26, 1948, FO 371/68447 E 3894/27/93, and Foreign Office to Henry Mack, April 1, 1948, FO 371/68447 E 3901/27/93.

World War II to the Cold War and continued to view the Istiqlal Party members as "ex-Nazis." Some British officials, genuinely committed to economic reform as a means of forestalling popular revolution, sought an alliance with the National Democratic Party, which they hoped could be purged of its leftist faction and refashioned as a moderate liberal party. Others worried that the party had understood too well the importance of street demonstrations from the lessons of the *Wathbah*, and in any case, the party leadership showed no indication that they were willing to sacrifice popular support for access to power. The British Embassy eventually decided that "a few members" of both parties should be elected in the interest of making parliament "as representative as possible" and in the hope that "success might moderate their views."⁸⁴

Internal political disputes in Muhammad al-Sadr's cabinet, however, impeded the government's ability to properly rig the elections. Turnout was so uncharacteristically high in the first stage among working class voters in Baghdad and Basrah that some panicked tribal forces loyal to pro-British candidates opened fire on the voter queues, leaving at least four dead and injuring dozens. The staggering success of leftist candidates prompted an immediate reconciliation among rival factions of the political elite, and the declaration of martial law allowed the government to intervene more forcefully in the second stage of the electoral process "in order to make sure that the right people were elected." Early gains in Basrah were erased when the local governor had several NDP leaders court-martialed as a warning to secondary electors. In Hillah, the local governor complained when given a predetermined list of victors that Iraq "had travelled from free elections via 'direction' to selection." In Sulaymaniyah, the overwhelming victory of the National Liberation Party in the first stage was reversed by the decision to disband the "Communist front" party. In the end, the opposition parties won just eight out one hundred and thirty-seven seats – four for the Istiqlal Party and two each for the Liberal Party and the National Democratic Party. The British Ambassador reflected without a hint of sarcasm that "the Iraqi electorate had struck the death-blow of the hopes of democratic political life" and had instead demonstrated "that they preferred the existing type of government to the programmes of the political parties."⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Douglas Busk to Foreign Office, April 5, 1948, FO 371/68448 E 4591/27/93, Foreign Office to Henry Mack, May 10, 1948, FO 371/68448 E 4661/27/93, Henry Mack to Foreign Office, May 11, 1948, FO 371/68449 E 6581/27/93 and May 24, 1948, FO 371/68449 E 6894/27/93.

⁸⁵ Henry Mack to Foreign Office, May 13, 1948, FO 371/68449 E 6265/27/93, June 6, 1948, FO 371/68449 E 8293/27/93, June 23, 1948, FO 371/68450 E 9086/27/93, and December 17, 1948, FO 371/75128 E 74/1016/93.

By the end of June, the "old gang" was once again firmly in control of the government and hundreds of leftist and nationalist opposition figures were behind bars. Jawahiri published "Disgraceful Conditions," a fierce attack on the counterrevolution in general and the Istiqlal Party leader Muhammad Mahdi Kubba in particular for exploiting the legacy of the martyrs in exchange for a path to power:

Go and tell the papers you are in control
Shamelessly claim you are the free leader
As for me – and my honor here is vast
I righteously abstain from all exploitation
I have amassed from tragedy only a moral
A treasure for the country and her people
That will enrich the generations and nourish
Them with fat, while I am tormented by hunger
No, I will not exploit, for you are a warning
In what you have done, you are to me filth!⁸⁶

Bahr al-'Ulum likewise condemned the Istiqlal Party and other opposition factions that had abandoned the national front and entered into a new anti-Communist alliance with the pro-British political elite. His poem "An Anti-Colonial Rebel" defiantly attacked those who dismissed him as a godless Communist:

Some people will say after my liberation from them
In death, "That Unbeliever has finally died!"
But others will rise enthusiastically to defend me
From the charge of atheism and indeed refute it
And my truth, like the sun, will spread its light
Shining an eye upon the intentional concealment
For even the English see that I am a free poet
Eternally a rebel against their colonialism⁸⁷

Perhaps the most significant development of the *Wathbah*, however, was the total erosion of the old regime's popular legitimacy. Anti-colonial poets and intellectuals, who had always attempted to balance a critical stance towards the state with working alliances with select factions of the political establishment, now divorced themselves entirely from the regime and dedicated themselves to revolutionary activism. The near total marginalization of the opposition political parties from parliament increasingly propelled disaffected intellectuals towards the

⁸⁶ *Al-Hidarah* and *al-'Usur*, July 24, 1948 and Jawahiri, *Diwan al-Jawahiri*, 3:189-90.

⁸⁷ Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan Bahr al-'Ulum*, 2:152.

radical underground parties, particularly the Iraqi Communist Party. Jawahiri's militant stance on the poet's political duty to assume a public role in the struggle against colonialism and dictatorship was made most explicit in his lengthy poem "The Balcony," which denounced those poets who held court in cafes and refused to take on a public role:

Heedless of their persistence in the vacuum
The nooks and corners of cafes are to them a salon
They shout at one another in chatter and nonsense
The whooping of storks rained down upon with pebbles...
Their dishonor is in donning the robes of litterateurs
Which the honorable man of letters goes without⁸⁸

Jawahiri's political poetry in the coming years would be characterized by an overwhelming interest in caustic criticism and public confrontation reflecting an almost self-destructive tendency to provoke national controversy and to court arrest. Despite the fact that 'Abd al-Ilah personally assured Jawahiri that he would be reelected to parliament, the poet declined to stand for office in the new elections. The painful abdication of his coveted parliamentary seat, which had for so long symbolized the national recognition for his literary accomplishments denied to him by the opposition of both pan-Arabists like Sati' al-Husri, who resented his Persian heritage and Shi'i background, and elite politicians like Salih Jabr, who resented his caustic public criticism, reflected a new public commitment to revolution. It was a painful decision for Jawahiri, who had enjoyed warm personal relations with the monarchy for decades, and his retrospective account reflects the disappointment that accompanied his pride in championing the legacy of the national martyrs: "It was not on account of my own future or the future of my family, but instead for the sake of the martyrs of the *Wathbah*, the revolutionary street, and the masses longing for rest. And yet... what a pity..."⁸⁹

Poetry and Public Confrontation, 1948-1952

In the aftermath of the *Wathbah*, Jawahiri's public stature stood unrivalled among the poets, intellectuals, and politicians affiliated with the national front opposition movement. Along with his comrade Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulum, Jawahiri emerged as a leader of the leftwing Peace Partisans movement and remained on excellent terms with the leadership of both the

⁸⁸ *Al-Ra'i al-'Amm*, August 11, 1948 and Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri, *Diwan al-Jawahiri* (Bayrut: Bisan, 2000), 3:109-20.

⁸⁹ Jawahiri, *Dhikrayati*, 2:30.

bourgeois liberal National Democratic Party and the outlawed Iraqi Communist Party. Widely recognized as "the greatest Iraqi poet of his generation," Jawahiri's literary abilities helped to cut across the social and ideological divisions that bisected the opposition movement.⁹⁰ Communists celebrated his uncompromisingly withering critique of capitalism and dictatorship while non-Communists praised his political independence and strident anti-colonialism. His ability to blend classical and modern techniques won the praise and enthusiasm of both traditionalists and modernists. Most importantly, his public interventions in the political arena won him a mass following of unprecedented proportions. When he found himself penniless as a result of his self-imposed political exile and unable to fund the publication of his newspaper, *al-Ra'ī al-'Amm*, the workers at a cigarette factory in Baghdad stepped in and offered a loan – which Jawahiri would only accept after convincing their representative to accept the legal title to his printing press as collateral – to help keep the paper afloat.⁹¹

Jawahiri now seemed to revel in his national fame and increasingly insisted on reciting his poems in public, preferably before audiences that included powerful political figures. His infamous reading of "Hashim al-Witri" at a public ceremony in Baghdad, which resulted in his arrest and imprisonment, created a major public scandal and further solidified the role of poetry as a transgressive political weapon.⁹² Jawahiri continued to compose inflammatory poems after his release from prison, and his palpable anger and longing for revolution is evident in the memorable poem "Descend, Darkness," which followed shortly after "Hashim al-Witri" in the summer of 1949 and called for violent retribution against the national traitors responsible for the *Wathbah* massacres:

Descend, darkness! Descend, fog! Descend, barren clouds!
Descend, smoke burning from the conscience! Descend, torture!
Descend, ruin upon your protectors! Descend, damnation!
Descend, punishment on the tomb builders! Descend retribution!
Descend, crowing and the owl will answer the echo! Descend destruction!
Descend upon the lazy whose sluggishness is scorned even by flies!
They have never known the color of the sky because their necks are too bowed!
Because their heads are trampled upon as one tramples upon dust!
Descend upon the hungry goats still yearning to be milked!

⁹⁰ See Janyyusi, *Trends and Movements*, 1:197-204.

⁹¹ Jawahiri, *Dhikrayati*, 2:54-55.

⁹² On the "Hashim al-Witri" episode, see the introductory chapter to this dissertation, pp. 1-4.

Descend upon these disfigured wretches whose lives are loathed even by dogs!⁹³

Literary critic M. M. Badawi has noted that the poem's "repetition and diction has an effect analogues to that of magical imprecation or curses."⁹⁴ This poetic effect underscored the pessimism of a national opposition movement now fractured by the crackdown on the Iraqi Communist Party in late 1948 and early 1949 and the defection of leading members of the Istiqlal Party to the regime.

Jawahiri's clear sympathy for the Communists, however, did not lead him to join the party or even coordinate with its leadership informally. While younger poets like Badr Shakir al-Sayyab and 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati were swept up by the revolutionary fervor of the era and joined their comrades at the University of Baghdad in joining the Iraqi Communist Party, the older generation of intellectuals and poets, led by Jawahiri and Bahr al-'Ulum, fit much more comfortably with the independent Peace Partisans, a leftwing movement dedicated to political neutrality and world peace. Jawahiri had traveled to Wroclaw for the World Congress of Intellectuals for Peace in 1948, where he met Pablo Picasso, Bertolt Brecht, Aldous Huxley, and other prominent leftwing intellectuals. The Peace Partisans have generally been branded as a "Communist front" by British and American officials because of their unwavering commitment to socialist domestic policies and adoption of consistently anti-American and anti-British stance unbalanced by any serious criticism of Soviet foreign policy.⁹⁵

Ideology aside, there were serious practical distinctions between membership in the Iraqi Communist Party and the Peace Partisans movement that help explain the significance of the poets' decision to adopt an independent political stance. Peace Partisan leaders were highly respected poets and lawyers and overwhelmingly hailed from Arab Muslim backgrounds, while ethnic and religious minorities were overrepresented in the Communist Party. More importantly, the anti-American themes emphasized by the Peace Partisans were consistent with a long tradition of anti-colonial nationalism in Iraq. The Peace Partisans publicly and consistently denied any affiliation with the Communist Party or loyalty to the Soviet Union and instead framed their opposition to Cold War defence treaties in a language of "national liberation" that

⁹³ Jawahiri, *Diwan al-Jawahiri*, 3:155-59.

⁹⁴ M. M. Badawi, *A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 66.

⁹⁵ See, for example, Edward S. Crocker to Department of State, July 7, 1951, USDS 787.001/7-751. Even Batatu has described the Peace Partisans as "the auxiliary forces of the Communist Party." Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 687.

recalled the nationalist discourse of the Rashid 'Ali movement.⁹⁶ Both Jawahiri and Bahr al-'Ulum valued their artistic independence and ability to determine their own political agenda rather than heeding the tactical and aesthetic advice of party leaders. While the young Communist poet Badr Shakir al-Sayyab chafed under the Communist aesthetics that encouraged him to mimic the style of radical poets like Pablo Neruda, Nazim Hikmat, and Konstantin Simonov instead of his preferred "reactionary" poets like T.S. Eliot and Edith Sitwell and to avoid nationalist tropes and symbols, Jawahiri continued to craft his political commentary in the neo-classical tradition that looked to 'Abbasid era poets like al-Mutanabbi, Abu Tammam, and Abu al-'Ala al-Ma'arri for aesthetic inspiration.

The Peace Partisans' public campaign against the incorporation of Iraq and other Arab countries in an anti-Communist Cold War alliance with Britain and the United States was launched in the fall of 1949. In the poetry of Bahr al-'Ulum, in particular, the campaign prompted a remarkable rhetorical shift as the poet used peace rather than violence as a metaphor for anti-colonial resistance. In "Peace is the Desire of the Peoples," he framed a sharp dichotomy between victims and aggressors:

They say "Peace," and I say what nation
Preserves its security without its peace
But the dregs of the two wars gather themselves
To complete the trilogy of their misdeeds
In the East and West, and in any home therein, we find
Survivors of the misdeeds? Or perhaps their victors?⁹⁷

The new rejection of violence – remarkable for a poet who once suggested that Britain could only be confronted with machine guns because they only comprehended Arab voices that spoke with a "rat-a-tat-tat" – was made more explicit in the poem "In Peace the Death of Tyranny":

Do not ask about the enemy and from whom we borrow the sword for his extermination
I am acquainted with what was devised and hatched for this East and her occupation
But go and ask the occupiers how they can tyrannize the people reeling in shackles
The people of the world work in peace for the annihilation of tyranny and exploitation⁹⁸

⁹⁶ See, for example, Tawfiq Munir's apologia for the Peace Partisans. Tawfiq Munir, *Haqiqat Harakat al-Salam* (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr, 1956), 41-43.

⁹⁷ Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan Bahr al-'Ulum*, 2:183.

⁹⁸ Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan Bahr al-'Ulum*, 2:183.

The thematic transformations reflect the tremendous impact of the *Wathbah* on the national consciousness of the political opposition. While the anti-colonial poetry of 1920 yearned for the tribes to save the nation and that of 1941 looked to the military for national salvation, poets now put their faith in mass political action in the streets and factories as the greatest hope for breaking colonial hegemony.

This rhetorical shift from an anti-colonial poetics of violence to a third world poetics of peace likewise reflected an increasingly apparent identification of the United States, rather than Great Britain, as the popular symbol of colonial exploitation in the context of the Cold War. Bahr al-'Ulum responded enthusiastically to the Stockholm Appeal with "At Your Service, Peace Council":

At your service, Peace Council, with literary productions
 Suitable for the appraisal and estimation of the conscious masses
So that all the legal codes of life may finally achieve
 The prohibition of all weapons of violent annihilation
The old man so devoted to them did not reckon
 That his own health would be struck by the stinger of wars
For the old man was driven mad by the Reich
 Some time ago, and now his hospital is that very same hell⁹⁹

The depiction of President Truman as an "old man" driven mad by an obsession with Nazis reflected a striking reformulation of political discourse from the framework of World War II to the Cold War. Bahr al-'Ulum, who spent several years in internment camps for supporting the Rashid 'Ali movement and repeatedly mocked British efforts to brand all local nationalists as "Nazis," now deployed the metaphor against the United States as evidence of colonial hypocrisy and irrationality.

Perhaps paradoxically, the growing identification with the Communist national liberation movements of East Asia helped to solidify the national front politics in Iraq as vertical class rivalries were subsumed by the horizontal solidarities of international anti-Americanism. For the first time, poets began to openly condemn American imperialism in terms that rendered explicit the growing nexus of anti-colonialism and anti-capitalism. The first blow came in Bahr al-'Ulum's "The Triumph of the Revolution in China," written in July 1949 in celebration of the

⁹⁹ Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan Bahr al-'Ulum*, 2:190.

Maoist victory over the forces of Chiang Kai-shek that framed the victory of peasants over feudalism as a metaphor for the global anti-American struggle:

The revolution triumphed and crushed the palaces of treason
While the servants of America howled and implored for help
For their leaders in the United States it was the day of reckoning
And their arrow will come, preserved in this very same quiver¹⁰⁰

More explicit was his couplet "Come, Peace," which followed shortly afterwards and drew an even sharper equivalence between colonialism and capitalism:

Come, Peace, and counter the wars
Kindles for the interests of the colonizers
And steel yourself to salvage a region
Tyrannized by the guinea and the dollar¹⁰¹

Both Bahr al-'Ulum and Jawahiri composed lengthy poems denouncing American intervention in the Korean War as an imperialist war motivated by a desire for profit.¹⁰² Bahr al-'Ulum was arrested in 1951 as part of coordinated campaign against the Peace Partisans and sentenced to one year in prison.¹⁰³

The *Intifadah* of 1952

The continued evolution of social and political conditions necessary for the emergence of mass politics, coupled with the darkening atmosphere of political repression that exposed the abject fraud of the electoral process and the cynical hypocrisy of the political elite, set the stage for the eruption of new popular protests. Unlike the *Wathbah* of January 1948, the *Intifadah* of November 1952 was not provoked by a single event but rather emerged in reaction to shared national grievances of the previous four years. While the *Intifadah* ostensibly emerged from the conjunction of specific grievances of students at the College of Pharmacy and Chemistry at the University of Baghdad and national demands by the political opposition parties for electoral reform, minor developments quickly set off a chain reaction of street protests that reflected the suppressed rage of a nation still chafing from the state violence of the *Wathbah*. Beneath the calls for political reform, though, lay lingering anti-colonial resentments against the highly

¹⁰⁰ Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan Bahr al-'Ulum*, 2:184.

¹⁰¹ Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan Bahr al-'Ulum*, 2:188.

¹⁰² Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan Bahr al-'Ulum*, 2:204-212 and Jawahiri, *Diwan al-Jawahiri*, 3:299-302.

¹⁰³ *Al-Sha'b*, June 4, 1951.

public influence of the United States and Great Britain. The Iraqi public was galvanized by concurrent events in Lebanon, Egypt, and Iran that challenged imperial hegemony and provided a model for national resistance reflected in the slogans and actions of the crowds.

While the nationalist opposition parties had continued to agitate for the abrogation of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty left in place after the *Wathbah* demonstrations had forced the cancellation of the Portsmouth Treaty, efforts by Nuri al-Sa'id to arrange a Hashemite union between Jordan and Iraq and attempts by the United States and Britain to craft a Middle East Defense Organization provided a new impetus for anti-colonial mobilization. In the fall of 1952, an overreaching effort to criminalize any expression of support for Communist policies – transparently directed at the independent Peace Partisans – provoked fierce resistance from the National Democratic Party, which had grown more liberal and anti-Communist over the preceding years but remained committed to democratic political freedoms. On the pages of *al-Ahali*, party leader Kamil al-Chadirchi contended that if the amendment passed, it would mean that "cheers for peace, the desire of all nations, will result in seven year prison terms."¹⁰⁴

By the fall of 1952, regional political events had occupied the attention of the country and thrown a spotlight on the internal contradictions of political sovereignty in Iraq. The Free Officers Revolution in Egypt and the popular protests that forced the resignation of Bisharah al-Khuri in Lebanon had a galvanizing effect on the Iraqi public. Teachers and principals reported that they had never seen their students so attuned to the political landscape and rumors were rampant over the identity of the "Iraqi Neguib." Salih Jabr, terrified that the prospect of popular disturbances would mean that "the old order would disappear forever in Iraq," urged immediate electoral reforms to mollify the disaffected political opposition.¹⁰⁵ The Iraqi Left, on the other hand, took a cautious approach to the developments in Egypt, praising the mass uprising while warning against the dictatorial tendencies of the military regime.¹⁰⁶ Kamil al-Chadirchi argued publicly that the imperialist powers had not intervened to prevent the nationalist uprisings in Egypt and Lebanon from displacing the corrupt ruling class and suggested that they were eager to see the new regimes enact popular reforms against political corruption in order to deflect attention from their simultaneous efforts to enlist the "new dictatorships" in anti-Communist

¹⁰⁴ *Al-Ahali*, August 19, 1952 and Kamil al-Chadirchi, *Mudhakkirat Kamil al-Chadirchi wa Tarikh al-Hizb al-Watani al-Dimuqrati* (Bayrut: Dar al-Tali'a, 1970), 539-40.

¹⁰⁵ Note by D.J.D. Maitland, November 3, 1952, "Political Situation: Iraq," FO 624/209.

¹⁰⁶ Jawahiri, for example, wrote publicly in *al-Ra'i al-'Amm* about his disillusionment with military coups after his experience with the Bakr Sidqi and Rashid 'Ali coups. Jawahiri, *Dhikrayati*, 2:105.

joint defence partnerships. Chadirchi contended that the public riots in Cairo and the massive protests in Beirut had convinced the western governments that those client regimes were beyond salvation, whereas the relative docility of the Iraqi public ensured continued imperialist support for Nuri al-Sa'id. The implication that only popular demonstrations could end imperialist support for Nuri's dictatorship helped to convince both the British and American Embassies that Chadirchi had "disappeared beyond the horizon as far as the West is concerned."¹⁰⁷

As in 1941 and 1948, the nationalist opposition was increasingly animated by a commitment to neutrality in foreign conflicts and fiercely resistant to any efforts to hamstring national sovereignty through the ratification of binding treaty agreements. When Foreign Minister Fadhil al-Jamali publicly argued in support of Iraqi cooperation with the United States on a joint defence treaty, he was publicly denounced by the nationalist press.¹⁰⁸ In response to the affair, the British Ambassador complained to Prime Minister Mustafa al-'Umari that he could think of no country other than Russia with such a vocally anti-British tone, at which point Mustafa helpfully assured him that "if I had been in Iraq during the past 30 years I would have found little change in the Iraqi press." The ensuing debate about the nature of the Anglo-Iraqi alliance read almost verbatim for the arguments between the British Embassy and the Iraqi Foreign Ministry in the late 1930's. 'Umari delineated the litany of colonial transgressions in Iraq, Syria, and Palestine while the British Ambassador complained that "Iraqis read only of evils of the British connection, and heard nothing of the benefits of it – how, for instance, it was Britain who had created the State of Iraq, how British experts had devoted their lives to the administration of the country."¹⁰⁹

It was in this context that an electoral crisis emerged in protest toward the relentless exploitation of constitutional politics by the small coterie of politicians who benefited from imperial patronage. While some of the old opposition figures had died and others had been co-opted into the "old gang," the popular sentiment undergirding calls for political reform was scarcely different from that which had animated the supporters of the Bakr Sidqi coup d'état, the Rashid 'Ali movement, and the *Wathbah* demonstrations. As the Istiqlal Party leader Muhammad Mahdi Kubba later reflected in his appraisal of the push for electoral reform, "This was the

¹⁰⁷ *Al-Ahali*, September 22, 1952 and Burton Y. Berry to Department of State, September 26, 1952, USDS 787.00/9-2652. After the appearance of that editorial, internal U.S. Department of State correspondence began to summarize the editorials of NDP papers under a separate heading titled "Commie Line." See USDS 787.00/11-1352.

¹⁰⁸ Burton Y. Berry to Department of State, October 4, 1952, USDS 787.00/10-452.

¹⁰⁹ Note by John M. Troutman, October 27, 1952, "H.E.'s Minutes," FO 624/212.

government that was established in the shadow of the mandate and brought to power in order to accommodate its principles... This government was forced to supply parliament with hand-picked representatives in order to guarantee the ratification of the imperialist treaties."¹¹⁰ The Communists, for their part, were publicly denouncing parliament as the "Clayton-Sadr" parliament, a reference to the intelligence activities of British operative Iltad Clayton in coordination with the government of then-Prime Minister Muhammad al-Sadr that imprisoned numerous political dissidents and helped to orchestrate the rigging of the last parliamentary elections in June 1948.¹¹¹

Chastened by their experience in the 1948 elections, the National Democratic Party and the United Popular Front announced their intention to boycott the upcoming elections unless they were conducted on a direct basis free from governmental intervention. The Istiqlal Party soon joined the latter two parties in threatening an electoral boycott after their private entreaties to Prime Minister Mustafa al-‘Umari for additional seats were rebuffed. As far as Britain and the United States were concerned, however, the scheduled elections were merely an opportunity to settle the personal rivalry between Nuri al-Sa‘id and his erstwhile protégé Salih Jabr. While the National Democratic Party and the Istiqlal Party were dismissed as "not parties but bodies of gangsters," Salih Jabr's Popular Socialist Party, though in fact neither popular nor socialist, enjoyed both warm relations with the British Embassy and considerable support among the political and economic elite. Jabr consistently assured both foreign embassies that the total control of the tribal shaykhs over the electoral process in the countryside meant that direct elections would preclude the possibility of opposition victories outside of Baghdad and Basrah and instead force an ideological contest between his own party and Nuri's Constitutional Union Party. When Jabr appeared on the verge of joining the opposition boycott, several cabinet members considered resigning in order to avoid the public debacle of an election contested only by Nuri's Constitutional Union Party.¹¹²

The British Embassy, desperate to prevent a united front of the opposition parties, tried first to have ‘Abd al-Ilah simply "order" Salih Jabr to participate and then sought a compromise solution based on an official promise that the government would not intervene in the upcoming

¹¹⁰ Muhammad Mahdi Kubba, *Mudhakkirat fi Samim al-Ahdath, 1918-1958* (Beirut: Dar al-Tali‘a, 1965), 336.

¹¹¹ Edward S. Crocker to Department of State, February 21, 1952, USDS 787.001/2-2152.

¹¹² Burton Y. Berry to Department of State, November 19, 1952, USDS 787.00/11-1952 and Note by John M. Troutbeck, November 14, 1952, "Political Situation: Iraq," FO 624/209..

elections and would amend the electoral law at some point in the future. Jabr was not otherwise predisposed to cooperation with the opposition parties, which he considered composed of "rubbish people," but simply did not believe that Nuri would refrain from interfering. Nuri offered to permit direct elections in any district where literacy rates exceeded fifty percent, but the proposal was meaningless in a country where barely twelve percent of the population was literate.¹¹³ In any case, it was an open secret that Nuri had already guaranteed his own party at least hundred seats in the new parliament, with the remaining thirty to be divided between various opposition candidates. While Nuri averred that he "did not think dictatorship the right form of Government for Iraq" and insisted that carefully arranged elections would allow the opposition parties "to say all they wanted to say," Siddiq Shanshal publicly warned him that "Iraqis are fed up with your dictatorship, which you are using to force them to follow the imperialists" and declared that the opposition "would rather become your victims than your slaves."¹¹⁴

As the national political elite grew increasingly concerned that electoral conflict would rekindle popular protests and provoke bloodshed, many urged the British Embassy to intervene and convince their local allies to accede to public demands for direct elections. The British Ambassador, fearful of "the probability was that things would get entirely out of hand" in direct elections, wondered aloud "why it was thought that direct elections would necessarily be more free than indirect."¹¹⁵ Embassy discussions with local politicians were characterized by a colonial schizophrenia throughout the course of the electoral crisis as British officials simultaneously professed their commitment to "free" elections and negotiated the "proper" distribution of seats between the various political parties behind the scenes. The inherent contradiction proved particularly troublesome in negotiations with Salih Jabr, for even though the British Ambassador desired to see the vast majority of parliamentary seats divided between the supports of Nuri and

¹¹³ Philip W. Ireland to Department of State, November 18, 1952, USDS 787.00/11-1852.

¹¹⁴ Note by John M. Troutbeck, October 7, 1952, "H.E.'s Minutes," FO 624/212 and *Liwa al-Istiqlal*, November 3, 1952.

¹¹⁵ Troutbeck had a point – while the outrageous manipulations of the secondary stage of elections had overturned clear popular mandates in a highly visible manner, the primary stage had also been subject to police intimidation and outright ballot fraud, especially outside the urban city centers, where tribal shaykhs and rural governors sometimes colluded to prevent peasants from voting altogether. Note by Harold Beeley, November 21, 1952, Note by John M. Troutbeck, November 11, 1952 and November 19, 1952, "Political Situation: Iraq," FO 624/29.

Jabr, he could hardly suggest such an arrangement as a legitimate solution to Jabr's demand for "free and fair election" conducted on the British model.¹¹⁶

The electoral crisis came to a head in early November when a meeting of senior politicians and prominent opposition figures convened by 'Abd al-Ilah at the royal palace ended in failure. When Kamil al-Chadirchi of the National Democratic Party and Taha al-Hashimi of the pan-Arabist United Popular Front complained about the government's subservience to British and American interests, 'Abd al-Ilah snapped back that they could leave the country if they weren't satisfied. The Regent then launched into a tirade against Taha's role in the Rashid 'Ali movement and his support for the *Wathbah* that ended with Taha and Chadirchi storming out of the palace. The debacle provoked Taha, who had previously expressed some willingness to support Nuri in exchange for a parliamentary seat, to join the electoral boycott declared by the National Democratic Party and the Istiqlal Party. Rumors that Tawfiq al-Suwaydi had dismissed the political opposition as "those who oppose throwing rubbish in the gutter" spread quickly among union workers and Communist students who rallied to defend the independent parties.¹¹⁷

The demands for electoral reform now gave a political impetus to local grievances over rampant inflation that left many working class families unable to feed their families. Local informants warned the British Embassy that the conjunction of economic distress and political crisis resembled the state of affairs in January 1948 and that "one spark would set the country ablaze." The opposition parties now expanded their demands for electoral reform to include calls for the redistribution of land and an end to political corruption and martial law as a condition for ending their boycott.¹¹⁸ In his party newspaper, Chadirchi traced the current problems to the suspension of constitutional law during the British re-occupation and called for the restoration of the constitution, the abrogation of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty, and the rejection of Cold War joint-defence treaties.¹¹⁹ Even the rightwing Istiqlal Party was moving significantly to the left on economic matters in order to imbue their nationalist agenda with populist principles. Fa'iq al-Samarra'i blamed the deplorable social conditions in the country on colonial support for Nuri al-Sa'id and the Hashemites, who were "making people into Communists" with their feudalist

¹¹⁶ Note by John M. Troutbeck, November 3, 1952 and November 5, 1952, "Political Situation: Iraq," FO 624/209.

¹¹⁷ Philip Ireland to Department of State, November 10, 1952, USDS 787.00/11-1052, Chadirchi, *Mudhakkirat Kamil al-Chadirchi*, 551-57, Kubba, *Mudhakkirat fi Samim al-Ahdath*, 343-44, and Baha al-Din Nuri, *Mudhakkirat Baha al-Din Nuri: Sikritir al-Lajnah al-Markaziyah li al-Hizb al-Shuyu'i al-'Iraqi* (London: Dar al-Hikmah, 2001), 160.

¹¹⁸ Note by D.J.D. Maitland, October 11, 1952 and October 25, 1952, "Political Parties: Iraq," FO 624/210.

¹¹⁹ *Al-Ahali*, October 29, 1952.

politics and draconian repression and argued that only radical social reform could truly and effectively forestall the Communist threat.¹²⁰ As the opposition parties dug in their heels in support of the electoral boycott, both the political radicals and the government prepared for public confrontation.

The Intifadah

In stark contrast to the spontaneity of the popular protests that characterized the *Wathbah* uprising, the inevitability of the *Intifadah* had been apparent for months. In anticipation of popular disturbances, Husam al-Din Juma' a took control of both the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Interior, thus centralizing authority over both the police and the army. While the poorly paid and publicly reviled police were ready for an open confrontation, many of the junior military officers openly declared their unwillingness to open fire on "their relatives" in the streets. Prime Minister Mustafa al-'Umari had already sought and received permission from the British Embassy to put down protests with violence if necessary. The British Ambassador only qualified his approval with a warning that the deployment of state violence not be followed by public concessions, pointing to the government's repudiation of the Portsmouth Treaty in 1948 as a display of political weakness that only emboldened the opposition.¹²¹

The spark that set off the conflagration of the *Intifadah* was lit by student organizers from the College of Pharmacy and Chemistry at the University of Baghdad who had announced a general strike at the beginning of November to protest a new university examination policy that required them to repeat an entire year of courses if they failed a single examination. The strike leaders announced to the local press their support for the national opposition party demands for electoral reform, the release of political prisoners, the abrogation of foreign oil concessions, the rejection of foreign defense treaties, and the introduction of economic reforms.¹²² After negotiations with the Ministry of Education resulted in the suspension of the new policy, the students cancelled their strike and returned to class on November 19. Trouble, however, resumed almost immediately when leftwing student leaders publicly denounced the niece of the college dean, who had crossed student picket lines during the strike, and were in turn assaulted by the

¹²⁰ Note by Harold Beeley, October 21, 1952, "Political Parties: Iraq," FO 624/209.

¹²¹ Note by Harold Beeley, November 7, 1952, "Political Situation: Iraq," FO 624/209, John M. Troutbeck to Foreign Office, November 22, 1952, FO 371/98736 E 1016/70, and Note by D.J.D. Maitland, November 25, 1952, "Political Situation: Iraq," FO 624/209..

¹²² *Liwa al-Istiqlal*, November 7, 1952 and Muhammad Hamdi al-Ja'fari, *Intifadat Tishrin al-Thani 'Amm 1952 wa Inqilab al-Wasi fi al-'Iraq: Dirasah Tarikhiyah Tahliiyah Witha'iqiyah* (Cairo: Maktabat Madbuli, 2000), 90-92.

girl's male relatives. The student leaders immediately announced the resumption of their strike, now joined in solidarity by students from other colleges, and clashed with security forces on November 20. While the Ministry of Education again attempted to negotiate a settlement, the students now demanded concrete political reforms and publicly appealed to the opposition parties for support.¹²³

On the morning of November 22, several thousand students gathered in front of the College of Literature with placards and signs articulating their positions. Among the slogans were demands for opposing colonialism, instituting social justice, and effecting democratic reforms:

Long Live World Peace and Down with Wars of Aggression!
Down with the Allies and the Colonial Confederation of Aggression!
Down with Colonialism and Its Treasonous Local Agents!
We Demand the Abrogation of the Treaty of 1930!
We Demand the Application of Democratic Freedoms!
We Demand the Release of Political Prisoners!
Down with the Sham Elections – There Are No Free Elections while Liberals Rot in Jail!
We Demand Free Elections on the Principle of Direct Elections!
We Demand Bread and Work for the Laborers!

The students were soon joined by hundreds of workers and onlookers as the crowds began chanting, "By God and by the people, the *Wathbah* has been renewed!" Police first used clubs and tear gas to disperse the crowds, but opened fire when other tactics failed. On the first day of the uprising, the crowds were led by the student leader Hamdi Ayyub, who directed them across al-Ma'mun Bridge toward the British Embassy, where they stopped and chanted against colonialism. The huge contingent of police forces managed to keep the protestors from storming the embassy, but the crowds did stone the statue of General Maude that stood in front of the embassy.¹²⁴

The following morning, the students were joined by workers from the major textile and tobacco factories who had announced their own solidarity strike in reaction to the political developments. When the chief of police dispatched two armored cars filled with helmets and clubs in the earlier morning hours to disperse the crowds gathered in front of the College of

¹²³ *Al-Ahali*, November 21, 1952, Ja'fari, *Intifadat Tishrin al-Thani*, 90-92, and Nuri, *Mudhakkirat Baha al-Din Nuri*, 161-63.

¹²⁴ Ja'fari, *Intifadat Tishrin al-Thani*, 93 and Nuri, *Mudhakkirat Baha al-Din Nuri*, 163-164.

Literature for the new day's protests, bands of protestors attacked the cars, seizing the helmets and clubs and chasing off the police before setting the cars on fire. Police again opened fire on the crowds, and many of the protestors painted their clothes and signs with the blood of their fallen comrades. The Iraqi Communist Party had not planned the protests or coordinated with student leaders, but the party leader Baha al-Din Nuri capitalized on the opportunity and ordered party members into the streets. While the crowds on the first day of the demonstrations had chanted for democratic reform, they now called for the collapse of the monarchy and the establishment of a popular republic.¹²⁵

The chaos and violence in the streets forced the resignation of Mustafa al-'Umari and the radio soon broadcast the news that Jamil al-Midfa'i, an extremely conservative pro-British politician, had been tapped as his replacement. The enraged crowds, who felt that "the people did not sacrifice themselves in order to replace al-'Umari with al-Midfa'i," now chanted in the streets against his nomination: "Down with the Administration of the Mole Midfa'i!" Midfa'i arranged meetings with leaders from the Istiqlal Party and the Popular Socialist Party, offering cabinet positions in exchange for their efforts to end the protests, but quickly discovered that the opposition parties were not controlling the crowds and could thus not offer any assurances. Seizing the opportunity to preempt the regime, the Communists scrambled to mobilize popular support behind an acceptable alternative. They put forward Kamil al-Chadirchi as the figurehead of a national salvation government that would include prominent independent leftists like the poet Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri and the politician 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Shaykhli, as well as secret Communists Salim al-Fakhri and Tawfiq Munir as Minister of Defence and Minister of Interior as a guarantee against counterrevolutionary attempts to use the army and police against the Communists. Baha al-Din Nuri compiled a list of the proposed cabinet, made copies, and distributed them among the protestors, while at the same time sending emissaries to meet with Chadirchi. The latter protested that he ought to have the right to form his own cabinet and called his own meeting of the opposition parties but was quickly brought by Fa'iqa al-Samarra'i of the Istiqlal Party to the realization that the crowds were now controlled by the Communists and that the composition proposed cabinet was not up for debate.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Ja'fari, *Intifadat Tishrin al-Thani*, 94 and Nuri, *Mudhakkirat Baha al-Din Nuri*, 165-67.

¹²⁶ Kubba, *Mudhakkirat fi Samim al-Ahdath*, 346-47 and Nuri, *Mudhakkirat Baha al-Din Nuri*, 167-69

By the afternoon of November 23, the police had retreated in defeat, and for a few hours, the crowds controlled the streets of Baghdad. At the direction of Baha al-Din Nuri, a huge group of Communist workers from Kadhimayn descended upon the United States Information Services office on Rashid Street, which had been closed for several days. Communist activists smashed the glass windows and stormed the building while onlookers shouted slogans against American imperialism. Baha al-Din Nuri would later proudly recall that the poor workers who ransacked the offices, tossing pricey Parker pens and handcrafted clocks from balconies into the fire blazing in the street below were interested only in destruction and refused to pocket any of the items.¹²⁷ The Communist poet Badr Shakir al-Sayyab later recalled rushing from his work post to join his comrades "They burned and looted and destroyed, as if they were destroying colonialism itself and not tape recorders and burning exploitation rather than cinema reels." Sayyab climbed an electrical pole outside and recited a violent poem that he had composed the night before to the crowd:

The martyr grew hungry and opened his mouth for blood
So wring out your heart or the heart of the criminal
The martyr grew hungry and so too did you as you were surrounded
By scores of stars come to aid the hungry¹²⁸

When U.S. Embassy officials arrived at the scene to inspect the damage the following morning, the looting was still in progress. The officials' efforts to recover classified documents were thwarted by verbal and physical assaults from the mob, and when the officials found their pleas for help ignored by both the police and army, they decided to flee the scene.¹²⁹

Sayyab was lifted onto the shoulders of protestors, as the radical poet Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulum had been during the days of the *Wathbah*, and paraded through the streets as he recited more revolutionary poems. Unlike Bahr al-'Ulum, though, Sayyab exercised no great leadership role and claimed no ability to lead the crowds. While the former had articulated the demands of the masses in short and fiery poems, Sayyab articulated and encouraged their anger and would later recall his horror as the crowds descended into violence. Near the mosque of Shaykh 'Abd al-Qadir al-Kaylani on Ghazi Street, the protestors faced a volley of gunfire from

¹²⁷ Foreign Office Minute by J.C. Wardrop, November 24, 1952, FO 371/98736 E 1016/69 and Nuri, *Mudhakkirat Baha al-Din Nur*, 170-71.

¹²⁸ *Al-Hurriya*, October 26, 1959 and Sayyab, *Kuntu Shuyu'iyān*, 204-9.

¹²⁹ Burton Y. Berry to Department of State, November 24, 1952, USDS 787.00/11-2452.

the Bab al-Shaykh police station. Sayyab stood by as his comrades retreated to a side street and then crept across the mosque cemetery and scaled the wall of the police station, killing a poor sentry and then setting the station on fire. They carried the bodies of two of the slain police officers into the street outside, dragged them to the South Gate, doused the corpse with gasoline, and then lit them on fire.¹³⁰

As public calls for the end of the monarchy intensified, 'Abd al-Ilah was forced to turn to General Nur al-Din Mahmud to head an emergency government. The decision to bring the military back into the political arena for the first time since the Rashid 'Ali movement contrasted sharply with the efforts to appease the public with the appointment of Muhammad al-Sadr in the wake of the *Wathbah* massacres and underscored the total collapse of the regime's political legitimacy. Mahmud immediately declared martial law and ordered the dissolution of all political parties and newspapers. The Communists, who thought that the old regime was on the verge of total collapse, saw the resort to the army as a last ditch effort to prevent the destruction of the old regime. There were at that time no Communist cells within the Iraqi Army, and so the Communists instead endeavored to win over the junior officers and conscripts by deploying slogans of unity and brotherhood between the military and people: "Long Live the Brotherhood of the Army and the People!" and "Long Live the Partnership of the Army and the People against Colonialism and Reactionaryism!" Police forces were unable to prevent the crowds from attacking various foreign companies and institutions, but when the violence reached its peak, Mahmud managed to dispatch a detachment of the royal bodyguard to protect the British Embassy.¹³¹

Mahmud moved immediately to arrest prominent opposition figures, most notably Peace Partisan leaders Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri and 'Abd al-Wahhab Mahmud, National Democratic Party leader Kamil al-Chadirchi, and Istiqlal Party leaders Fa'iq al-Samarra'i and Sadiq Shanshal. United Popular Front Taha al-Hashimi and Popular Socialist Party leader Salih Jabr were protected by their relations with the military and the British Embassy. Despite the fact that Mahmud immediately announced his intention to amend the electoral law and institute direct

¹³⁰ John M. Troutbeck to Foreign Office, November 28, 1952, FO 371/98736 E 1016/78, *Al-Hurriya*, October 26, 1959, Sayyab, *Kuntu Shuyu'iyān*, 204-9, and Nuri, *Mudhakkirat Baha al-Din Nuri*, 170-71.

¹³¹ The Iraqi historian Muhammad Hamdi al-Ja'fari has notably described 'Abd al-Ilah's recourse to the military as "The Regent's Coup D'etat." Ja'fari, *Intifadat Tishrin al-Thani*, 100-118, Nuri, *Mudhakkirat Baha al-Din Nuri*, 170-72, Kubba, *Mudhakkirat fi Samim al-Ahdath*, 347, and John M. Troutbeck to Foreign Office, November 25, 1952, FO 371/98736 E 1016/64.,

elections once order was restored, to ease the burden of taxation on the poor, and to root out political corruption, protests continued in the following days. The crowds now chanted "Down with Nur al-Din Mahmud" and "We want a popular government under Kamil al-Chadirchi!" Demonstrations spread south of Baghdad to Basrah, Najaf, Karbala, Kut, and 'Amarah in the following days. In Basrah, crowds of students chanting "Down with America!" and "Down with England!" stormed the British Institute before police repelled them. In Diwaniyah, crowds stoned American cinema vans while shouting, "Down with the King!" By November 26, however, the situation in Baghdad was returning to normal and Americans and Englishmen were finally permitted to return to their business downtown.¹³²

One of the more striking features of the *Intifadah* in comparison to prior moments of national crisis and popular mobilization was the relatively marginal role assumed by the nationalist poets. Most of the poets who had played leading roles in supporting the Bakr Sidqi coup and the Rashid 'Ali movement had passed from the national cultural landscape. Ma'rif al-Rusafi had died, 'Abd al-Husayn al-Huwayzi and Muhammad 'Ali al-Ya'qubi had sacrificed their nationalist reputations when they publicly apologized for supporting the Rashid 'Ali movement and turned to composing poems of flattery for 'Abd al-Ilah and Nuri al-Sa'id, 'Ali al-Sharqi had given up political poetry in order to satisfy his political ambitions, Nu'man Mahir al-Kan'ani had gone to work for Bahjat 'Attiyah's secret police, and Muhammad Bahjat al-'Athari was occupied with the Islamist movement. The two great poets of the *Wathbah*, Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulum and Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri, remained as prolific and politically defiant as ever, but Bahr al-'Ulum was already in jail and Jawahiri was the first opposition figure arrested after Nuri al-Din Mahmud came to power.¹³³

By the time of the *Intifadah*, only the younger generation of poets led by free verse pioneers Nazik al-Mala'ikah, Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, and 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati could

¹³² Burton Y. Berry to Department of State, November 25, 1952, USDS 787.00/11-2552 and November 26, 1952, USDS 787.00/11-2652, P.A. Rhodes to Foreign Office, November 26, 1952, FO 371/98736 E 1016/76, and John M. Troutbeck to Foreign Office, November 26, 1952, FO 371/98736 E 1016/67 and November 28, 1952, FO 371/98736 E 1016/78.

¹³³ Bahr al-'Ulum's biography argues that the poet was released from his year-long stint at the Baghdad Central Jail on November 20 and participated in the *Intifadah* before a new warrant for his arrest forced him into hiding for several months. This story, though, is contradicted by American archival sources that date his release to mid-December. Given Bahjat al-'Attiyah's view of the poet as the prime instigator of the *Wathbah* protests, it appears highly unlikely that he would have been released from prison in the midst of the November political crisis, and no poems or secondary accounts of his participation have been recorded. See Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan Bahr al-'Ulum*, 1:17 and Burton Y. Berry to Department of State, December 16, 1952, USDS 787.00/12-1652.

challenge the culture hegemony of Jawahiri and Bahr al-‘Ulum. Despite the imprisonment of the latter two poets, however, the young poets faced a series of political, cultural, and literary constraints that prevented their stewardship of the popular protest movement. While Bahr al-‘Ulum and Jawahiri enjoyed public reputations magnified by their personal suffering for their courageous political stands, the young poets had not yet suffered publicly for the sake of their art. Mala’ikahh was handicapped, if not disqualified, by her gender, and in any case, her poetry was distinguished by her stylistic innovations and social criticisms rather than political commitments. Both Sayyab and Bayati, committed members of the Communist Party at the time, participated directly in the *Intifadah*, but they did not assume leading roles. While the formless crowds of the *Wathbah* took their cues from Bahr al-‘Ulum and Jawahiri, the crowds of the *Intifadah* drew their slogans and chants distributed from handbills and placards distributed by the Communists. As junior members of the Iraqi Communist Party during Baha al-Din Nuri's "anti-intelligentsia" period, Sayyab and Bayati were permitted to recite poems in support of the Communist political agenda but not to stake any claim of political leadership.¹³⁴

Perhaps more importantly, the cultural and linguistic dynamics of the new free verse poetry militated against the younger poets' ability to lead popular demonstrations. Where the poetry of Bahr al-‘Ulum was characterized by pithy brevity and striking bluntness and that of Jawahiri was characterized by rhythmic repetition and intimately familiar rhetorical allusions, Sayyab and Bayati composed lengthy poems marked by references to Greek mythology and Islamic mysticism and an avant-garde aesthetic influenced by Western modernists like T.S. Eliot. Where the former two poets reveled in the neo-classical "poetry of occasion" that offered a contrapuntal engagement with contemporary political events, the latter two were far more deliberate in their composition and tended to shroud their political message in romantic and epic allegories. The practitioners of free verse poetry were thus ill-equipped for an engagement with mass political movements. While those poets remained a political threat to the regime, their intellectual innovations began to transform the *qasidah* from a product of traditional and popular culture to an avant-garde symbol of literary modernity and to turn the poet from a political actor into a political critic.

¹³⁴ It is perhaps instructive to note here that the only surviving poetry from the *Intifadah* is Jawahiri's prison writings. Sayyab provided several fragments in his later reminiscence on the events, but not even the younger poets considered their contributions of any great artistic or political significance. On the party's composition during the era of Baha al-Din Nuri, see Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 512-15.

Aftermath of the Uprising

The Iraqi Communist Party's postmortem of the *Intifadah*, written by Baha al-Din Nuri and published in the December edition of the underground party newspaper *al-Qa'idah*, underscored the anti-colonial nature of the uprising. Nuri argued that the *Intifadah* was an explosion of popular anger, inspired by the popular uprisings in Iran, Egypt, and Lebanon and the need to release the pressure built up during the four years of dictatorship and repression that followed the *Wathbah*. He argued that the uprising was a spontaneous mass movement inspired by opposition to colonialism and not confined to the revolutionary working class. He criticized efforts by local officials to categorize the *Intifadah* as a "Communist movement," arguing that while the Iraqi Communist Party took a leading role in organizing the movements and slogans of the protestors once they filled the streets, they did so out of necessity to fill the void created by the "aloofness" and "bankruptcy" of the bourgeois political parties.¹³⁵ Nuri noted the striking difference between the leading role taken by poets, intellectuals, and students in the *Wathbah* demonstrations and proudly contrasted it with the role played by the working class in the *Intifadah*. He argued that the experience of the *Intifadah* illustrated the fecklessness of the bourgeois opposition parties and taught the masses that the "true national front" needed to decisively defeat colonialism could only be forged in the violence of a mass politics free from intellectual stewardship.¹³⁶

This Communist vision of a "true national front," however, differed sharply from that envisioned by the independent political parties. Many on the left complained that Communist overreach was threatening to destroy the entire opposition movement. Jawahiri contended that the *Intifadah* was "merely a student insurrection" that had been used by certain "opportunists" to appropriate the political discourse of anti-colonial resistance.¹³⁷ Chadirchi complained about Communist attacks on the "the revolutionary strata of the petty bourgeoisie" and privately urged the Communist leadership to renew their commitment to popular front politics, warning that British and American plans for an anti-Communist joint-defence pact would succeed unless mass

¹³⁵ U.S. intelligence officials concluded from the text that "the Communists take full credit for originating the 1952 disturbances." They also failed to note the significance of Baha al-Din Nuri's conflation of the National Democratic Party, Istiqlal Party, and United Popular Front as "bourgeois" and "reactionary" parties, which undermined the prevailing sentiment in both the British and American embassies that the National Democratic Party was merely a Communist front. Philip W. Ireland to Department of State, March 4, 1953, USDS 787.001/3-453.

¹³⁶ *Al-Qa'idah*, December 1952.

¹³⁷ Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrayati* (Damascus: Dar al-Rafidayn, 1988), 2:105-6.

protests could continue to shake colonial confidence.¹³⁸ Sadiq al-Bassam, an anti-colonial nationalist politician, reminded his followers of the Communist political alliance with Britain and the United States after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union and warned that Communist loyalties lay first to the Soviet Union and that their opposition to imperialism was contingent on Soviet interests.¹³⁹ The fracturing of the political consensus among the opposition parties and ended whatever hope had previously existed of popular protests providing a path for political reform and the emergence of a democratic civil society.

Unbeknownst to the Iraqi opposition, however, the confidence of the U.S. Embassy in the local regime was severely shaken by the assault on the United States Information Service offices. Senior American officials now worried that political instability in Iraq would leave the country unable to assume a leading role in the creation of the proposed Middle East Defense Organization. While the British Embassy, which had "known for years the difficulty of getting sense out of any Arab country," was more sanguine in the assessment that the uprising might prove a "blessing in disguise" by exposing "the opponents of stability," the U.S. Ambassador was cognizant enough of the strength of anti-colonial sentiment in Iraq that he cautioned the State Department against issuing any public statement of support for the monarchy. Still, he noted gloomily, the maintenance of an official distance between the U.S. Embassy and the Iraqi government was unlikely to fool the Iraqi public: "Whether the mobs shouted 'Down with Nuri' more than they shouted 'Down with the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty' seems to this Embassy to be a minor consideration. Back of Nuri the mob undoubtedly saw the British and back of the British, the United States."¹⁴⁰

More troubling to the U.S. Embassy than the breadth of anti-American sentiment, though, was the fact that police refused to fire on the crowds looting the USIS offices and that some soldiers even cheered the looting. As the U.S. Ambassador noted, the fact that the crowds targeted symbols of American sent a message that was not likely to be lost on future governments as they considered the public consequences of forging closer relations with the United States. Despite American frustrations with the hesitance to open fire indiscriminately on the "Communist crowds," senior embassy officials reserved most of the blame for stalwarts of

¹³⁸ Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 679-89.

¹³⁹ *Al-Difa'*, April 2, 1953.

¹⁴⁰ John M. Troutbeck to Foreign Office, November 28, 1952, FO 371/98736 E 1016/78, C. Steel to Foreign Office, December 8, 1952, FO 371/98736 E 1016/81, and Burton Y. Berry to Department of State, December 8, 1952, USDS 787.00/12-852.

the old regime who adamantly refused to address the social grievances that gave currency to communism. The *Intifadah*, warned the U.S. Ambassador, was "merely one symptom that the Iraqi body politic is diseased" and suffering from the "lopsided political, economic, and social structure of this country with its ruling oligarchy, frustrated middle-class, primitive tribes and depressed peasantry." He blamed the "lack of tact and imagination" of Nuri al-Sa'id and 'Abd al-Ilah in dealing with the "responsible" opposition parties for creating the circumstances that allowed for Communist exploitation of popular grievances. One senior military officer acquainted the ambassador with the level of dissatisfaction in the army: "They all expect the day to come when new leadership will arise and a government which has the interest of the common soldiers and the common people at heart will come to power."¹⁴¹

The uprising provided the regime with a new impetus for political repression, which now extended beyond the Communists and their fellow travelers in the Peace Partisans to encompass the social democrats of the National Democratic Party and the left flank of the Istiqlal Party, and a new excuse for rigging elections. The historical transition to a system of direct elections in January 1953 did not put an end to electoral fraud and corruption but rather magnified the fact that the democratic charade was a systemic and not a structural problem. The government did release most of the opposition political prisoners by the middle of December, but Kamal al-Chadirchi and several other National Democratic Party figures remained in jail, with the full support of British and American officials who had been duped by the crowds into thinking that Chadirchi was a Communist stooge. 'Abd al-Ilah sent official instructions to regional governors to distinguish between "good" and "bad" candidates and to "help the good ones and refrain from helping bad ones" and colluded privately with tribal shaykhs to determine the appropriate proportion of shaykhs and effendis elected from tribal districts. The National Democratic Party, the Istiqlal Party, and even Salih Jabr's Popular Socialist Party boycotted the elections, leaving only Taha al-Hashimi's United Popular Front and Nuri's Constitutional Union Party to contest elections. The flurry of withdrawals from the ballot meant that by the time that election day rolled around, nearly half of the candidates had already "won" their seats.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Burton Y. Berry to Department of State, November 24, 1952, USDS 787.00/11-2354, November 26, 1952, USDS 787.00/11-2652, and December 8, 1952, USDS 787.00/12-852.

¹⁴² Burton Y. Berry to Department of State, December 8, 1952, USDS 787.00/12-852, December 16, 1952, USDS 787.00/12-1652, December 30, 1952, USDS 787.00/12-3052, January 9, 1953, USDS 787.00/1-953, January 13, 1953, USDS 787.00/1-1353 and January 18, 1953, USDS 787.00/1-1853.

At least ninety of the one hundred and thirty victorious candidates were either members of Nuri's Constitutional Union Party or otherwise loyal to him personally, and even the victorious opposition candidates were drawn from United Popular Front members known to be "in [Nuri's] pocket" and tribal shaykhs with similar material interests.¹⁴³ While the government tried to avoid flagrant violations of the law that might ignite new popular demonstrations, the process of fixing elections was generally completed long before election day. Undesirable candidates were first advised to withdraw in order to avoid a futile expense of money and time and then threatened with arrest if they persisted. In the countryside, the landed tribal shaykhs intimidated candidates and voters by threatening mass arrests, tax hikes, and the deprivation of water rights. Some voting stations were deliberately situated at formidable distances from the district inhabitants. In the impoverished district of Muntafiq, for example, the polling station was located twenty miles across the foreboding marshes from the location of one village. Voters had to fill out their ballots while government monitors hovered over their shoulders and illiterate voters had to allow government officials to fill out their ballots. In at least one district, the number of votes cast was markedly higher than the number of voters checked off of the registration rolls. Voter turnout in most districts was less than ten percent of those registered, and did not exceed five percent in many southern districts. Even those who did vote were overwhelmingly government employees and peasant sharecroppers escorted to the polls en masse by their employers or landlords.

U.S. Embassy representatives described the attitudes of Iraqis to the conduct of the elections as alternately amused, angry, and ashamed, depending on their political affiliations. While the ambassador was extremely disappointed by Salih Jabr's decision to boycott the elections and annoyed by Nuri's apparent glee in seeing his rival marginalized, at least one American official noted a more common refrain from "the poorer type of Iraqi" in reaction to the absurd political theater: "Besides, things would be no better even if Saleh Jabr people assumed power: what did he do for us when he was in control?" While the British Ambassador celebrated Nuri's victory through the "time-tested methods" perfected under colonial tutelage, his American counterpart privately feared the inevitable product of the charade. Britain, he warned, was

¹⁴³ The United Popular Front was largely comprised of those members of the old social and political elite who had grown uncomfortable with Nuri's pro-British and pro-American policies. As the Istiqlal Party had gradually shifted to the left on domestic matters, these disaffected elites defected to the UFP. They were, therefore, extremely willing to cooperate with Nuri and his supporters on domestic matters, though they would continue to oppose his foreign policy line. Burton Y. Berry to Department of State, January 20, 1953, USDS 787.00/1-2053.

overlooking the fact that the blatant electoral fraud would only "give further support to Communist propaganda that Iraq has a 'fake' government' which survives by 'fake' elections of a 'fake' Parliament." Attention, he argued, must be paid to the cultivation of a younger generation of "pro-Western leadership" that took actual strength from popular politics to avoid the eruption of "a horrible void" when Nuri passed from the political scene.¹⁴⁴

Conclusion

The events of 1946-1952 had fundamentally altered the political and cultural landscape in Iraq. The development of mass politics without corresponding democratization brought the newly politicized public into the streets and forced the state to rely on progressively more repressive and violent measures of control. As political repression extended to the criminalization of political dissent, poets were forced to explore new strategies of resistance. The older models of contrapuntal engagement with the colonial metropolis and the local state were rendered obsolete by the extension of state control over the press. Dissident poets like Badr Shakir al-Sayyab and 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati now turned toward more insular artistic expression of isolation and despair. Epic poems like Sayyab's "The Blind Whore" became the new model for committed poetic achievement, shrouding a message of post-colonial angst and defiant resistance in layers of mythology and avant-garde aesthetics. While the modernist turn in Iraqi poetry was hailed across the Arab world as a monumental artistic achievement, it contributed to the erosion of the political link between the masses and the purveyors of traditional and popular culture by removing poetry from the public sphere at precisely the moment when the masses were entering it.

It was nevertheless undeniable that radical poets like Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri and Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulum had played a crucial role in guiding the emergence of mass politics through their public interventions in the political arena. The state's critical awareness of this fact underscored the political threat posed by popular poetry and the subsequent effort to suppress popular poets forced many into exile in the following years. While the *Intifadah* spelled the end of public political poetry for the duration of the monarchical period, it certainly did not signal a retreat from the "horizon lit with blood" that propelled revolutionary political action. Poets continued to challenge the fundamental legitimacy of the state and its subservience to

¹⁴⁴ Daniel Gaudin, Jr. to Burton Y. Berry, January 18, 1953, USDS 787.00/1-3153 and Burton Y. Berry to Department of State, January 27, 1953, USDS 787.00/1-2753.

imperialist demands in exile, in underground publications, or in the veiled language of symbolism and metaphor. After the July 1958 Revolution, poets would once again return to the public sphere and lay claim to the mantle of social leadership for which they had struggled, fought, and died.

CHAPTER FIVE

"THIS IS THE CROWING OF THE ROOSTERS" NATIONAL FRONT POLITICS, 1952-1960

The movement of the Iraqi political opposition toward a cultural politics of national unity, already evident in the waning years of World War II, accelerated dramatically after the *Intifadah* of November 1952. The brutal suppression of political dissent by Nuri al-Sa'id, paradoxically, brought the nationalist and leftist factions of the political opposition closer together by providing them with shared experiences and languages of imprisonment and exile.¹ While the politics of national unity in this period were characterized by an overarching commitment to the anti-colonial politics of the past three decades, this was not merely an alliance of convenience dedicated to ending British (and now, to a lesser extent, American) hegemony in Iraq. The leftist activists, artists, and intellectuals who worked to undermine the regime of Nuri al-Sa'id were now far more committed to the Arab national liberation movements than their counterparts of 1936 had been. The radical nationalists, in turn, no longer denounced their leftist counterparts as Communist infidels bent on destroying the cultural and religious national fabric as they had done in 1936, but now denounced the oppressive structures of capitalism and feudalism and endorsed leftist demands for social and cultural revolution. All of these details make the sudden and violent rupture between the leftists and radical nationalists in the months that followed the revolution of July 14, 1958 particularly confounding.

Historians in recent years have effectively rebutted monocausal explanations attributing the political violence of the Qasim period to sectarian, structural, or ideological factors. While noting the unmistakable correlation between the urban locales of Communist resistance to Ba'athist violence in Baghdad and the concentration of Shi'i Arabs in those quarters, Hannah Batatu offered two compelling arguments to challenge the reductive resort to sectarian explanations as an explanation for communal violence in these "bitterest of years." On the one hand, Batatu provides profuse historical data to demonstrate that the upper echelons of leadership in both the Ba'ath Party and the Communist Party contradicted the superficial sectarian narrative. Five of the eight members of the Command of the Ba'ath Party in the Iraqi Region at the time of

¹ Ja'far 'Abbas Hamidi, *al-Tattawurat wa al-Ittijahat al-Siyasiyah al-Dakhiliyah fi al-'Iraq, 1953-1958* (Baghdad: Sa'adat Jami'at Baghdad 'ala Nashrih, 1980) and Abdul-Salaam Yousif, "The Struggle for Cultural Hegemony during the Iraqi Revolution," in *The Iraqi Revolution of 1958: The Old Social Classes Revisited*, edited by Robert A. Fernea and Wm. Roger Louis (London: I.B. Tauris, 1991), 172-96.

the February 8, 1963 coup d'état were Shi'a, while only nine of the twenty-six members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party at that time were Shi'a. The disparity in these numbers was even more striking in light of the fact that the Shi'a constituted nearly 45% of the of the Iraqi urban population according to data from the 1951 census.² On the other hand, Batatu argues convincingly that the Shi'a strongholds of greater Baghdad were overwhelmingly the poorest sections of the city and that class consciousness offers a far more convincing historical explanation for ideological opposition than primordial sectarian strife.³ If the Iraqi Shi'a were disproportionately attracted to the Communist Party, he argues, it was not because of any ideological affinity between Shi'ism and Communism or any Shi'i predisposition to fear Ba'athist pan-Arabism, as some scholars have argued,⁴ but rather because they suffered disproportionately from feudalist and capitalist exploitation.

Batatu's argument has been challenged on the basis of its casual dismissal of ideological conflict and the persistence of traditional communalist politics. Sami Zubaida, for example, has argued that Batatu's reliance on class as a causal explanation for the disproportionate Shi'i support for the Communist Party is only applicable to greater Baghdad. In the traditional Shi'i centers of Najaf and Kadhimiyyah, Zubaida argues, Communist partisanship was particularly notable among the children of prominent religious and mercantile families. Zubaida contends that the class politics of the Qasim era must be analyzed in conjunction with the shifting ideological terrain of the nationalist struggles.⁵ While those "traditional forces" most threatened by land reform and class politics reluctantly embraced the Ba'ath Party as the only hope for stemming the "red tide" of the Communist Party, the communalist politics of religious and ethnic minorities began to view Communism as the sole means of combating the dual threats of pan-Arabism and Sunni Islam. Zubaida thus highlights the complex interplay between economic and sectarian interests as the central determinant in the new communal politics. Eric Davis goes even further than Zubaida in arguing that violence and brutality of the Qasim era "makes any effort to

² Batatu notes as well that of the eleven major leaders of the on-scene Communist resistance in Baghdad in February 1963, eight were Sunni Arabs or Arabized Turks, one was Christian, and just two were Shi'a. See 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'athists and Free Officers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 960-64, 968-969, and 983-84.

³ Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 983.

⁴ See especially Liora Lukitz, *Iraq: The Search for National Identity* (London: Frank Cass, 1995), 129-47.

⁵ The Shi'i poets Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri and Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulum are particularly notable examples of this phenomenon. See Sami Zubaida, "Community, Class and Minorities in Iraqi Politics," in *The Iraqi Revolution of 1958*, 197-210.

reduce the regime's 1963 demise to a simple dynamic of class conflict or ethnic strife untenable." Davis points to popular contestations over history and culture as the most important struggles shaping the political conflict between pan-Arabist (*qawmi*) and Iraqiist (*watani*) forces.⁶

Other scholars have challenged this superficial dichotomy between Iraqiist proponents of a cosmopolitan and Mesopotamian national identity and pan-Arabist proponents of an exclusive and chauvinist brand of ethnic nationalism. Long before Davis developed this thesis, Abdul-Salaam Yousif argued convincingly that the cultural hegemony of the Iraqi Left was so complete that even after the Ba'athist coup d'état of February 1963, the pan-Arabist poet Badr Shakir al-Sayyab was complaining that "although Communism was crushed in Iraq, its outlook on literature is still predominant: it has been adopted unconsciously by *qawmi* elements."⁷ Amatzia Baram has likewise shown that the cultural tropes of *qawmi* and *watani* nationalism could not easily be mapped onto the political division between the Ba'ath Party and the Communist Party, noting, for example, that the pan-Arabist poet Badr Shakir al-Sayyab pioneered the use of Mesopotamian imagery and themes in modern Iraqi poetry.⁸ In his own reflections on his seminal work of history in the wake of the Iran-Iraq war, Hanna Batatu has argued that the communalist movements of the Qasim era and their echoes in Saddam Hussein's Iraq, should be more properly considered a function of elite politics than evidence of cultural and sectarian cleavages.⁹

Taken together, these historiographical interventions underscore the complexity of cultural politics in revolutionary Iraq. Economic interests, communal loyalties, ideological commitments, and cultural affinities were each integral to shaping the political discourse and violence of this period. Taking to heart Peter Sluglett's suggestion that we build upon Batatu's analysis of the link between poverty and revolutionary consciousness with more attention to the ways Communists merged the national and social question, I analyze the production and

⁶ Eric Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 146-47.

⁷ Yousif supports this argument with Batatu's dual observations that "Communism had provided a whole generation of Iraqis with not a few of their categories of thought" and that "its rhetoric, its mood, its style of thinking affected even its opponents. Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 465-66 and Yousif, "The Struggle for Cultural Hegemony," 172-96.

⁸ Amatzia Baram, "Mesopotamian Identity in Ba'athi Iraq," *Middle Eastern Studies* 19:4 (1983), 426-55.

⁹ Hanna Batatu, "The Old Social Classes Revisited," in *The Iraqi Revolution of 1958*, 211-22.

reception of political poetry between 1952 and 1960 in this chapter.¹⁰ I begin by analyzing the construction of national front politics between the November 1952 *Intifadah* and the revolution of July 14, 1958 in order to illustrate both the scope and limitations of leftist cultural hegemony in this period. I then turn to the revolutionary period to analyze how and why popular front politics fell apart after the revolution. The chronological endpoints of this chapter are critical to the thrust of my argument; because most historical analyses of the political violence of 1959 are situated within the temporal framework of the Qasim era (1958-1963), they fail to adequately convey the gravity of political transformations and the dynamic contestations of cultural politics in the first two years of the Iraqi Republic. I argue in this chapter that cultural constructions of popular front politics in the waning years of the Hashemite monarchy represented a genuine convergence of interests and that the eruption of violence between Ba'athist and Communist partisans was not pre-ordained in July 1958. While divergent economic interests and attitudes toward integration with the United Arab Republic certainly present obstacles to political cooperation between the two blocs, the final descent into violence was the product of the far more complex processes of cultural politics through which the radical nationalists constructed popular visions of Communism as a new form of colonialism, imported from abroad, dedicated to the interests of the Soviet Union, and based upon the depraved immorality of infidels.

The Construction of National Front Politics

Anti-Zionism and the Petroleum Problem

The anti-colonial politics of the interwar period were constrained to a considerable extent by class cleavages and the enduring tension between traditional and modern politics. While select individuals, like the poet Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulum supported both the radical and traditional revolutionary currents as preferable to the current regime, most parties and factions remained unable or unwilling to contemplate that tactical compromise. This stratification of political opposition began to weaken with the collapse of the Rashid 'Ali movement in 1941, as the total decimation of the movement's leadership, organization, and institutions allowed the leftist parties, who took full advantage of the political latitude offered by the anti-fascist policies of British officials, to rapidly consolidate their base of support among students and workers. The younger generation of pan-Arabists reconstituted their movement under the banner of the Istiqlal

¹⁰ Peter Sluglett, "Review of Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, Ba'athists, and Free Officers* (London: Saqi Books, 2004)," *Democratija* 4 (Spring 2006), 7-19.

Party in the post-war period, but that party now increasingly adopted the rhetoric of social justice and cultural revolution as a core component of the national liberation movement. As the leftist and radical nationalist parties drew ever closer together on both rhetorical and ideological grounds, the model of traditionalist pan-Arabism endorsed by Yasin al-Hashimi and Rashid 'Ali ceased to function as a viable political option. Now that the new cultural politics of anti-colonialism insisted on social revolution as an integral part of the liberation agenda, the traditionalists were forced to choose between collaboration with the regime or an alliance with the radicals.

The historical conjunction of the Arab catastrophe in Palestine and the exponential increase in Iraqi oil production underscored the emerging opposition consensus on social and political revolution. As older critiques of colonialism as an obstacle to Arab unity gave way to more nuanced denunciations of imperialism as a monolithic and totalizing system of cultural, economic, and political exploitation, Iraqi oil emerged as both the potent symbol of colonial control and the potential apparatus of national liberation. Iraqis, of course, had been well aware of the particular importance of oil as both national treasure and object of colonial desire, as Ahmad al-Safi al-Najafi's 1927 poem "Iraq's Complaint" lays bare:

Why should the Euphrates flow freshly and savory
While the people of the Euphrates have only salty water?
Poverty stares in the face of these people and indeed
The waters of the Euphrates are glowing with gold
From the ocean came a whale crying of thirst
And what could satiate her in this terrible heat?
Our oil burst forth before her like a volcano
Could our flowing water really extinguish her thirst?
Oil flows through Iraq and yet our own wealth
Is nothing but the glow of stars or lamps in the night!¹¹

As Najafi's poem indicates, the central complaint of many Iraqi critics was that the country should suffer poverty and dictatorship for the sake of the colonial lust for oil. The situation in Palestine suddenly and dramatically changed this narrative, particularly after the port of Haifa fell to the Israeli forces. Oil suddenly emerged as a viable political weapon that could be harnessed to the broader discourses of Arab nationalism and anti-colonialism.

¹¹ Ahmad al-Safi al-Najafi, *al-Amwaj* (Beirut: Dar al-'Ilm li al-Malayin, 1961), 98-99.

The dramatic expansion of oil production in the post-war years was largely a product of Nuri al-Sa'id's efforts to involve the United States in the Iraqi oil industry. Nuri, frustrated that significant Iraqi oil fields at Basra and Mosul were barely being exploited, convinced State Department officials that the British shareholders in the Iraq Petroleum Company were deliberately depriving their American counterparts of dividends and revenue in the interest of avoiding direct competition with the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. Since the AIOC was the single largest shareholder in the IPC consortium, Nuri argued, the Brits would continue to pocket their profits while keeping global oil prices artificially high. Under considerable pressure from the State Department, the consortium partners struck an agreement in the summer of 1947 to construct three additional pipelines from Kirkuk to the Mediterranean. Over an eighteen month period beginning in January 1947, the Iraq Petroleum Company doubled the size of its labor force and increased oil production by a factor of six.¹²

The establishment of the state of Israel in May 1948, however, abruptly upended plans to turn Haifa into the transportation hub of the Middle East oil industry. Iraqi politicians, driven partly by fear of domestic opposition and partly by sincere opposition to any engagement with Israel, adamantly refused to approve the flow of oil from Kirkuk to Haifa. More importantly from the standpoint of the AIOC officials, the Iraqis now refused to countenance the construction of pipelines from Abadan and Kuwait through Iraqi territory to Haifa. Company officials desperately pled with Iraqi officials to "listen to reason" and to separate commercial interests from nationalist political causes. While British officials offered private assurances that the IPC would see all Iraqi oil pumped to the Haifa refinery to Jordan and Lebanon, the administration of Muzahim al-Pachachi remained convinced that Western sympathy for Zionism would inevitably facilitate Israel's acquisition of Iraqi oil on the black market. Nuri privately acknowledged his own satisfaction with the IPC terms but contended that the agreement would have to be delayed indefinitely in order to forestall "serious political repercussions."¹³

¹² "Memorandum of Conversation with Nuri al-Sa'id," May 29, 1945, USDS 890G.6363/5-2945, "Memorandum of Conversation: 1928 Oil Agreement Negotiated in London by Iraq Petroleum Company," June 11, 1947, USDS 890G.6363/6-1147, Victor von Lossberg, "Iraq Petroleum Activities in Kirkuk," May 28, 1947, USDS 890G.6363/5-2847 and Albert E. Clattenburg, Jr. to Secretary of State, April 22, 1948, USDS 890G.6363/4-2248.

¹³ Edmund J. Dorsz to Secretary of State, February 12, 1948, USDS 890G.6363/2-1248, Edmund J. Dorsz to Secretary of State, December 29, 1948, USDS 890G.6363/12-2948, and Edward S. Crocker to Secretary of State, April 12, 1949, USDS 890G.6363/4-1249.

The Haifa affair illustrated the new leverage of the Iraqi government over the oil companies at a crucial moment in Iraqi history. The *Wathbah* protests of January 1948 had underscored the depth of social unrest in the country and the government desperately needed an infusion of capital to fund an ambitious development agenda. Increased oil production provided more revenue, but the government was still collecting a mere twenty-five percent of company profits under the terms of the IPC concession. Nuri sought to revise the terms of the concession, apparently under the impression that the British government would support his requests in the interest of internal stability. The government opened negotiations with the IPC in London in late 1948, but as one U.S. official noted with obvious frustration, the failure of negotiations was already predetermined, "since London has no doubt already decided how far it would go in granting Iraq's requests." U.S. officials, who were by that point deep in negotiations to facilitate mutually beneficial revisions with ARAMCO and Saudi Arabia, acknowledged that the IPC consortium had taken on far greater risks at the time of the original concession but nevertheless contended that the company ought to offer concessions in the interest of "greater stability."¹⁴

In the arena of popular politics, the debacle in Palestine completely reframed the discourse and demands of anti-colonialism. Denunciations of the presence of foreign troops turned into denunciations of the oil concession as the opposition parties competed with one another to propose the most sweeping reforms.¹⁵ Muhammad Hadid, a leftist economist and representative of the National Democratic Party argued that Nuri was personally responsible for the "raw deal" given to Iraq under the terms of the initial concession and urged profit sharing provisions on the model agreed to by ARAMCO in Saudi Arabia.¹⁶ The moderate nationalist paper *al-Zaman* argued that royalty payments were a fraction of what the government would otherwise collect from the IPC in corporate taxes and customs duties and urged the government to call the company's bluff and offer to swap tax and custom duties for royalty payments.¹⁷ Even the staunchly pro-British Salih Jabr, who was at the time trying to deflect attention from his prominent role in the Portsmouth Treaty negotiations, publicly declared that Britain was exploiting the financial crisis in Iraq in order to pressure the government to resume pumping oil

¹⁴ Edmund J. Dorsz to Secretary of State, November 27, 1948, USDS 890G.6363/11-2748 and Edmund J. Dorsz to Secretary of State, April 25, 1949, USDS 890G.6363/4-2549.

¹⁵ Baghdad Chancery to Eastern Department, July 28, 1948, FO 371/68451 E 10369/27/93.

¹⁶ *Sawt al-Ahali*, March 2, 1949.

¹⁷ *Al-Zaman*, February 26, 1949 and Victor Von Lossberg to Secretary of State, March 3, 1949, USDS 890G.6363/3-349.

to Haifa.¹⁸ Most worrying to Britain, however, was the growing popularity among junior army officers of the radical nationalist Istiqlal Party. Sadiq al-Bassam, then Minister of Defence and close associate of the Istiqlali leadership, was now publicly denouncing the "conspiracy of our British ally" and calling for the severing of diplomatic relations with any foreign country that recognized Israel.¹⁹

While British officials fulminated against Bassam's public denunciations of British policy, they were far more ambivalent about his repressive measures against the Iraqi Jews. The Iraq parliament quickly amended the penal code law criminalizing any sympathetic expression of communism to include Zionism, and Bassam, who enjoyed near dictatorial powers under the provisions of martial law used the measure to dismiss all Jewish employees of the Basrah Port Authority, the Iraqi State Railways, and the Posts and Telegraphs Department. While liberal politicians like the Prime Minister Muzahim al-Pachachi protested that "injustice was never an instrument of good government," British officials saw an opportunity to deflect anti-British sentiment onto the Iraqi Jews and the United States. When rightwing Iraqi politicians pled with Britain to circumvent the arms embargo in order to fulfill their treaty obligations and disarm the rising tide of Communist opposition, British officials responded bluntly that the United States would just supply the Zionists with better weapons.²⁰ The British Embassy likewise rebuffed American requests to intercede on behalf of Shafiq Ades, a prominent Jewish merchant in Basra sentenced to death for smuggling weapons to Zionist forces after a hasty show trial. The British Ambassador argued that he could "hardly blame" Crown Prince 'Abd al-Ilah for approving the execution, since he was "in no stronger position to stand up against the Army here than the State Department is against the New York Jews."²¹

¹⁸ *Al-Ummah*, July 27, 1949 and August 3, 1949. The latter editorial offered a revisionist history of Salih Jabr's tenure as Prime Minister, contending that his efforts to save Palestine by threatening to cancel oil concessions if the U.N. partition plan were approved were subverted by his political rivals.

¹⁹ Henry Mack to Foreign Office, September 28, 1947, FO 371/68452 E 12584/27/93, J.C.B. Richmond to Foreign Office, August 24, 1948, FO 371/68451 E 11431/27/93 and G.C. Littler to Basrah Consulate, August 26, 1948, FO 371/68451 E 11645/27/93.

²⁰ British Chancery to Eastern Department, July 20, 1948, FO 371/68451 E 10195/27/93, M.R. Wright to Henry Mack, July 23, 1948, FO 371/68451 E 10026/27/93, J.C.B. Richmond to B.A.B. Burrows, September 1, 1948, FO 371/68451 E 11708/27/93, and Henry Mack to Foreign Office, September 30, 1948, FO 371/68452 E 3085/27/93.

²¹ Henry Mack to Foreign Office, September 16, 1948, FO 371/68451 E 12058/27/93, G.C. Littler to Henry Mack, September 23, 1948, FO 371/68452 E 13329/27/93, and Henry Mack to Foreign Office, September 24, 1948, FO 371/68452 E 12930/27/93.

The sudden British shift toward an implicit endorsement of Iraqi anti-Zionism and even anti-Semitism had broader ramifications for the structure of political alliances in the country. Embassy officials ceased urging Nuri to cooperate with moderate reformist factions like the National Democratic Party, sanctioned the marginalization of liberal critics of the government's anti-Jewish policies like Muzahim al-Pachachi, and over the coming years gradually approved the political rehabilitation of several of the Rashid 'Ali movement's most prominent "ex-Nazis." Former internees 'Abd al-Rahman Khidr, Musa Shahbandar, Sami Shawkat, 'Ali Mahmud al-Shaykh 'Ali, 'Ali Haydar Sulayman, and Musa Shahbandar were all permitted to return to political life after the collapse of the *Wathbah*. Shahbandar, who had served as Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Rashid 'Ali administration of 1941, earned British favor by offering to organize a "movement from below" to recognize Israel in order to rid Iraq of its Jewish population. 'Ali Mahmud al-Shaykh 'Ali returned to public life after Crown Prince 'Abd al-Ilah assured the British Embassy that he "had greatly changed his views since 1941, largely owing to [the] fact that he was violently anti-communist." While he continued to maintain his staunch opposition to the presence of "the Jews" in both Palestine and Iraq, 'Ali Mahmud privately apologized to British officials for his past actions and declared that he now understood the importance of a firm Anglo-Iraqi alliance in order to stave off the communist threat. After publicly defending the efforts of Nuri al-Sa'id to revise the terms of the IPC concession, 'Ali Mahmud became Minister of Finance, an office that he used to obstruct significant economic reform.²² By the time that the November 1952 *Intifadah* erupted, the transformation of national political alliances was complete. The old guard of traditionalist nationalists were now staunch advocates of the Anglo-Iraqi alliance, while socialism emerged as an integral component of anti-colonial ideology and discourse.

The Anti-Colonial Context of Labor Radicalism

While the rapid transformation of the Iraqi petroleum industry into the backbone of the national economy and the symbol of imperial exploitation was reshaping the landscape of anti-colonial politics in Baghdad, oil workers were simultaneously emerging as the vanguard of the

²² B.A.B. Burrows to Henry Mack, October 8, 1948, FO 371/68452 E 13010/27/93, Henry Mack to Foreign Office, November 30, 1949, FO 371/75128 E 14883/1016/93 and December 15, 1949, FO 371/75128 E 15408/1016/93, J.C.B. Richmond to Foreign Office, August 24, 1948, FO 371/68451 E 11431/27/93, Baghdad Chancery to Eastern Department, September 1, 1948, FO 371/68451 E 11651/27/93, Commonwealth Relations Office, November 26, 1952, FO 371/98736 E 1016/74, Burton Y. Berry to Department of State, December 8, 1952, USDS 787.00/12-852, and Note by John M. Troutbeck, December 15, 1952, "H.E.'s Minutes," FO 624/212.

national labor movement. Unionization efforts in Iraq were galvanized by the efforts of Iranian oil workers at the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company camps in Abadan. While AIOC successfully suppressed unionization efforts in the pre-war period, Tudeh Party activists managed to enroll nearly ninety-five percent of the Iranian workforce in the Council of the Trade Unions of Workers during the summer of 1946. Unionization and the subsequent wave of labor strikes produced immediate results for the Iranian workers. By the end of the summer, some classes of workers could claim wage increases of one hundred and seventy-five percent, and most workers were now earning double the rate paid to the counterparts in Basra.²³ When reports of dramatic concessions to oil workers at Abadan and Haifa, Iraqi oil workers demanded similar wage increases. IPC management was eventually forced to offer significant wage increases, but these offers still paled in comparison to the gains won by Iranian and Palestinian workers.²⁴

In response to the apparent injustice of denying Iraqi workers wage increases comparable to their counterparts in Iran and Palestine, nearly five thousand IPC workers struck at Kirkuk on July 6, 1946. Six days later, Iraqi police opened fire on the striking workers, killing between ten and eighteen and wounding between twenty-seven and fifty. While the IPC quickly agreed to daily wage increases of fifty-five to seventy-five percent in order to end the strike, the massacre further strengthened public perceptions of the oil industry as the newest manifestation of colonial oppression and exploitation.²⁵ The radical poet Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulum addressed company leadership in his poem, "The Massacre of Workers at Gawurpaghi":

In the tragedy of Gawurpaghi injustice has struck my gut
The slaughter of my sons and bothers caused me to bleed
The victims cleansed not with water but their own pure blood
O Butcher of Kirkuk, you may expect the resurrection of limbs!²⁶

The following day, a demonstration of nearly a thousand workers and hundreds of local women carried placard with such slogans as "We salute the souls of our martyrs, victims of imperialist interference in our affairs." Rumors of broad sympathy for the strikers among local army

²³ William C. Burdett, Jr. to Secretary of State, August 16, 1946, USDS 890G.5045/8-1346.

²⁴ "The Success of the Arab Laborers' Strike in the Iraq Petroleum Company in Palestine," *Al-'Usbah*, June 1, 1946, "Minutes of the Third Meeting of the I.P.C. Fields Workmen's Committee on July 1, 1946," USDS 890G.5045/8-1046, and William J. Handley, "Strike at Kirkuk Oil Fields," August 10, 1946, USDS 890G.5045/8-1046. On the mobilization and radicalization of Palestinian oil workers see Zachary Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies: Arab and Jewish Workers in Palestine, 1906-1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 327-32.

²⁵ Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 532-33 and 623-34.

²⁶ Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan Bahr al-'Ulum* (Baghdad: Matba'at Dar al-Tadamun, 1968), 2:99.

conscripts led the workers to protest in front of army headquarters, where one worker recited a speech declaring, "These murdered persons were the victims of foreign influence and the intervention of imperialism." Government officials sought to mitigate popular sympathy for the workers by publicly describing them as "Armenians, Jews, Assyrians and foreigners."²⁷ While obviously unavailable to Iraqis at the time, British and American records confirm the popular suspicions that IPC officials had orchestrated the police assault. The British Vice-Consul at Kirkuk admitted to advising the local governor to fire upon the workers because "the situation was becoming dangerous" and "force is the only language these people understand." His only regret was the incompetence displayed by Iraqi police: "In India only twelve shots would have been needed and the right men would have been killed. Instead, the Police had fired between three hundred and four hundred rounds and had not knocked out a single important striker."²⁸

The public uproar over the events at Gawurpaghi was stoked by the diligent efforts of the opposition parties to counter government propaganda about the events. Musa al-Shaykh Radi of the leftist National Union Party published an explosive report on the massacre based on extensive interviews with workers, eyewitnesses, police officials, medical personnel, provincial officials, and military officers. Radi noted that the daily worker assemblies at the gardens of Gawurpaghi could not have constituted a threat to public safety because of the substantial distance between the gardens and the city limits of Kirkuk and that the workers were shouting that they could not hear police instructions when police forces opened fire. The most shocking detail of the report, however, was the fact that police continued to pursue and fire upon the fleeing workers for nearly twenty-two minutes and that nearly all of the victims were shot from behind. Two workers were killed as they climbed trees to escape, another was executed after entering a local house in search of refuge, and several of the corpses were mutilated and robbed of their possessions.²⁹ While Radi refrained from offering policy conclusions in his report, the Iraqi Communist Party made the logical conclusions for him. Leaflets distributed around Kirkuk condemned British imperialism and the reactionary administration of Arshad al-'Umari for the

²⁷ "Report by Musa al-Shaykh Radi to Political Committee of the National Union Party," *al-Siyasah*, July 17, 1946.

²⁸ James C. Moose, Jr. to Secretary of State, July 14, 1946, USDS 890G.5045/7-1446 and July 23, 1946, USDS 890G.5045/7-2346 and William J. Handley, "Strike at Kirkuk Oil Fields," August 10, 1946, USDS 890G.5045/8-1046.

²⁹ "Report by Musa al-Shaykh Radi to Political Committee of the National Union Party," *al-Siyasah*, July 17, 1946.

assault and argued that in the massacre, Arshad "proved his greediness for blood and desperate capabilities for defending the interests of British imperialism."³⁰

Arshad al-‘Umari responded to the fierce press attacks on his administration's culpability in the Gawurpaghi massacre by shutting down every prominent opposition newspaper in Iraq, which frustrated U.S. officials complained only magnified the influence of the underground communist papers. While government assaults on the press usually involved short suspensions and small fines, Arshad now suspended most papers for at least one year, fined leftist editors like ‘Aziz Sharif substantial sums, and put the editors of both *al-Siyasah* and *al-Ahali* on trial in retaliation for their publication of the Musa al-Shaykh Radi report. The declaration of a national press strike on September 5 left just two newspapers in circulation.³¹ These harsh measures against the press only further magnified labor opposition to Arshad's government, and workers at the Ahliyah National Tobacco Factory struck in solidarity with the press syndicate on September 20, 1946. While the company's management immediately replaced the striking workers and continued production, the workers organized a national boycott of Ahliyah cigarettes, the most popular brand in the country, that was supported by eleven distinct trade unions representing tobacco workers, tailors, compositors, shoemakers, taxi drivers, carpenters, port workers, postal, telegraph, and telephone workers, machinists, textile workers, and railway workers. The boycott was relatively successful in strengthening labor solidarity inside the country, but the financial vulnerabilities of both wage laborers and the trade unions forced the strikers to cave after thirty-nine days and to return to work on October 19.³²

Muhammad Salih Bahr al-‘Ulum, who was himself a factory worker and labor organizer at the Ahliyah factory, attempted to rally the spirits of striking government workers in a poem delivered at a National Union Party meeting in Baghdad. Bahr al-‘Ulum sought to draw clear connections between the tobacco strikes, the police assault on the anti-Zionist demonstration in Baghdad earlier that summer, the Gawurpaghi massacre, the Cold War struggles for Kurdistan, and the continuing British dominance of Iraqi political affairs:

³⁰ "A Declaration by the Communist Party in Iraq," July 26, 1946, USDS 890G.5045/8-1046.

³¹ James S. Moose, Jr. to Secretary of State, September 16, 1946, USDS 890G.5045/9-1646 and October 7, 1946, USDS 890G.5045/10-746, "Iraqi Press Summary, September 8 to 14, 1946," USDS 890G.9111 RR/9-1646, and "Iraqi Press Summary, September 29 to October 5, 1946," USDS 890G.9111 RR/10-846.

³² James S. Moose, Jr. to Secretary of State, October 15, 1946, USDS 890G.5045/10-1546 and October 28, 1946, USDS 890G.5045/11-2246.

Shame on us and our patience under the yoke of power
While the claimants fall under the barrage of bullets
For Baghdad was preceded by Kirkuk in sorrow
And the tragedy of Sinjar foreshadowed all else
The tyrants of this age keeps running their race
To gratify John Bull with this grand competition
Dallying with the subversion of truths held dear
The lesson of truth replaced by that of destruction
And the people became in this era of the tyrants
But natural fertilizer in some of their gardens!³³

Bahr al-'Ulum's fluid conflation of labor politics and anti-imperialism foreshadowed the integral role of workers in the protest movements of 1948 and 1952.

While the revolutionary tenor of political discourse during the 1948 *Wathbah* integrated the rhetoric of national liberation and social justice, the chronological and geographical trajectory of the labor strikes that erupted in March and April illustrate that the former was the driving factor of working class radicalism. Workers certainly participated in the mass protests of January and February, but organized labor disruptions did not erupt until Iraqi workers employed at the British Royal Air Force base at Shaybah struck for higher wages on March 3. Additional strikes erupted at the British controlled Basra Port Directorate in late March and the British owned firm Gray Mackenzie and Company Limited in early April. Company management at the Iraqi Petroleum Company, Basra Petroleum Company, and Rafidain Oil Company managed to forestall labor disturbances only by offering preemptive concessions to workers. Notably, virtually no locally owned firms in the private sector were affected by the strikes.³⁴

The declaration of martial law on May 15, 1948 allowed the government to suppress the labor movement for two full years, but strikes resumed as soon as it was lifted. The first two labor disruptions occurred at the British firms Gray Mackenzie and Company and the Basra Petroleum Company in May and June of 1950, which surprised American officials due to the fact that British firms were "usually regarded as paying higher wages and granting workers more amenities, privileges and better working conditions than Iraqi concerns." When another strike erupted at the Basra Petroleum Company in March of the following year, the U.S. Ambassador concluded that given the high wages paid by the oil companies, "there appears to be a certain

³³ Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulum, *Diwan Bahr al-'Ulum* (Baghdad: Matba'at Dar al-Tadamun, 1968), 2:103-4.

³⁴ Henry Fletcher, "Supplementary Report on the Living Conditions of Manual Workers in Basra Area," June 1948, USDS 890G.504/7-1348

amount of xenophobia involved."³⁵ Iraqi oil workers, though, had real grievances with foreign management. Among the eight hundred contracted IPC employees, a mere five were Iraqis, the highest-ranking of whom was an administrative assistant. IPC management found it "not necessary or desirable" to promote Iraqis to higher positions and refused to employ technically qualified Iraqis trained at their own expense in Europe and the United States. The company relied on paid informants to ferret out instigators among the local workers, which created an extremely hostile working environment. Unlike many of the oil companies in neighboring countries, the IPC offered no plan or provision for pensions or social security even for those workers employed for more than twenty years. Housing conditions for Iraqi laborers were extremely poor and dozens of workers were infected with tuberculosis at any given time.³⁶

While both the leftist and radical nationalist parties now strongly backed the labor strikes, the conservative parties were torn on how to respond to the tremendously popular attacks on foreign economic interests. Salih Jabr, who had by that point fallen out of favor with Nuri and was trying to resurrect his political career as a populist reformist, condemned the unwillingness of the foreign firms to train Iraqi workers for high wage positions but refrained from offering an explicit endorsement of the labor strikes so as not to alienate the tribal shaykhs and business owners who controlled secondary elector votes. Jabr gave space in his newspaper to Sami Shawkat, perhaps the leading ideologue of the "ex-Nazis" of the Rashid 'Ali movement, to argue that planned economic development projects would stem the tide of peasant migrations and raise urban wages. The official paper of Nuri's Constitutional Union Party, on the other hand, simply declared that the trade unions were part of a foreign conspiracy to undermine domestic security and national sovereignty.³⁷

While the rightwing parties recycled xenophobic tropes in an effort to divert attention from real labor grievances, both the socialist and radical nationalist parties refused to blame the systemic exploitation of Iraqi industrial workers on nefarious foreign plots. The National Democratic Party newspaper *Sada al-Ahali* denounced the government's duplicity in espousing the rhetoric of economic reform in front of foreign audiences while continually ignoring the plight of workers in domestic politics and contended that the government's defense of anti-labor

³⁵ "Labor Report - Iraq," November 2, 1950, USDS 887.06/11-250 and Edward S. Crocker "Labor Report," May 8, 1951, USDS 887.06/5-851.

³⁶ William J. Handley, "British Labor Policies in Iraq, Especially in the Iraq Petroleum Company," April 28, 1950, USDS 887.06/4-2850 CSBW

³⁷ *al-Ummah*, April 3, 1950 and July 4, 1950 and *al-Ittihad al-Dasturi*, October 4, 1950.

policies "reveals the obstinacy of the reactionary ruling clique."³⁸ Siddiq Shanshal, a prominent supporter of the Rashid 'Ali movement, illustrated the radical nationalists' new endorsement of socialist economics in his attack on the government's blanket denunciation of the labor unions as "communist" organizations in the Istiqlal Party newspaper *Liwa al-Istiqlal*. Since the government took no steps to improve worker conditions, Shanshal argued, "it is inevitable that workers should embrace certain doctrines that seem to give a better promise for the future."³⁹

Mosaddeq and the Global Politics of Anti-Colonialism

The gradual convergence of the nationalist parties on questions of domestic economic policy had broader ramifications for their understandings of global politics. Before 1952, the radical nationalists had shown little interest in non-Arab politics and tended to dismiss leftist expressions of solidarity with African and Asian anti-colonial movements as unwelcome diversions from the more pressing demands of Arab liberation. Muhammad Mosaddeq's nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, however galvanized all factions of the political opposition in Iraq and inspired scores of approving newspaper editorials and laudatory popular poems. Radical nationalists, for the first time since Muhammad Bahjat al-'Athari and Yunis al-Sab'awi had lionized Adolf Hitler in 1941, celebrated a non-Arab political figure as a model for the Iraqi opposition. This development was particularly striking given the virulent anti-Iranian sentiment of many of the most prominent Rashid 'Ali supporters. While the immediate impetus for the pro-Mosaddeq movement in Iraqi politics may have been grounded in superficial identifications with anti-British politics, the fall-out from the C.I.A. orchestrated coup d'état of 1953 would prove to have far more reaching consequences.

The opposition parties, which at the time enjoyed a limited minority presence in parliament, began developing their own nationalization legislation as soon as the Iranian Majlis passed Mosaddeq's legislation in March 1951. Eighteen opposition deputies, representing both the moderate nationalists and moderate leftists, crafted a nationalization bill that denounced the IPC oil concession as a product of colonial exploitation that allowed foreigners to profit from precious national resources while the Iraqi government was forced to beg for loans from foreign banks in order to fund crucial development projects. The draft bill echoed the complaints of U.S. officials that IPC management was utterly neglecting the task of training Iraqis to take on

³⁸ *Sada al-Ahali*, October 1, 1950 and October 5, 1950.

³⁹ *Liwa al-Istiqlal*, October 5, 1950.

leadership roles within the company in accordance with the terms of the concession. Nuri, however, blocked discussion of the proposed legislation and instead proposed his own initiative to revise the terms of the concession.⁴⁰ While Nuri managed to negotiate a new concession in August 1951 that was modeled on the profit sharing agreement concluded between Saudi Arabia and ARAMCO the year before, the Iraqi opposition was wholly unsatisfied with the outcome. Muhammad Hadid, an economist affiliated with the leftist National Democratic Party argued that the new arrangement left crucial national resources in the hands of foreign powers and would permit a foreign company to wield considerable leverage over the Iraqi government by threatening to curtail oil production, as the IPC had done in the past, unless certain political conditions were met.⁴¹ Virtually all of the independent opposition political parties – including the rightwing nationalist Istiqlal Party and United Popular Front – backed the NDP demands for immediate nationalization.⁴²

Frightened by the prospect that the oil nationalization campaign would turn NDP leader Kamil al-Chadirchi into an Iraqi version of Mosaddeq, Nuri and his allies moved to undermine Mosaddeq. The Iraqi government provided facilities for the expelled representatives of the British Embassy in Teheran to continue working to undermine Mosaddeq, and Nuri argued forcefully for Anglo-American intervention in Iran to counteract the effects of the evacuation from South Asia. The proper balance of power in the region, Nuri contended, could only be restored by stationing American troops in Pakistan to cow Mosaddeq into submission. Nuri made every effort to convince both British and American officials that political dissent should be dealt with only through strength, dismissing the nationalist press as inconsequential and arguing that the government need only inform the opposition parties that "no nonsense" would be tolerated by "irresponsible elements" and they would fall in line. While it is unlikely that Nuri's analysis and accusations played any real role in shaping Anglo-American perceptions of Mosaddeq as a Communist, he was far more successful in convincing British and American officials that Chadirchi's earnest endorsement of social democracy was an act to lend the Communists some legitimacy. When the crowds of the November 1952 *Intifadah* chanted for a republican government headed by Chadirchi, Nuri pointed triumphantly to the Communist role in

⁴⁰ Muhammad Mahdi Kubbah, *Mudhakkirati fi Samim al-Ahdath, 1918-1958* (Beirut: Manshurat Dar al-Tali'a, 1965), 312-15.

⁴¹ *Sada al-Ahali*, August 19, 1951.

⁴² Kamil al-Chadirchi, *Mudhakkirat Kamil al-Chadirchi wa Tarikh al-Hizb al-Watani al-Dimuqrati* (Bayrut: Dar al-Tali'a, 1970), 537-38.

orchestrating the protests as proof that the National Democratic Party was a Communist front organization. U.S. officials, who had once seen Chadirchi as the great hope for domestic political reform in Iraq, bought the argument and ceased urging the government to accept the reforms advocated by Chadirchi and the NDP. It was not until after the July 1958 revolution that they would come to realize their mistake and to once again look to Chadirchi as the voice of reason and moderation in Iraqi politics.⁴³

While Iraqi intellectuals and political activists were now united in their support for Mosaddeq, the efforts of the Iranian government to curtail Mosaddeq and his supporters posed new challenges to the fragile unity of political opposition in Iraq. Both leftist and radical nationalist poets responded with passionate indignation to the events of July 1952, when Mosaddeq resigned to protest restrictions on his constitutional powers. As his supporters took to the streets to demand that the Shah respect the constitution and restore Mosaddeq to office, the new Prime Minister Ahmad Qavam ordered troops to open fire on the demonstrators, killing and wounded several hundred Iranians.⁴⁴ The leftist poet Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri glorified the heroic resistance of the protestors in his short poem "Day of the Martyrs in Iran":

Their blood flowed to impose what they willed
Their martyrs fell in order to raise their concern
And their bloody submission served to implant
Their banner among the banners of the peoples
Shining with the blood that nourishes their land
And with the brilliant and noble deeds of their heavens⁴⁵

The obvious parallels between this poem and Jawahiri's widely celebrated *Wathbah* poems underscored the globalist dimensions of the new leftist political discourse. Solidarity with the Iranian masses in their struggle against imperialism and dictatorship was part of a broader social and cultural movement to realign the Iraqi political opposition with the socialist bloc.

It was not only the leftist poets and intellectuals, however, who contributed to this reshaping of international commitments. Ba'hist intellectuals like the poet 'Ali al-Hilli expressed their solidarity with Mosaddeq and the Iranian National Front in strikingly similar terms as those employed by Jawahiri and the leftists. Hilli dedicated his July 1952 poem "O

⁴³ Note by John M. Troutbeck, October 23, 1952, "H.E.'s Minutes," FO 624/12 and November 5, 1952, "Political Situation: Iraq," FO 624/209 and Burton Y. Berry to Department of State, October 24, 1952, USDS 787.00/10-2452.

⁴⁴ Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 270-273.

⁴⁵ *al-Jihad*, July 23, 1952 and Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri, *Diwan al-Jawahiri* (Bayrut: Bisan, 2000), 3:353.

Guard of the Fire" to "the martyrs of the Qavam al-Sultanah massacre in Iran" and celebrated the martyrdom of the Iranian protestors with familiar language:

Pierce the mob with the partisanship of terror and strife
And supplicate the horror that drives the burning and blazing
Pierce the mob through the eternal heart... A graveyard
Embracing her mortals, martyred in action by the coterie
Beg for rain to quench the burning corpse of sacrifice
Across this wall, and pierce this gloomy vengeance
Draw back the cover from the still discarded corpse
For we bestow upon it the sweet fragrance of freedom
Hide and seek help from the strength of the blind
For blood surges between the veins crying in hunger
And bless the exuberant and frenzied rebels
For death in the embers of the hurricane has exulted⁴⁶

More notable than these apparent similarities with Jawahiri's poetry, however, was Hilli's effusive lionization of Mosaddeq, which resembled the traditional panegyrics composed by Iraqi poets like Ma'rif al-Rusafi and Muhammad Bahjat al-'Athari in praise of Yasin al-Hashimi and Rashid 'Ali:

Mosaddeq, O Leader of the People, indeed my mouth
Has become a vocalist entralling the exuberant musicians
My poetry pours down like the tunes of the chanteuse
It flows forth with inspiration, and it glimmers ablaze
Blessed with victory, so long as the Most High is vigilant
With sacrifices stretched before the compassionate rescuer
An offering to the star of the redeemers of this carnage
So as to avoid oppression until it is torn limb from limb
Do not feel safe from barbarity for betrayal is their goal
From the corner of their mouth evil flows like poison and ruin

As a symbol of anti-imperialist resistance, of course, Mosaddeq would soon be displaced by Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser in pan-Arabist literature and rhetoric, but the passionate response that Mosaddeq inspired from the Iraqi radical nationalists suggested that the younger generation of nationalists was now moving beyond the superficial chauvinism of earlier historical moments and engaging more deeply with the global dimensions of the anti-colonial movement.

The sudden overthrow of Mosaddeq in August 1953 shattered the hopes of the Iraqi opposition that Mosaddeq might provide a new model for anti-colonial republicanism in the

⁴⁶ 'Ali al-Hilli, *Thawrat al-Ba'th* (Beirut: Matabi' Dar al-Andalus, 1963), 76-81.

Middle East. While no one doubted the role of the United States and Britain in the coup, Iraqi artists and intellectuals were still left to grapple with the apparent disinterest of the Iranian population in defending their beloved leader. The process of assigning blame to the various Iranian factions who failed to defend Mosaddeq would have important ramifications for Iraqi perceptions of their own national liberation movement. The socialist poet Talib al-Haydari castigated the liberal contingents of the Iranian National Front for their refusal to participate in the street battles in his poem "To Mosaddeq":

There is no disgrace in your fate, O Mosaddeq
Your honor remains while the liberals ran away
Be easy upon yourself, for you are the first rebel
From the East to cry out in the name of the revolutionaries
Iran, shame upon you for how you followed
That first glorious step, shame upon you Iran
O, for the resurrection of a new living soul
In which your star will be an exalted planet!
The oil is for the people and not the usurper
So enjoy your right to it or let the wells be buried⁴⁷

For Haydari and the Iraqi Left, including the Peace Partisans and especially the Iraqi Communist Party, Mosaddeq's National Front stood as an obvious parallel to Kamal Chadirchi's National Democratic Party. The Communists had already broken with Chadirchi after the collapse of the November 1952 *Intifadah* and rejected his advice to cease their attacks on the rightwing nationalist Istiqlal Party and Popular Front Party in the interests of national unity. Communist publications now denounced Chadirchi and the NDP, declaring that "the liberal national bourgeoisie now fears the people's revolution more than the feudal-imperialist dominance and has, therefore, become a class hostile to the revolutionary aims and interests of the people."⁴⁸

The socialist poet Kazim Jawad expanded upon Haydari's critique of the Iranian liberals in his own poem, "News from Tehran," which opened with the caustic imagery of Iranian cafe patrons passively listening to the tragedy unfold over the radio:

The yawning of the sluggish, the specters of sorrow, and the spies
Watching every subtle step of the open minded
And the breeze, the radio set, and the slain dawn
The silence of the cafe patrons, the cigarettes, and the spittle

⁴⁷ Talib al-Haydari, *Nidhal: Qasa'id Thawriyah min al-'Iraq* (Baghdad: Matba'at al-Ma'arif, 1958), 112.

⁴⁸ Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 682-83.

Floating above the marble, and the attentive loiterers
Waiting for the final outcome, and the tone of the sad dispatch:
"The dead,
There are one thousand, and the mighty soldiers remain
While the company of wounded - fortifying the house of their leader"⁴⁹

Jawad made clear that he viewed the collapse of the Mosaddeq regime as part of a coordinated global assault on the liberty of the East, using a complex historical metaphor that connected Anglo-American intervention to Mongol invasions of the Middle Ages:

And the blood of wounded Iran, in mourning, Chief of the Old East
The ignoble, the mercenaries, they remain the puppets of the foreigner
And the grandsons of Hulagu remain in our beautiful East
The savagery of the blind follows the flocks through the pastures:
"Grandsons of Hulagu, we will begin again
Through the battles, where the caravan of peoples
With its leaping throngs, yearning in this night of life
For light, for virginal freedom, for the great hope
Indeed, we will begin again
Our suppressed movement, if it resounds, shall wash away the castles
And fortresses of the occupation
For the Great Wall of China was razed, the ribs of the invaders taken apart
And so the everlasting hurricanes shall sweep away the tyrants
Even if the troops of colonial legions lie down
In the bloody East, for in the castles remaining as curiosities
Are the whips of Indian rajas inlaid with pearls"

Jawad closed his poem with a lengthy passage castigating the Iranian traitors who collaborated with the Anglo-American agents, mentioning by name 'Ali Razmara, who preceded Mosaddeq in office and was assassinated by the Fedayan-e Islam in retaliation for his efforts to ratify a new agreement with the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company on highly unfavorable terms.⁵⁰ This political critique was magnified by Jawad's striking contrast between the radical workers leading the revolution as the idle bourgeois listened to the news:

The pistols manufactured by foreigners, the blood, and the bayonets
Rushing feverishly through the streets, where the piles of flesh
Lie exposed, barren, above the pools of blood
And the oil, the foreigners, and the conspirators
Agents of Chicago, sultans of war, disfiguring

⁴⁹ Kazim Jawad, *Min Aghani al-Hurriyah* (Beirut: Matabi' Dar al-'Ilm li al-Malayin, 1960), 45-52.

⁵⁰ Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, 261-66.

Our wealth from green to red, and the newborn dawn
 And the bereaved widows, the moans of sullen virgins
 Like the brides of the tents, weary, where the horizons of spring
 And the playgrounds of gentle innocence polluted with grief
 And the processions of workers marching on the tyrants
 Eternally seeking to crush their debauchery, toward the tyrants:
 "Orphans of Razmara, we have our tomorrow of laughter
 And copious oil wells, spikes of grain, and the spring..."
 And the throats of the rebels ignite the flame of the masses:
 "Riffraff, illiterates, imbeciles
 The ignorant have decided
 The fate of our new world..."
 And the unhappy East, and the tone of the sad dispatch, "The dead
 There are one thousand, and the mighty soldiers remain
 While the company of wounded - fortifying the house of their leader"
 And the warm blood of Shiraz, where Hafez remains
 An intoxicated anthem for the stained visions of the blood of vineyards
 And the night, the radio, and the slain dawn
 And the horrified star of Tehran dyed with shame
 And the fear and embarrassed silence
 In that night wrapped in crime and prisons
 Filled with them, who are they? Men chanting
 In their shackles, in the chains of tyranny, a song takes flight
 Across the blackened nights, crying out, "From here
 The star of morning
 Must rush to the horizon of the people."

While most Iraqi responses to the coup against Mosaddeq centered around the treasonous acts of the Anglo-American clients and the cowardice of the Iranian liberals, others pointed to the hypocrisy of the Tudeh Party. The avant-garde poet Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, who was then a member of the Iraqi Communist Party and enjoying increasing popularity among Iraqi students and the younger generation of intellectuals, fled to Iran after the Iraqi government issued a warrant for his arrest due to his prominent participation in the November 1952 *Intifadah*. While in Iran, Sayyab was harbored by the Tudeh Party and became heavily involved in the party's activism and demonstrations. He later recalled his stunned disillusionment with the Iranian communists after they refused to intervene against the "reactionary revolution" of rightwing soldiers and street thugs sponsored by Britain and the United States.⁵¹ Sayyab recounted engaging in heated argument with an Iranian communist leader after the latter informed him that they would stand aside in order to avoid causing complications for the Soviet Union by

⁵¹ On the Tudeh Party's ambivalence toward Mosaddeq, see Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, 267-80.

provoking American intervention. Sayyab yelled back, "But you are Iranians and not Soviets, and your duty is to defend the interests of your people, the Iranian people, and not the interests of the Soviet Union and her people!" According to Sayyab, his Iranian colleague laughed and responded, "As a communist you must learn that the first duty of every communist party in the world, in this period, is to defend the peace before defending national interests."⁵² While Sayyab's account, written six years later and in the context of a horrific wave of violence between Ba'athists and Communists, cannot simply be taken at face value, it does help to explain his sudden and unexpected defection from the Communist Party.

Popular anger over the fall of Mosaddeq helped to inspire Iraqi oil workers to wage their own assault on foreign oil interests in the country. Led by young Communist labor activists, workers at the Basra Petroleum Company in Zubayr went on strike on December 5, 1953 to protest low wages and the constant humiliation of Iraqi workers by insults from British management. Though initially only a minor labor disturbance, the situation quickly escalated after one a British official opened fire on the striking workers. Minister of Interior Sa'id al-Qazzaz ordered the strikers to return to work and, when they refused, ordered the police to open fire on the workers, leading to the death of at least one worker and serious injuries to a dozen more.⁵³ Massive crowds in Basra, enraged by rumors that the British director of the company, known simply as "Mr. Tissot," had personally ordered Iraqi troops to fire on the workers circulated, chanted against both Tissot and Britain. The socialist poet Kazim Jawad composed the poem "To Mister Tissot" in response to the events:

The Tissot-ians, O Tissot, cannot be counted
So push your nose up higher as you plunder the country's wealth
And fiddle around with it, for you are the messenger of death, or rather destiny
He inspires and implores for violence from his new followers
Or are you not the one who said, with the news as a witness:
"The people, the oil, and the law are under my hand"
What an evil article! The comfort of the people is not a hand
In this land held back in unhappiness
Her wealth remains stained red with blood
And the wound is still under the surveillance of the thieves

⁵² It was certainly not coincidental that this recollection was offered by the author as the first stage of his disillusionment with communism in a series of articles published in Baghdad after the collapse of the monarchy. *Al-Hurriyah*, August 16, 1959 and Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, *Kuntu Shuyu'iyah* (Cologne: Manshurat al-Jamal, 2007), 12-18.

⁵³ John M. Troutbeck to Foreign Office, December 16, 1953, FO 371/104666 EQ 1016/70.

Ask the people about November, ask about January, ask about their blood
Ask the people about their victims, ask about their eternal glory
And ask your blackened gang about their tomorrow
What will it be? For is vengeance not coming the day after tomorrow?⁵⁴

Jawad's reference to November and January, an invocation of the *Intifadah* of November 1952 and to the *Wathbah* of January 1948, underscored the commitment of the Iraqi Left to rewriting the history of those popular uprisings as driven by opposition to the economic exploitation of imperialism.

National Unity and Popular Front Politics

Recent historiography on the cultural discourses of political opposition in the waning years of the Hashemite monarchy have emphasized the rigid dichotomy between the insularity of pan-Arab nationalism and the globalist dimensions of Iraqist nationalism.⁵⁵ While radical nationalist poets like 'Ali al-Hilli and 'Adnan al-Rawi focused their attention on Arab national liberation movements in Algeria and Palestine and celebrated the early steps toward national unity between Egypt and Syria, leftist poets like 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati, Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Uloom, and Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri looked to the anti-colonial movements of Asia and Africa and celebrated their integration of nationalism and social justice. As Bashkin has noted, the convergence of radical nationalist and leftist artists and intellectuals in support of the Mosaddeq movement in Iran stood as a noteworthy exception to this discursive stratification.⁵⁶ A deeper reading of the poetic archives from the period of popular front politics (1952-1958), however, suggests that the affinities between the two ideological camps were far deeper than has been recognized. Young radical poets like Badr Shakir al-Sayyab and Kazim Jawad could comfortably identify with both the Ba'athist and Communist blocs in this period, and the eventual allegiance of Sayyab to the Ba'ath Party and Jawad to the Communist Party during the traumatic social violence of 1959 was certainly not predetermined.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Kazim Jawad, *Min Aghani al-Hurriyah* (Beirut: Matabi' Dar al-'Ilm li al-Malayin, 1960), 39-40.

⁵⁵ Orit Bashkin, *The Other Iraq: Pluralism and Culture in Hashemite Iraq* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 158-69 and Davis, *Memories of State*, 82-108.

⁵⁶ Bashkin, *The Other Iraq*, 164-65.

⁵⁷ Bashkin's classification of both Sayyab and Jawad as "radical nationalists" illustrates the challenges of binary categorizations. While noting Sayyab's Communist affiliations in the 1940s, Bashkin's description of Jawad as a radical nationalist appears to be based on his appeal to Iraqi leftists in *al-Adab* to focus on Arab national liberation struggles rather than Asian and African anti-colonial movements. Jawad's poetry, however, suggests that this appeal reflected strategic concerns rather than political ideology. See Bashkin, *The Other Iraq*, 121-23 and 164.

Kazim Jawad, whose poetry was heavily influenced by the writing of the Turkish socialist poet Nazim Hikmet, reoriented his poetry to reflect the new cultural politics of national unity.⁵⁸ Along with 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati and Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulum, Jawad was one of the earliest Iraqi poets to compose verses celebrating the communist liberation movements in Asia and Africa. Jawad's 1952 poem "A Song for Asia" signified his political commitment to socialist internationalism:

O Asia, O Lands of Temples... How beautiful
Driven away to the harbors, to the forest, to the valleys
Cast upon the sands of Jaffa, bloody and disfigured
Abandoned on the soil of Korea, tattered and naked
And your surviving ruins moaning in Hiroshima
But still across the seas, upon the departing ships
Piled with plunder, you are crucified in the gloomy dusk
...
The glory of the soil has dyed the dawn with bountiful gifts
So do you notice the breezes overwhelming the pavilions of hell
So do you observe the castles falling into shattered ruins
So do you hear the songs of Mao's mighty armies⁵⁹

By the middle of the 1950s, however, Jawad had concluded that the interests of popular front politics in Iraq necessitated an increased focus on Arab national liberation movements. His 1955 poem "The Sun Rises Over the Maghreb," written in support of the Algerian revolution, drew heavily upon the historical imagery of the pan-Arab struggle:

Do you not behold the star of morning, Maysalun
Bursting forth before the dew, the light, and the eyes
Upon the horizon, where the shining stars upon the graves
Encircling from the heights of dawn in reverence
O Yusuf al-'Azmah
O Commander of Armies, O Poetry of Refuge
He has returned to lead the army of the people to victory in battle⁶⁰

Jawad's invocation of the Battle of Maysalun, where Yusuf al-'Azmah led the Syrians' last stand against the French army, served as a symbolic marker of his solidarity with the Iraqi pan-Arabists.⁶¹

⁵⁸ On Jawad's poetic influences see Salma Khadra Jayyusi, *Trends and Movements in Modern Arabic Poetry* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1977), 2:576-77.

⁵⁹ Jawad, *Min Aghani al-Hurriyah*, 26-30.

⁶⁰ Jawad, *Min Aghani al-Hurriyah*, 155-161.

In 1956, Jawad joined the radical nationalists in celebrating Egyptian heroism against British, French, and Israeli forces during the Suez Crisis in his poem "Port Sa'id." Notably absent in his poem, though, was any indication of support for Nasser's vision of pan-Arab national unity:

Who is Port Sa'id?
A century of fires on the horizon
As the wicks of dawns burn
...
Who is Port Sa'id?
And these bells across death and ice
For whom, for whom do they toll at dawn?
Is it for absent spring hidden in the trees
And in the fragrance of flowers?
...
Indeed, indeed, from the blood of Port Sa'id
From her torn and martyred people
The world will be born again⁶²

While Jawad's contribution to the nationalist cannon of Suez Crisis poetry was celebrated by radical nationalist poets and critics, the poem is notable for its celebration of Egyptian popular resistance.⁶³ While most of the radical nationalist poetry glorified the role of 'Abd al-Nasser in confronting and resisting imperialism, Jawad pointedly refrained from mentioning either 'Abd al-Nasser or the pan-Arab cause.

The increasingly popular Free Verse poets 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati and Badr Shakir al-Sayyab made similar poetic adjustments over the course of the 1950s. The fact that Bayati remained a loyal member of the Iraqi Communist Party throughout his life and Sayyab publicly left the party in June 1954 only further magnifies the significance of their political and aesthetic convergence. Bayati's internationalist commitments were readily apparent in poems like

⁶¹ On the significance of Maysalun in pan-Arabist literature and discourse, see Abu Khaldun Sati' al-Husri, *Yawm Maysalun: Safhah min Tarikh al-'Arab al-Hadith, Mudhakkirat Musawwirah bi Muqaddimah 'an Tanazu' al-Duwwal hawla al-Bilad al-'Arabiyyah wa Mudhayyalah bi Watha'iq wa Suwar* (Beirut: Dar al-Ittihad, 1965).

⁶² Jawad, *Min Aghani al-Hurriyyah*, 108-112.

⁶³ Majid Ahmad Samarra'i, *al-Tayyar al-Qawmi fi al-Shi'r al-'Iraqi al-Hadith mundhu al-Harb al-'Alamiyyah al-Thaniyyah 1939 hatta Naksat Haziran 1967* (Baghdad: Manshurat Wizarat al-Thaqafah wa al-'Ilam, 1983), 335-36. Eric Davis has noted Samarra'i's general omission of certain leftist poets like 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati and Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri and mobilization of other leftists and ex-leftists like Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulum and Badr Shakir al-Sayyab to support his revisionist analysis of the long historical tradition of Iraqi political poetry within a Ba'thist political framework. In this context, Samarra'i's enthusiastic endorsement of Kazim Jawad is all the more striking. See Davis, *Memories of State*, 208-12.

"Vietnam" and "Mau Mau" published in his 1954 collection *Abariq Muhashshamah*.⁶⁴ Just two years later, Bayati published *al-Majd li al-Atfal wa al-Zaytun*, which included a number of poems that engaged explicitly with cherished pan-Arab themes, including "A Song from Iraq to Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser," "Odes to Jaffa," and "A Song of Victory for Marrakesh, Tunisia, and Algeria."⁶⁵ Sayyab, on the other hand, never engaged contemporary political issues with the direct immediacy of Jawad or Bayati - and especially not of the older generation of poets like Bahr al-'Ulum and Jawahiri who specialized in the "poetry of occasion" - but his work in this period nevertheless underwent a remarkable shift from the socialist realism of poems like "The Gravedigger," "Arms and Children," and "The Blind Whore" composed between 1952 and 1954 and poem like "In the Arab Maghreb" and "Port Sa'id" composed in 1956.⁶⁶

Even Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri, who would emerge after the July 1958 Revolution as the primary spokesman of the Communist bloc and the principle enemy of the Ba'athists in their struggle for cultural hegemony, now eagerly embraced a political alliance with the Ba'athists. While in political exile in Damascus in 1956, Jawahiri delivered the poem "I Left the Stupor of Servility" to a massive crowd gathered to commemorate the assassination of the Syrian Ba'athist leader 'Adnan al-Maliki by a fellow military officer affiliated with the Syrian Social Nationalist Party.⁶⁷ In the poem, Jawahiri promoted the rampant suspicions that the SSNP had acted on behalf of Western powers because of Maliki's opposition to the Baghdad Pact:

The sacrifice to this wretched pact is a premonition
 For you in exposing the evil of these base and lowly men
 The fable of "The Signatories" will be spit from
 The mouth of history just like the legend of "The Allies"
 And how quickly will you sigh after the ardor
 Will blind the eyes like the coal of the tamarisk
 They said "Enter into our contract," and I said
 Let them enjoy this utter obscenity and hyper-stupidity
 The laughingstock of the Signatories between the oppressed

⁶⁴ 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati, *al-A'mal al-Shi'riyyah* (Beirut: al-Mu'assassah al-'Arabiyyah, 1995), 1:125-26 and 178-89.

⁶⁵ al-Bayati, *al-A'mal al-Shi'riyyah*, 1:191-92, 193-97, and 234-35. Bayati's growing identification with the Arab nationalist cause was undoubtedly influenced by his own experiences in exile between 1954 and 1958. See Muhsin J. al-Musawi, "'Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati's Poetics of Exile," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 32:2 (2001), 212-38.

⁶⁶ Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, *Diwan Badr Shakir al-Sayyab* (Beirut: Dar al-'Awdah, 1971), 394-402, 492-508, 509-42, 543-63, 563-91.

⁶⁷ See Adeed Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 157 and Rami Ginat, *Syria and the Doctrine of Arab Neutralism: From Independence to Dependence* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2005), 148.

And his oppressors, between the master and his slave girls
Whoever saw a pact so extraordinary in its dictates
Between this moist soil and the stars of Orion?⁶⁸

Jawahiri's passionate eulogy for Maliki underscored the new solidarities forged between Communists and Ba'athists in this period. The poet had planned to return to Iraq after the event but was moved to remain in Syria until after the July 1958 Revolution by the fervor of the Ba'athist crowds chanting in unison, "Don't return! Don't return!"⁶⁹

Kazim Jawad, who was also living in political exile in Syria composed the well-known poem "An Iraqi in Aleppo," which became an anthem for the Iraqi activists, artists, and intellectuals banished from their country. The poem was notable for its expression of solidarity with Ba'athist radicals in Aleppo and its denunciation of the Baghdad Pact:

I am in the north, with the comrades, with the plains, with the morning
Among the ditches, under the rain of spring, along the riverbed
The earth beckons to the stars, to the irises, and to the chamomiles
And continues to protect the peace of the forests from the rifles on all sides
And on your borders, O my homeland, roaring in a flight of fancy
While the colonizers lurk in anticipation of feeding from the wound
And from your blood if it should flow from the spring of the offerings
Of thousands upon thousands, and the tyrants filled with blackened aspirations
Of bloody and sinful deeds, and the confiscated conscience
And I can almost hear a bereaved voice groaning in the wind
Baghdad crying in my blood: "Raise the wounded around Aleppo
And unfurl your bloodstained flags above the plaza of the struggle
For I have learned that I am a victim of the Pact, they have clipped my wings"
At your service!
I am in the north
Responding
From behind my guns⁷⁰

While Jawad's poem was widely praised by pan-Arabist poets and critics, the clear longing for his Iraqi homeland underscores the persistence of quintessentially Iraqist imagery and themes in the new poetry of national unity.

The new affinities expressed by the leftist poets and intellectuals for the pan-Arabist cause earned the approval and respect of the radical nationalists. The Ba'athist poet 'Adnan al-

⁶⁸ al-Jawahiri, *Diwan al-Jawahiri*, 4:33-38.

⁶⁹ Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrayati* (Damascus: Dar al-Rafidayn, 1988), 2:133-42.

⁷⁰ Jawad, *Min Aghani al-Hurriyah*, 120-21.

Rawi, who would emerge after the July 1958 Revolution as the most violent critic of the Iraqi Communist Party and its affiliated artists and intellectuals, praised the role of leftist poets Muhammad Salih Bahr al-‘Ulum, ‘Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati, Kazim Jawad, and Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri along with the pan-Arabist poets ‘Ali al-Hilli and Badr Shakir al-Sayyab in resisting colonialism and dictatorship in the introduction to his 1957 collection *al-Naft al-Multahib* [*Blazing Oil*]. His comparison of the political tribulations of Ma‘ruf al-Rusafi in his long battle against colonialism in Iraq to the government's campaign against the radical leftist poet Muhammad Salih Bahr al-‘Ulum was particularly striking.⁷¹ Rawi dedicated one of the poems in the collection, "A Wall... In Iraq" to the Iraqi poets silenced by the regime:

If the spokesmen here grow quiet
 There will be no voice or paper to exclaim
Misfortunes clouding over the two rivers
 And spiteful hands will grasp their instruction
And our free sons will continue to wander
 And to distract the people with trivial verses
And in the name of the Pact and its signatories
 The old prisons will quarrel with those newly built
But I turned and spoke to the despotic wall
 I spoke of truth and certitude in the name of faith
So that your hopeless alliance will fall!⁷²

Rawi's willingness to ignore ideological differences between the resistance factions was a testament to the spirit of national unity in this period. For both the leftists and the radical nationalist, Britain, France, Israel, the United States, and the pro-Western Arab regimes represented tyranny and oppressions, while the leftists and radical nationalists embraced one another as comrades in the anti-colonial struggle.

This is not to suggest that the differences between the two sides had been totally cast aside. Rawi's anti-Zionist poetry, for example, was marked by caustic anti-Semitism that was notably absent in the anti-Zionist poetry of the Iraqi leftists.⁷³ More significant was the striking difference between the utopian visions of post-revolutionary society articulated by leftists and

⁷¹ ‘Adnan al-Rawi, *Diwan al-Sha‘ir al-‘Arabi wa al-Za‘im al-Thawri al-‘Iraqi al-Munadil: ‘Adnan al-Rawi* (Cairo: s.n., 1974), 650-651.

⁷² al-Rawi, *Diwan al-Sha‘ir al-‘Arabi*, 687-688.

⁷³ Rawi's 1954 poem "The Fisherman Whom They Killed," written in response to an attack by the Israeli vessel *Bat Galim* on two Egyptian fishing vessels in the Red Sea was introduced by the caustic line, "And thus the Jews, always." See al-Rawi, *Diwan al-Sha‘ir al-‘Arabi*, 703-704.

radical nationalists. For the radical nationalists, Arab unity remained the ultimate goal of the political struggle against imperialism. This commitment is evident in Rawi's jubilant celebration of the United Arab Republic in his February 1958 poem "An Arab Reunion":

How long was this era of separation
But today is the day of lost brotherhood
One thousand years
And all of them longing
How long since the banks of Iraq have called out
To the Khufu ships at the foot of the pyramid
How long since the edges of pines have called out
From the tips of the cedars of Lebanon
To the desert breezes of Oman
The era of separation lasted so long
The disgrace of Iraq lasted so long...⁷⁴

In sharp contrast to this vision of pan-Arab unity, leftists proposed far more universalist visions of revolutionary utopia. This is particularly evident in the socialist poet Talib al-Haydari's August 1957 poem "The Eternal Song":

For indeed peace is the song of all peoples
Without it the masses could not raise their voice
And indeed equality is the right of everyone
For those with white skin as well as those with black
And indeed the fables of centuries past
Have vanished before the eternal promise
And indeed the truth is that there is no place
On the land for the slave and the master
The people are equal and no one group
Shall transgress, no one man shall encroach⁷⁵

While each side refrained from attacking the ideological visions of the other in the interest of national unity, the obvious difference in goals and objectives foreshadowed the coming divisions of the post-revolutionary era.

The differences between the leftists and radical nationalists on the questions of social reform underwent a similarly impressive, though incomplete, evolution toward national consensus. While leftist poets made a concerted effort to mirror the language and interests of

⁷⁴ al-Rawi, *Diwan al-Sha'ir al-'Arabi*, 724-726.

⁷⁵ al-Haydari, *Nidhal*, 13.

their nationalist counterparts on foreign policy discussions, they resolutely maintained their commitment to labor radicalism and social revolution in the domestic arena and, in fact, drew the radical nationalist poets toward their position. In his new 1952 poem "The Battle of Freedom," the socialist poet Kazim Jawad glorified the role of the workers in both the *Wathbah* of 1948 and the *Intifadah* of 1952:

I still dream of the struggle, of that relentless voice
The voice of the masses moved to wade into that battle of life
With a drawn out yell, gazing into their eyes and crying:
"I will perish so that my country may live, I will perish so that sorrows are driven away
From my plague-stricken people, from my country shackled in chains
My blood singing in my veins, burning with reckless exuberance
Forever it will be told - what became immortal - the spring of the workers' glory"⁷⁶

Jawad's ability to connect the workers' struggle to the broader questions of anti-colonialism and anti-Zionism was particularly influential in garnering the support of the radical nationalists:

A voice answered in a tone overflowing with buried malice:
"Woe to the scoundrels, for the necks of the tyrants shall be trampled
Those who sell the blood of men, like thieves of the people's nourishment
As hunger persists in chewing the lacerated linings of their stomachs"
And like the luminous sun of March, like the irises, and the fires
Friends of every people who announce their liberation
 Intending to declare
To the rulers of America, those masters of war, gods of destruction,
Whose wealth supports the Zionist wolves:
"O Fall, you agents and colonizers
O Fall
O Fall..."

Jawad's sentiment was echoed by 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati in "The Illuminated Door," his own poem about the *Wathbah* published in 1952:

"O Fall, you colonizers
And the contractors who defend them, O Fall"
And in the whiz of gunfire: "O unhappy soldier"
I am your comrade, O unhappy soldier
I am your comrade in this fate
In this poverty, and in this damned malady"⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Jawad, *Min Aghani al-Hurriyah*, 11-22.

⁷⁷ al-Bayati, *al-A'mal al-Shi'riyyah*, 1:304-306.

Bayati's appeal to the Iraqi soldiers signaled the obvious influence of the Free Officers Revolution in Egypt on the Iraqi political opposition, including the leftists.

By the middle of the decade, Iraqi leftists still connected the political struggle against dictatorship to capitalist and feudal oppression and exploitation. The influence of social realism on Iraqi novelists and short story writers like Gha'ib Tu'amah Farman, 'Abd al-Malik Nuri, and Fu'ad al-Takarli was also apparent in the work of both the radical nationalist and the leftist poets.⁷⁸ While the poets' interest in both rural and urban poverty was not necessarily an innovation inspired by socialist currents emanating from Europe but rather an integral extension of an historical legacy dating back to the verses of poets like Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulum, Ma'ruf al-Rusafi, and Ahmad al-Safi al-Najafi in the 1930s, the resurgence of poetic interest in questions of poverty in the mid-1950s was nevertheless a striking phenomenon.⁷⁹ The Ba'athist poet 'Ali al-Hilli, for example, yearned for working class revolution in his 1957 poem "The Proletariat":

From the sweat and nakedness of the peasant
And from the tears of the poor disabled worker
From the bloodied quill and ink of the artist
And from the remnants of trembling hands
From the beams of the hut, from its scent
Cut from the shabby saplings of the reeds
From the shackled wrist, from the lesion
And from the anguish of banished resisters
From the swish of the hoe across the village
And from the moaning of the weary sickle!!⁸⁰

On the level of domestic politics and social revolution, Hilli's poetry was scarcely distinguishable from that produced by the Communist poets. His December 1952 poem "The Martyr Farhat Hached" celebrated the radical Tunisian labor activist assassinated by Red Hand terrorists and his March 1956 poem "Blood on the Shores of Pearls," celebrated the anti-British

⁷⁸ On the impact of social realism in Iraq, see Bashkin, *The Other Iraq*, 150-51, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, *Princesses' Street: Baghdad Memories* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2005), 87-88, and Zuhayr Shalibah, *Gha'ib Tu'amah Farman: Dirasah Muqarana fi al-Riwayah al-'Iraqiyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Kunuz al-Adabiyah, 1996), 31-76.

⁷⁹ On the discussions of poverty in Iraqi poetry during the 1930s see especially Yusuf 'Izz al-Din, *Poetry and Iraqi Society, 1900-1945* (Baghdad: Matba'at al-'Ani, 1962) 33-39 and 51-57.

⁸⁰ 'Ali al-Hilli, *Thawrat al-Ba'th* (Beirut: Matabi' Dar al-Andalus, 1963), 9-10.

demonstrations orchestrated by the leftist National Union Committee in Bahrain in support of an anti-sectarian politics of national liberation.⁸¹

The most memorable of these poems, however was Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri's famous 1951 poem "Lullaby for the Hungry," a caustic satire of elite political discourse and its inattention to mass poverty in Iraq:

Sleep, You hungry people, sleep!
So that you are free from vice and blame
Sleep, for the unity of the most precious demands that you sleep
Sleep, You hungry people, sleep!
For sleep is one of the blessings of peace
The parties have united in sleep and taken shelter from the danger of the clash
The crowd has weakened in sleep and the ranks have no need for division
For indeed it is folly for you to rebel against the staff of harmony⁸²

Jawahiri's mockery of calls for national unity was meant to satirize the discourse of reconciliation promulgated by Nuri al-Sa'id and Salih Jabr.

Jawahiri's denunciation of the government's cynical exploitation of poverty and misery to strengthen the stability of the regime was echoed by the radical nationalists. Badr Shakir al-Sayyab's well-known poem "The Informant," composed near the end of the Hashemite era, denounced the paid government agents who had thoroughly infiltrated universities and cafes⁸³:

I am what you will: I am despicable
Shoe shiner of the invaders, merchant of blood and conscience
For the tyrants. I am a crow
Feasting on the corpses of chicks. I am destruction, I am desolation!⁸⁴

In the poem's depiction of the radical students and intellectuals monitored by the informant, Sayyab clearly emphasized the conjunction of anti-colonial nationalism and the struggle for social reform:

For what reason do they read? Because Tunisia wakes up to the struggle?
Because the rebels of Algeria weave from sand
And from storms, floods, and gasps of the hungry

⁸¹ al-Hilli, *Thawrat al-Ba'th*, 25-28 and 32-36.

⁸² *al-Awqat al-Baghdadiyah* March 28, 1951 and al-Jawahiri, *Diwan al-Jawahiri*, 3:313-17.

⁸³ On the role of state surveillance see also Bashkin, *The Other Iraq*, 104-11 and Gha'ib Tu'amah Farman, *al-Hukm al-Aswad fi al-'Iraq* (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr, 1957), 49-54.

⁸⁴ al-Sayyab, *Diwan Badr Shakir al-Sayyab*, 338-43.

The funeral shrouds of tyrants? All while the bombs of volunteers
Hiss in the dusk of the canal?
For what reason do they read and then glance at me time after time
As if we are rejoicing at one another's misfortune?

It was the concluding lines of the poem, however, that most clearly echoed Jawahiri's language in "Lullaby for the Hungry" and underscored the enduring affinities between both the poets and their respective political ideologies:

Away with all of this existence, let destruction unravel it!
My money and what for the people? I am not the father of all of these hungry mouths
I want to quench my thirst and sate my hunger just like the others
So let them shower me with curses and contempt as they wish
For I have a fistful of grain in my hand and in the coming years
Five or more... Or less... It will be the spring of life
So let them dream of their illusive tomorrow stirring in the wilderness
The spirit of growth, threshing floors, and the victory of the proletariat
Let them dream, if dreams can sate the hungry

Dreams, of course, could not sate either the literal or the metaphorical hunger of the Iraqi opposition, but the verses of Jawahiri and Sayyab indicated the depth of popular opposition to the Iraqi regime. While this opposition certainly intensified over the course of the 1950s, partly in response to external developments in Egypt and Syria and partly in response to the government's increasingly heavy-handed repression of domestic dissent, the popular euphoria that erupted when the Hashemite monarchy finally fell on July 14, 1958 must be seen as the culmination of a long social and cultural revolution that dated back to the termination of the British Mandate in 1932. While several scholars have pointed to the intensification of political repression and the consolidation of the socialist opposition in Iraq after the collapse of the November 1952 *Intifadah* as the true basis for the July 1958 Revolution, this view tends to dismiss the radical nationalists as mere reactionaries in the struggle for cultural hegemony in the post-revolutionary period.⁸⁵ In fact, while Ba'athist intellectuals may have appealed to reactionary and traditionalist communalist forces as a bulwark against the spread of communism, radical nationalists were deeply committed to their own interpretation of the previous twenty-six years of Iraqi history.⁸⁶ Lingering pan-Arabist suspicions of the partisans of the Bakr Sidqi coup d'état

⁸⁵ See especially Pierre Rossi, "'La Culture Nouvelle': Mouvement Révolutionnaire des Intellectuels Irakiens," *Orient* 2:8 (1958), 61-65 and Yousif, "The Struggle for Cultural Hegemony," 172-96.

⁸⁶ Sami Zubaida, "Community, Class and Minorities in Iraqi Politics," 197-210.

of 1936 and entrenched idolization of the Rashid 'Ali movement of 1941 would play a more prominent role in the unraveling of popular front politics than simple disputes over social reform and Arab unity in the post-revolutionary period.

The July 14 Revolution

The events of July 14, 1958 and their aftermath have been exhaustively covered by numerous historians. In a matter of hours, nearly a dozen members of the Hashemite royal family, including the Crown Prince 'Abd al-Ilah and King Faysal II, were executed and Colonel 'Abd al-Salam 'Arif announced the birth of the independent Republic of Iraq over the radio. The capture and execution of Nuri al-Sa'id, caught trying to escape in Baghdad in women's clothing, on July 15 offered an air of finality to the events that was notably absent during the Bakr Sidqi and Rashid 'Ali coup d'états.⁸⁷ While the earliest historical accounts of the revolution focused on the secret planning and coordination of military movements, more recent studies have focused on popular participation as a crucial aspect in distinguishing the events July 14, 1958 from earlier military interventions that failed to evolve into true revolutions.⁸⁸ Considerably less attention has been devoted to the detailed analysis of cultural politics in the post-revolutionary period.⁸⁹

A deeper analysis of cultural production in the first two years of Republic Iraq, when both radical nationalists and leftists enjoyed relative freedom from government censorship, helps to illuminate historical discussions of ideological and political conflict in this period. The gradual unraveling of popular front politics between November 1958 and April 1959 was painstakingly catalogued and articulated by Iraqi poets affiliated with the Ba'ath Party and the Communist Party. The emotive dimensions of this archive underscore the cultural conflicts and debates that lay at the heart of the wave of bitter and brutal violence typically ascribed to purely social and ideological conflict. The earliest poems composed to commemorate the revolution were universally euphoric in nature. Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri serenaded Staff Brigadier 'Abd al-

⁸⁷ The most authoritative account of the revolutionary course of events comes from Batatu. See Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 764-807.

⁸⁸ See especially Juan Romero, *The Iraqi Revolution of 1958: A Revolutionary Quest for Unity and Security* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2011).

⁸⁹ There are two notable exceptions here: Abdul-Salaam Yousif concentrates on the pre-revolutionary cultural struggles and offers only suggestive insights about the post-revolutionary fallout in Yousif, "The Struggle for Cultural Hegemony," 172-96, and Eric Davis offers a fascinating account of the contestation of ideological politics in the works of the pan-Arabist 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Duri and the Communist Dhu al-Nun Ayyub in Davis, *Memories of State*, 109-47.

Karim al-Qasim and the army for their actions in his poem, "The Iraqi Army (July 14)," which ran in almost every major Iraqi newspaper:

My footsteps have guided me to say to you, "How Splendid"
For what you have done far exceeds my mere words of praise
Indeed you have printed what my poetic talent has composed
You have concluded what is spoken in the prose of eloquence
You struck the blow and so I have no hope of striking
And you thrust the sword and so I have no hope of thrusting
What you had with you was a final and decisive declaration
That captivated the mind, and so what declaration is left for us?
The crowns of the tyrants are hanging upon vagabonds
A stammer of eloquence, for I have become inarticulate⁹⁰

The socialist poet Kazim Jawad offered a similar sentiment of hope and thanksgiving in his poem "A Song for the Republic," written in the wake of the revolution:

I am returning on a long road, singing the praises of spring
For I was born in the pastures of the steppes amidst the flocks
Here the dawn slumbers behind the hills like a gentle child
Here the earth is a hymn that inspires the liberation of the masses
To a horizon stained by its victims in the shade of their blood
For the lilies have illuminated the morning to drive away the frost⁹¹

From his exile in Moscow, the Communist poet 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati offered his own panegyric for the revolution, "July 14":

The sun in my town
Shines
And the bells
Ring for the heroes
So wake up, my beloved
For we are free
Like the fire
Like the sparrow
Like the fire
For there is no longer a wall between us⁹²

⁹⁰ al-Jawahiri, *Diwan al-Jawahiri*, 4:103-107.

⁹¹ Jawad, *Min Aghani al-Hurriyah*, 62-65.

⁹² al-Bayati, *al-A'mal al-Shi'riyyah*, 1:366-67.

While the effusive leftist support for the revolution is often taken for granted, the radical nationalists were no less enthusiastic in their celebratory verses. Iraqis knew little of Qasim's politics in the immediate aftermath of the revolution, and poets from both camps tended to see the events as the culmination of their own political agenda. The Ba'athist poet 'Ali al-Hilli, for example, infused his verses with the symbolism of resurrection (*ba'th*) to valorize the Ba'ath Party in his poem "Nuptials of the Revolution," composed on August 2, 1958:

A revolution of resurrection, drawn from our blood and fire, our shimmering dawn!!
From the forearms of the proud who cast off their chains and prevailed over torture
From the guests of the prison, enflamed by the whip, in every heart an insistence
From the perseverance of the hungry, the cry of the shackled, the mutiny spread within us
From here... My free and generous people
 Resurrected and we are here soldiers and arms
And from this East the new life rises
 Upon our liberal and generous land
On each and every patch of our soil
 Noble blood... And sound spirits⁹³

On the other hand, leftist poets saw no contradiction between their yearning for social revolution and their support for pan-Arab political ideals. Thus, the socialist Kazim Jawad echoed Hilli's rhetoric with his own calls to the neighboring Arab nations to celebrate the Iraqi revolution with their own uprisings in his 1958 poem "Song to the Republic":

I dwell upon the aroma of the sun above the spring of the struggle
And sing to the lilies so that they grow proud in the hills and the valleys
The Tigris declares her astonishment in this wilderness of insomnia
To 'Amman where the blood that has been shed will remain an ink
With which to write the bloody fables of the executioner
And to wrench beautiful Jaffa away from the sorrow and mourning⁹⁴

Jawad's invocation of the Palestinian struggle was particularly significant as a marker of his commitment to the pan-Arab agenda.

Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri would quickly forge an extremely close personal relationship with Qasim, who assumed the post of Prime Minister after the revolution. Qasim quickly revived the old tradition of political patronage of poetry as a means of establishing cultural legitimacy. Jawahiri was invited to return to Baghdad from his internal exile at 'Ali al-

⁹³ al-Hilli, *Thawrat al-Ba'th*, 53-56.

⁹⁴ Jawad, *Min Aghani al-Hurriyah*, 62-65.

Gharbi, and Qasim arranged for Baghdad Radio to interrupt regular broadcasts with announcements of Jawahiri's return on July 24. The poet was immediately shuttled to a banquet in his honor at the Ministry of Defence, where the leading Free Officers, including Nasserists like 'Abd al-Salam 'Arif, praised his poetry as an inspiration for the national liberation movement. He would later recall with considerable pride that he was the only poet whom Qasim ever addressed with the honorific "*ustadh*" and that Qasim had remarked upon visiting Jawahiri's humble home in Baghdad, "Now I have visited the home that ripened the revolution!"⁹⁵ Jawahiri's personal devotion to Qasim was already apparent in his November 1958 poem "In the Name of the People":

'Abd al-Karim you are a law for the crowds
Peerless, you facilitate and sanction their path
The peace of the nations hangs upon you
Without you our souls would surely perish
God in His Eminence will obliterate any offense
Truly God will drive away any offense with blood⁹⁶

Jawahiri's language was particularly striking given his principled opposition to the lionization of political figures, except in death, after his embarrassing experience with the Bakr Sidqi coup d'état. The leftist poet Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulam, who had no such compunctions, eagerly joined the chorus:

He took up the sword and embraced this glory
Between his arms and then kissed the triumph
And the new moon of his feast blessed the people
With his triumphant army and his loyal sons
A new spirit emerged from the army and in this splendor
Of resurrection the name of righteousness circulated
An era of darkness vanished in the night
And a new era of justice appeared in the dawn
The army of the people cried with such force
Of victory and left the wall behind in its wake⁹⁷

Jawahiri played a crucial role in supporting the efforts of the National Unity Front, an alliance of the Communist Party, National Democratic Party, Istiqlal Party, and Ba'ath Party, to maintain

⁹⁵ al-Jawahiri, *Dhikrayati*, 2:161-210.

⁹⁶ *al-Ra'i al-'Amm*, November 30, 1958 and al-Jawahiri, *Diwan al-Jawahiri*, 4:111-116.

⁹⁷ 'Abd al-Karim al-Dujayli, *Muhadarat 'an al-Shi'r al-'Iraqi* (Cairo: s.n., 1959), 109.

unity between the revolutionary factions while adhering to democratic goals. He was frequently called upon to recite some of his most popular political verses at the massive National Unity Front rallies in Baghdad in November and December.⁹⁸

Already by later November, however, early signs of contention between Ba‘thist and Communist partisans emerged over the question of political leadership of the new republic. The Communists distributed pamphlets accusing the Ba‘thists of undermining national unity with their frequent calls for immediate integration with the United Arab Republic, which the Communists derided as a primary example of the failed "system of One Party." They accused the Ba‘thists of glorifying the Iraqi resistance in the Rashid ‘Ali movement of 1941 while ignoring the success of the masses in the *Wathbah* of 1948 and argued that post-colonial nations that excluded and suppressed Communism invariably found themselves rekindling old alliances with both the imperialist West and local reactionary forces.⁹⁹ Other Communist pamphlets made the case against immediate integration with the UAR in more explicit terms by arguing that the Ba‘thists were "working in isolation from the people in order to take the nationalist forces and the masses by surprise." The Communists contended that they did not oppose the idea of pan-Arab unity, but warned that immediate integration with the UAR would marginalize the Kurds and jeopardize the development of the Iraqi national economy. They nevertheless endorsed the idea of a federal union of anti-colonial Arab states in which the relationship between Iraq and the UAR would mirror that between Yemen and the UAR.¹⁰⁰

The suggestion, of course, failed to mollify radical nationalists who were growing impatient in their desire to realize the long-awaited goal of pan-Arab unity. In August 1958, the Ba‘thist poet ‘Adnan al-Rawi composed "The Long Absentee" as a call for Rashid ‘Ali to return to Iraq:

The English over there... They have remained over there
And the traitors... And you know them well... Over there
And those who dally with our people are remaining over there
And your hand knows how to harvest them... Your hand

⁹⁸ The Higher National Committee of the National Unity Front, "To the Noble Iraqi People," November 12, 1958, FO 371/133073 EQ 1015/376, Chancery Baghdad to Eastern Department, "National Unity Front," November 27, 1958, FO 371/133073 EQ 1015/377 and "Iraqi Partisans of Peace," December 31, 1958, FO 371/140900 EQ 1015/6.

⁹⁹ The Political Bureau of the Iraqi Communist Party, "The Unity of Ranks is a Great National Necessity," September 1, 1958, FO 371/133702 EQ 1015/330.

¹⁰⁰ The Political Bureau of the Iraqi Communist Party, "Declaration of the Iraqi Communist Party on the Union of the United Arab Republic and Yemen," September 3, 1958, FO 371/133702 EQ 1015/330.

O Leader of Liberation, our people's misfortune has lasted so long
And the story of expulsion is anticipating its conclusion
So when are you returning?

...

The glory... the covenant... and the ancient oath
In every heart under the sun... O Hero of the Land
On every sign you rise above the heads of the rest
In every voice in these glorious acclamations
In every revolution of Iraq
These days the people march... To say: No
No... We do not want the English in our land
The glory... and the longing for you
O Absentee, the days anticipate your rendezvous
So when are you returning?¹⁰¹

Rawi's verse should have served as a warning to Qasim and his supporters, particularly given the prominent space accorded to Rashid 'Ali and the Four Colonels of the Golden Square on placards alongside Qasim and 'Abd al-Salam 'Arif in the public squares of Baghdad. Rawi was in fact deeply involved in a plot to overthrow Qasim's government and anoint Rashid 'Ali as Prime Minister after his return to Baghdad from his Cairo exile.¹⁰²

The discovery of the Rashid 'Ali plot in early December 1958 unleashed both a new wave of anti-colonial suspicion and anger and vigilante justice. The Popular Resistance Forces, a volunteer militia authorized by Qasim in August, engaged in non-training activities for the first time, manning checkpoints on bridges and main roads in Baghdad.¹⁰³ Official government communiqués declared that the plot was sponsored by "foreigners," an obvious indication of Egyptian involvement that had the added benefit of promoting Qasim's anti-colonial credentials. The largely Communist crowds, in fact, assumed that Britain and the U.S. were behind the plot and beat several British and American civilians in Baghdad and Basra before Iraqi soldiers were sent to their rescue.¹⁰⁴ Popular suspicions of U.S. involvement were amplified by the fact that the plot was uncovered just before the visit to Baghdad of U.S. Assistant Secretary of State William

¹⁰¹ al-Rawi, *Diwan al-Sha'ir al-'Arabi*, 731-732.

¹⁰² R.S. Crawford, "Colonel Fadhil Abbas al Mahdawi and Colonel Wasfi Taher," November 27, 1958, FO 371/133074 EQ 1015/380 and R.S. Crawford to Foreign Office, December 14, 1959, FO 371/133075 EQ 1015/400.

¹⁰³ On the Popular Resistance Forces, see Romero, *The Iraqi Revolution of 1958*, 140-41.

¹⁰⁴ Crawford to Foreign Office, December 9, 1958, FO 371/133705 EQ 1015/391, December 9, 1958, FO 371/133705 EQ 1015/393, December 10, 1958, FO 371/133705 EQ 1015/394, and December 14, 1958, FO 371/133705 EQ 1015/400, Judd to Foreign Office, December 9, 1958, FO 371/133705 EQ 1015/395, Chancery Baghdad to Eastern Department, December 18, FO 371/133705 EQ 1015/409, and British Consulate-General, Basra, "Monthly Summary, December, 1958," FO 371/140897 EQ 1013/2.

Rountree, whose motorcade was pelted with garbage and by angry crowds shouting "American Donkey!" and "Go Home, Rountree!"¹⁰⁵ Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri composed the poem, "Messenger of Evil (The American Envoy Rountree)," to mark the occasion:

O Messenger of Evil and Squalor
O Raven of Discord in the darkness
O Herald of Misfortune bearing
Within his very spirit and his breath
O Son of the Tribe whose shaykh is Dulles
That one whose name derives from deception...¹⁰⁶

Official statements aided the paranoia by drawing implicit connections between the landing of British troops in Jordan and U.S. troops in Lebanon and the plots against the Qasim regime. The government specifically implicated feudalists, reactionaries, and imperialists working alongside those who "fraudulently speak for Arab unity,"¹⁰⁷

After the arrest of 'Adnan al-Rawi for his role in the Rashid 'Ali plot, he composed the poem "In a Baghdadi Prison," which adopted a rather credulous attitude toward the criminal conspiracy in its opening lines:

Because they are free men in my homeland?
And because they do not have a mouth...
To narrate their story from the past?
They left to fashion a new life in blood
In prison at the sides of preachers
The fable of history has lead them astray
O You, O Miserable One... O My Homeland
...
Is it because they did not have for tomorrow
Bread in the shadow of alliances and war?
And because they did not extend a hand
To the English... and the demons of the West
Is it because they are Arabs until the Day of Ransom
And vengeance pushes them together on the path
O Miserable One... O Arab Unity

¹⁰⁵ *al-Thawrah*, December 10 and M.S. Berthoud, "Fortnightly Political Summary, December 4 - December 17, 1958," December 22, 1958, FO 371/133706 EQ 1015/425.

¹⁰⁶ Jawahiri here makes a pun on Dulles and "*al-dalas*," meaning "deception." See *al-Ra'i al-'Amm*, December 16, 1958 and al-Jawahiri, *Diwan al-Jawahiri*, 4:117. The poem originally appeared under the title "Salutations, Rountree!"

¹⁰⁷ Text of Baghdad Radio Declaration, December 9, 1958, FO 371/133705 EQ 1015/405 and "Statement of the National Unity Front in Basra," December 9, 1958, FO 371/133706 EQ 1015/413.

...
 Is it because they rebelled against their tribulation
 And rose up in mutiny... And faced the shackles
 Neither prison nor fetters will frighten them
 No slave remains in their history
 And the tales of masters has been laid to rest
 The two are eternal... The people and the homeland
 ...
 And those who knead bread in their blood
 For the gluttonous... Over there they have grown hungry
 The loaf of bread gave up the ghost in their fingers
 So they divided it... And feudalism persists
 Is it because they stole the bread, in that case
 The whip falls upon them in perpetuity
 And God knows that they have grown hungry
 ...
 And because they are free men in my homeland
 al-Karkh will recognize them if they rebel
 And the graveyards of martyrs... And the bridge¹⁰⁸

Rawi's appeal to the workers and peasants in his long verse against feudalism signifies, at the very least, the persistent rhetorical commitment of the Ba'athists to social revolution. While many scholars have suggested that Ba'athist ideology appealed to the privileged social classes as a bulwark against Communist expansion, Rawi's language indicates that the Ba'athists were not challenging the Communists on social questions, but rather attempting to beat them at their own game. Equally significant is Rawi's invocation of "the bridge," an obvious reference to the massacre of leftist students on al-Ma'mun Bridge during the *Wathbah* of January 1948. Rawi's efforts to recast the uprising as a radical nationalist enterprise, echoed frequently over the coming year, signaled an awareness that the nationalists could not simply seek to turn back the clock to 1941.¹⁰⁹

By January 1959, Rawi was taking a different approach from his cell in the Abu Ghraib prison. His poem "The Six Month" expressed his frustrations with the course of the July 14 Revolution:

Here the sixth month has come
 After the revolution

¹⁰⁸ al-Rawi, *Diwan al-Sha'ir al-'Arabi*. 733-34.

¹⁰⁹ See, for example, the nationalist poet Badr Shakir al-Sayyab's argument that the Communist role in the *Wathbah* was greatly exaggerated in *Al-Hurriyah*, August 28, 1959 and al-Sayyab, *Kuntu Shuyu'iyah*, 83-89.

A month like the Sixth Fleet
 Spitting out its evil
 No, rather like the Red Fleet
 Bathing in blood
 Long live, long live the sixth month
 Nuri... O Symbol of Tyranny
 Your spirit has returned
 In another body, O Nuri
 The body of the revolution
 For I am in the prison of the revolution
 The soldiers have come... Indeed they came
 And at the door of the house they queued
 They are your soldiers... your soldiers... O Nuri
 Terror queued at my house
 Like the bygone terror, O Nuri
 Like the bygone era, O Nuri
 They came... They came... And they led me
 To prison... And to the red death
 O Nuri, in the sixth month
 We returned to prison... We have returned
 In the shadow of the red terror
 So let your soul enter and be glad
 For we have returned
 To prison and to the red death
 For perhaps death for us was greener
 In your era, your era, O Nuri
 And today we have a red death
 O Nuri... In the sixth month
 Long live, Long live the sixth month¹¹⁰

Rawi's language again significantly alters conventional historical understandings of the conflict between Ba'athists and Communists in this period. He is challenging neither Communist economics nor Communist internationalism but rather connecting Communist authoritarianism to the old regime. The invocation of the Sixth Fleet, a reference to the dispatch of fourteen thousand U.S. troops in Lebanon in during Operation Blue Bat in July 1958, and the repeated references to Nuri al-Sa'id were meant as a critique of the heavy-handed Communist approach to republican government.¹¹¹

Rawi's critiques of the Qasim regime were echoed in pamphlets distributed in early January by a group called "The Movement of Arab Nationalists in Iraq." Linguistic similarities

¹¹⁰ al-Rawi, *Diwan al-Sha'ir al-'Arabi*, 751-752.

¹¹¹ On Operation Blue Bat, see Irene L. Gendzier, "Oil, Politics, and US Intervention," in *A Revolutionary Year: The Middle East in 1958*, edited by Wm. Roger Louis and Roger Owen (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), 101-42.

between the "Sixth Month" and the pamphlets suggest that Rawi was the author: "[The people] feel that the breath of freedom blown by the eternal July 14 has quickly been stilled and that the joy with which they were filled during the first few months of the revolution has quickly ebbed as if the era of the detestable Nuri had returned again to this country." The pamphlet denounced several isolated incidents against faithful nationalists perpetrated by "lorry loads of Peace Partisans who fired shots and brandished sticks as if they were bound for a foray on Tel Aviv," and, if the point wasn't clear enough, declared that "the character of the communists is like that of their brethren the Jews." This was only natural, the author alleged, given Lenin's instruction to "Lie, lie, lie until the people believe you." The author also shared Rawi's interest in the history of the Rashid 'Ali movement, contending that Fadhil 'Abbas Mahdawi was the first military officer to embrace the "Enemy of God" - a popular pun describing 'Abd al-Ilah as 'Adu Allah - upon his return from exile in 'Amman and that he was personally responsible for carrying out the executions of Yunis al-Sab'awi and three of the four colonels of the "Golden Square."¹¹²

Mahdawi, dubbed by one observer as the Marat of the Iraqi Revolution, in the televised court proceedings popularly known as the People's Court or the Mahdawi Court, fought back against these charges with a fury.¹¹³ While the earliest show trials focused on the crimes perpetrated by leading figures of the old regime against the Arab nation, particularly Iraqi collusion with Britain during the Suez Crisis and efforts to undermine nationalist movements in Syria and Lebanon, the December trials began explicitly addressing Communist concerns. The trial of Bahjat al-'Attiyah, the notorious former Director-General of Security, offered Mahdawi the opportunity to denounce the brutal torture and execution of Communist students and workers in the waning years of the monarchy. One witness testified that American officers monitored the torture of Iraqi prisoners and that he had heard at least one remark, "That's how we used to do it in Korea," and Mahdawi at one angrily exclaimed, "I am a butcher of traitors!"¹¹⁴ More notably, however, Mahdawi now openly mocked the pan-Arabists, first denouncing the Muthanna Club, the center of cultural and intellectual support for Rashid 'Ali and the pan-Arabists in the late 1930s, as the servant of Fritz Grobba and the German Embassy and engaging in lengthy diatribes

¹¹² The Movement of Arab Nationalism in Iraq, "Army Day," January 6, 1959, FO 371/140902 EQ 1015/44.

¹¹³ Norman Daniel, "Contemporary Perceptions of the Revolution in Iraq on 14 July 1958," in *The Iraqi Revolution of 1958*, 1-30.

¹¹⁴ Chancery Baghdad to Eastern Department, "Trials of Bahjat al-Atiyah and Rafiq Tawfiq," January 15, 1959, FO 371/140902 EQ 1015/46 Hugh Trevelyan to Foreign Office, "Trial of Said Qazzaz," January 25, 1959, FO 371/140902 EQ 1015/54.

against the fascist dictatorships of Mussolini and Franco.¹¹⁵ More scandalous was the widely publicized speech to students at the University of Baghdad on January 3, where Mahdawi declared that Arab unity was used as "opium for the masses" by the old regime and that reactionary forces were still working to exploit pan-Arabism for political gain.¹¹⁶ The court later submitted "evidence" that 'Abd al-Salam 'Arif had complained to his fellow conspirators, "I prefer instead of the Communists taking power in Iraq to have imperialism. I wish instead of taking part in the revolt I had continued in my journey on the road to Fallujah. I am now regretful and feel sorry that Nuri Said is dead."¹¹⁷

The descent into political violence between Ba'hist and Communist partisans was certainly not preordained in the early months of the revolution. While certain factions of Ba'hist followed the lead of 'Adnan al-Rawi in backing the lost cause of Rashid 'Ali, other pan-Arabists saw Qasim as a potentially moderating influence on the revolutionary demands of the leftists and radical nationalists. Siddiq Shanshal, who had served as Director of Propaganda in the Rashid 'Ali administration in 1941 and was appointed as Qasim's Minister of Information in recognition of his diplomatic initiatives to ensure 'Abd al-Nasser's support of the July 14 Revolution, emerged as one of the few non-radicals of the Qasim regime.¹¹⁸ Despite his public support of the pan-Arabist political agenda and personal devotion to 'Abd al-Nasser and idea of an Arab political union, Shanshal feared social revolution more than revolution and actively collaborated with both the British and American embassies in Baghdad. Shanshal was appalled by the domestic platform of 'Abd al-Salam 'Arif, who "had preached the doctrine that everyone in Iraq was equal after the revolution, soldier and officer, manager and worker, and so on," and dismissed his demands for the immediate nationalization of the Iraqi Petroleum Company and limitation of land holdings to 60 dunums - compared to the 1000 dunums proposed by Qasim - as "complete nonsense." Shanshal loathed the Ba'hist leader Fu'ad al-Rikabi and worried about the impact of immediate unity with the United Arab Republic on the Iraqi economy but warned British officials that Iraq "was between the devil of Nasser and the deep blue sea of

¹¹⁵ Baghdad Chancery to Eastern Department, December 18, 1958, FO 371/133705 EQ 1015/410 and Hugh Trevelyan to Foreign Office, "Trial of Major General Abbas Ali Ghalib," December 24, 1958, FO 371/133706 EQ 1015/417.

¹¹⁶ *al-Bilad*, January 3, 1959.

¹¹⁷ "Speech by the Prosecution at the Secret Trial of 'Abd al-Salam 'Arif," January 29, 1959, FO371/140903 EQ 1015/68.

¹¹⁸ On the political background of Shanshal, see Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 293-94, 299-300, 794-95, and 931.

Communism" and that if nothing changed, he would " choose the former without hesitation, as there was no third choice."¹¹⁹

Still, despite the defection of ‘Adnan al-Rawi and certain factions of the Ba‘th Party to conspiratorial plots involving Rashid ‘Ali and ‘Abd al-Salam al-‘Arif, the final descent into violence was not preordained even by January 1959. Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri, whom Qasim had deputized to head the Iraqi Writers Union, earned broad approval from both the Ba‘thist and Communist camps when he publicly attacked the Kuwait and Sa‘udi governments after the Arab Writers Conference in Kuwait in January 1959. Upon his return to Iraq, Jawahiri issued a public statement warning of imperialist efforts to create dissension within the Arab ranks. The statement was laced with rhetorical support for Arab nationalism, particularly for the national liberation movements in Algeria, Oman, Palestine, and Yemen, and angry denunciations of the role of imperialists and their local clients in spreading lies about the young Iraqi Republic in order to pit pan-Arab nationalists against their Iraqi brethren. Anticipating Fanon's critique of superficial anti-colonial nationalism, Jawahiri argued eloquently that the reliance of empty nationalist slogans devoid of social meaning could never produce true revolutionary change.¹²⁰ Noting that both Nuri al-Sa‘id and Fadhil al-Jamali had utilized the rhetoric of Arab nationalism to cloak their collusion with their imperialist masters, Jawahiri pleaded: "We must give these expressions clear meanings derived from our aspirations and hopes, and to link them precisely with the aspirations of the Arab people in unity, liberation, independence, democracy, and prosperous life."¹²¹ As late as January 27, 1959, Ba‘thist and Communist partisans reportedly fought over front row seats to witness Jawahiri recite selections from his *Wathbah* verses, most notably "My Brother Ja‘far," at a massive rally of nearly fifty thousand to commemorate the eleventh anniversary of the *Wathbah*.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Sam Falle, "Conversation with Siddiq Shanshal," October 7, 1958, FO 371/133070 EQ 1015/279, M.S. Weir to F.D.W. Brown, "S. Falle's (Baghdad) Talk with Shanshal," October 20, 1958, FO 371/133070 EQ 1015/304, Michael Wright, "Analysis of Reasons for Instability and Factors at Work," December 4, 1958, FO 371/133074 EQ 1015/385.

¹²⁰ See Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, translated by Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 148-205.

¹²¹ J.M. Hunter, "Fortnightly Political Summary, December 18 - December 31, 1958," January 1, 1959, FO 371/140897 EQ 1013/1 and "Statement by al-Jawahiri on Return Home from Arab Writers Conference," January 7, 1959, FO 371/140902 EQ 1015/38.

¹²² *The Iraq Times*, January 28, 1959 and Chancery Baghdad to Eastern Department, January 29, 1959, FO 371/140903 EQ 1015/66.

Mosul and Kirkuk

The tenuous peace between the leftists and radical nationalists was shattered in the violence that engulfed Mosul in early March. The radical nationalists deeply resented extensive press coverage given to the massive Peace Partisans rallies organized in Ba‘qubah, Diwaniyah, Jalawla, Karbala, Najaf, and Shamiyah in January and February, and particularly to the prominently featured slogans "No to Partisanship!" and "Down with the Ba‘thists!"¹²³ The final straw, though, was the mass convergence of nearly two hundred and fifty thousand Communist partisans, many of them travelling from Baghdad, on Mosul for a Peace Partisans rally on March 6. Colonel ‘Abd al-Wahhab al-Shawwaf and sympathetic pan-Arabist officers detained and executed Kamil Qazanchi and other prominent Peace Partisans leaders in an attempted coup d'état. At least five hundred Communist and Ba‘thist partisans were killed in the Mosul clashes, including soldiers loyal to either Shawwaf or Qasim, Peace Partisans militia members, Shammar tribesmen who back Shawwaf, and ordinary citizens on both sides.¹²⁴ Massive rallies in support of Qasim erupted in Baghdad and Basra, as leftist crowds burned effigies of Gamal ‘Abd al-Nasser to signal their displeasure with the pan-Arabists. In one particularly gruesome case in Basra, Communist youths dragged the bloody corpse of a dog they had named Nasser up and down the wharves, and when a Ba‘thist partisan challenged him, they beat him to death and dragged his corpse through the streets.¹²⁵

More shocking than the sheer number of casualties, however, was the brutal mutilation of corpses strung up on lampposts and dragged through the streets. This horrific and callous violence was highlighted by the radical national poets to underscore the moral depravity of the Communists. Thus the Ba‘thist poet Hilal Naji thundered, "Four full days after abortive Revolt neither satisfied their avidity for tearing corpses limb from limb, nor did they quench their thirst for blood or vengeance on the innocent citizens."¹²⁶ Muhammad Naji al-Qashtini compared the violence to the historical massacres perpetrated by Yazid and Hulagu Khan:

¹²³ "Daily Radio Commentary, December 31, 1958, by a Middle East Correspondent," FO 371/133706 EQ 1015/416(c), *al-Ahali*, January 29, 1959, British Consulate-General, Basra, "Monthly Summary, January 1959," February 9, 1959, FO 371/140897 EQ 1013/5, and J.M. Hunter, "Fortnightly Political Summary, February 12 - February 25, 1959," February 26, 1959, FO 371/140897 EQ 1013/7.

¹²⁴ For the most authoritative account of the Mosul violence, see Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 861-89.

¹²⁵ J.M. Hunter, "Fortnightly Political Summary, February 26 - March 11, 1959," March 12, 1959, FO 371/140897 EQ 1013/8 and British Consulate-General, Basra, "Monthly Summary, March 1959," April 14, 1959, FO 371/140898 EQ 1013/13.

¹²⁶ Hilal Naji, *The Bloody Hands in Iraq* (Cairo: al-Karnak Publishing House, 1961), 23.

The captives every day are given to Yazid
And the victims entrusted to the new Hulagu
The world has never seen such blood spilled
As the blood of the martyred Iraqi people¹²⁷

The invocation of Yazid, infamous among both Sunnis and Shi‘a for slaughtering Husayn at Karbala in 681, was particularly significant as an obvious appeal to the cross-sectarian solidarity in the face of attacks by the "godless Communists." ‘Abd al-Hadi al-Fakiki offered a more notably chauvinist interpretation of the violence:

For the sake of what is right we rebelled
And challenged the tyrants
We raised up the banner of justice
Above the corpses of the despots
We challenged death
And avenged ourselves with blood
The torches that we carried
Burned with the blood of the martyrs
We, the free sons of Iraq
We, the army of the Arabs¹²⁸

Still, despite Fakiki's invocation of pan-Arabist rhetoric, it is notable that he explicitly refrained from framing the conflict as an attack on the Iraqis. While the call for Arab unity remained a slogan, the radical nationalists viewed the conflict as a fundamentally moral crusade.

The efforts of the radical nationalists to portray the Communist partisans as moral degenerates was more readily apparent in ‘Adnan al-Rawi's poem "March... and the Peace Partisans," which described the violence from the Communist perspective:

The voice of death roared, from Baghdad, calling out for peace
O Partisans... Partisans of Peace
Remove the little knives from your pockets
And content yourselves with these new guns
And tomorrow our convoy marches to the north
March, and the fragrant roses, and the dew
O... Long Live the Peace Partisans!
Forward!¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Excerpt from Samarra'i, *al-Tayyar al-Qawmi*, 139.

¹²⁸ Excerpt from Samarra'i, *al-Tayyar al-Qawmi*, 139.

¹²⁹ al-Rawi, *Diwan al-Sha‘ir al-‘Arabi*, 770-773.

The poem contributed to popular constructions of Communism as moral depravity by conjuring brutal images of the massacre of children:

Do not leave the suckling child
For tomorrow he will grow bigger and shout the hymns of the faithful
For tomorrow he will grow bigger and have faith in the aspirations of Arabism
Do not leave the suckling child
For in his heart is the filth of the aspiration of Arabism
Before Jerusalem comes calling
O Child of Babylon, O Foolish One
I shall crush your skull with rocks
So Forward!
O Partisans... Partisans of Peace
Let us crush the skull of the child in March, in the bosom of spring
Forward!

The poem also underscored the new fixation of the radical nationalists on sexual transgressions with images of young virgins and old women raped by the Communists:

Do not leave the woman, over there, do not leave those pure virgins
Do not leave the fertile among them, do not leave the sterile
For perhaps the sterile will give birth
For bosoms in March nurse their child upon the milk of exploits
The milk of the struggle, for the great union, and the liberation of Algeria
And from the ocean to the sea!!
O Foolishness, O Comrades!
Forward!

Even after the Mosul violence, though, the Ba‘thists showed no intention of ceding ideological ground to the Communists among the working classes. While they attacked Communists as national traitors and sexual deviants, Ba‘thist supporters not only accepted the social justice rhetoric of the Communists but actively claimed ownership of labor radicalism. The Ba‘thist poet ‘Ali al-Hilli argued in his poem "The Opportunists" that the Ba‘th Party was trying to salvage the interests of peasants and workers from communist exploitation:

We did not slink away... wherever we were
We did not slink away from our heritage of generosity
We did not slink away, do not slink away from our dead yesterday in the heart of sin
Yesterday?! Yesterday slept in the coffin of whores
Repel the illusion and the silly dreams
For you still have today

And tomorrow we live to see our nascent dream
 And the new legends
 We shrouded and buried our yesterday, and what of the languid race?
 We are singing the songs of youths
 The songs of shepherds
 Whenever the humble throngs pass by on the path
 The atmosphere splintered and pierced by the roar of the proletariat!
 And we sing and we clap
 To the tormented people, they were always... Hirelings
 And feeble-minded men!
 They buy the hunger, the terror, and the torment of the tyrants
 And the chains of the captors!
 And they peddle sterility as a mirage of happiness!
 We did not slip away, wherever we were
 We did not slip away from the steadfastness of the emancipated or the secret of heroism
 We did not slip away from the meanings of patriotism
 We are your partisans in every issue
 And the mounts of the faithful
 We are this cup, so fill it with pus or blood
 Or the sap of shame or zeal
 We do not care about the color or flavor of life
 We only care about drinking what is given to us!!¹³⁰

The total absence of political ideology in this poem, whether in relation to the foreign policy of Arab unity or the domestic policy of land reform and nationalization, is striking. Hilli's argument for the Ba'athist cause rests entirely on the tropes of masculinity and patriotism.

As Iraqis were pushed to back one camp or the other in the wake of the Mosul violence, National Democratic Party leader Kamil al-Chadirchi worked diligently to preserve the fragile national unity of the early post-revolutionary period. Chadirchi exerted whatever influence he still held over the Popular Resistance Forces and the National Unity Front to steer a middle course in support of Qasim. In the face of blistering attacks on the radical nationalists by the Communist partisans, Chadirchi persuaded the Istiqlal Party and the moderate wing of the Ba'ath Party to join the National Democratic Party in a last ditch effort to forestall civil war. The merger highlighted the striking affinities of bourgeois politicians from both the nationalist and leftist camps on the question of Arab unity. While the social democrats feared that immediate integration with the United Arab Republic would lead to Nasserist dictatorship, the middle class

¹³⁰ al-Hilli, *Thawrat al-Ba'ath*, 110-114.

nationalists worried that Iraqi resources would be funneled to Egypt and Syria.¹³¹ The Federation of Democratic Youth, formerly viewed as an appendage of the Iraqi Communist Party, now split into two factions, with the newly christened National Democratic Youth organization now professing its loyalty to Chadirchi and openly clashing with the Communists at public rallies. Communists no longer participated in the Popular Resistance Force and National Unity Front rallies and at times openly disrupted those events. While Chadirchi and the NDP had never been able to claim any significant popular support in the rural provinces, the party now encouraged the National Democratic Youth to proselytize among the peasants in a desperate effort to increase the base of popular support for the moderate nationalist factions.¹³²

While most of the leftist poets remained silent in the wake of the Mosul violence in order to avoid stoking radical nationalist anger, Kazim Jawad composed an emotional tribute to his close friend Kamil Qazanichi, the most prominent Peace Partisans leader killed in Mosul, in his poem "The Martyr of the Battle":

The evening and the hills were listening to the bullets
 As the wailing reverberated in the vortex of echoes
 Across the plains of Mosul tinted with shadows
 And the breeze ululated as a cloak of darkness cast down
 Upon the village, the river, the valleys, and the mountains
 ...And his eyes sparkled like a star on the horizon
 Cognizant that the vengeance of morning from its darkness
 Must come, and that the earth remained
 The cradle of the millions who must be roused
 The produce of the earth must pour forth
 So that the masses might eat - and might drink
 From the cup of love and joy
 ...And so it came to pass that he walked behind the prison in darkness
 Across the limits of dawn, of happiness, and of peace
 Two shots resounded:
 He fell upon the ground
 Tumbling upon the soil, the dream poured forth
 And love, and fire, from his heavy tears
 He died, and behind his eyes
 The new day rose¹³³

¹³¹ Sam Falle, "Conversation with M. Hadid," October 16, 1958, FO 371/133070 EQ 1015/296 and British Consulate-General, Basra, "Monthly Summary, March 1959," April 14, 1959, FO 371/140898 EQ 1013/13.

¹³² *Nida al-Ahali*, March 25, 1959, .British Consulate-General, Basra, "Monthly Summary, February 1959," March 9, 1959, FO 371/140897 EQ 1013/9, and British Consulate-General, Basra, "Monthly Summary, March 1959," April 14, 1959, FO 371/140898 EQ 1013/13.

¹³³ Jawad, *Min Aghani al-Hurriyah*, 127-29.

Jawad's commitment to ensuring that the Mosul violence contribute to the reconstruction of national unity was echoed by Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri in his poem "A Song of Peace" delivered publicly at a Peach Partisans' rally in Baghdad in mid-April that attracted a crowd of nearly one million.¹³⁴:

An army of peace building the arches of victory
And a procession spreading like the streaks of dawn
A gift sent down by the heavens of truth
The beauty of angels from whom people seek guidance
That whoever bears evil shall be felled by righteousness
And injustice shall meet defeat from the strength of the free
That the deluge of freshly spilled blood shall be lapped
By the tongues of roving and cornered predatory beasts
And even the rich in presumption furnish the blood sacrifice
So that an olive branch for peace might flower and flourish
And that the apparitions of flickering souls
Given wings from their summits by the lively falcon
The doves of peace returned to prostrate in fear
Before them whenever the eagle and vulture loom above¹³⁵

Jawahiri's poetry, though, was now haunted by the same specters of cultural violence and trauma that marked the work of the radical nationalist poets in the wake of the Mosul violence:

I saw an untamed and desolate wasteland
Without life, without water, without vegetation
Without graves, without heads, without corpses
But it was said metaphorically: Over there they buried
It was said to me as news that yesterday over there
The haughty sons of treaties vanished it seems without trace
Over there was a playground and youths
Illuminated in the lights and the blazes
Under every flowing strand of hair a stone
And dangling above every forehead a stone
Their crime was that they and their people wasted away
And that they and their heritage melted away
And that they swore an oath to repel injury
From every inch of their ground even if they were butchered

¹³⁴ The fact that the rally was held directly after the Id al-Fitr holiday, however, may explain additional reports that many of the participants "have little idea what is all about." Chancery Baghdad, "Political Summary, April 9 - April 20, 1959," April 22, 1959, FO 371/140898 EQ 1013/14.

¹³⁵ *al-Ra'i al-'Amm*, April 16, 1959 and al-Jawahiri, *Diwan al-Jawahiri*, 4:127-130.

And that this and that from their heroic exploits
Could not be forgiven by the filthy victor

Still, at this early stage of the struggle between the two camps, Jawahiri remained optimistic in his concluding verses about the eventual victory of the leftists:

An army of peace, Iraq trembles before it
The bedouin and the townsmen circle around it
Taken on their detour by the lessons of the past
From the wars, and the ill omens that they brought
And the world looks with favor upon it because
In the Land of Two Rivers we have a bit of heritage
And army of peace greets the outstretched wings
Of the valiant falcon of Iraq, confident and cautious

Whatever fragile unity remained between the moderate wings of each camp was definitely shattered by the second round of violence, which erupted at Kirkuk in July. Over a three day period, at least thirty-one Iraqis were killed and at least one hundred and thirty injured. There is little doubt the overwhelming majority of casualties were inflicted by Kurdish Communists on Iraqi Turkmen, though Batatu argues that "blame falls clearly upon fanatic Kurds of differing tendencies" and that "the ends they sought were not Communist but Kurdish ends."¹³⁶ While the Kirkuk violence, unlike the Mosul Rebellion, lacked any connection to the ideological conflict between Iraqists and pan-Arabists, the two events were accorded similar significance in radical nationalist cultural production. Hilal Naji, a Ba' thist poet later convicted for his role in the August 1959 plot to assassinate Qasim, composed fourteen poems about the Kirkuk events that mostly condemned the leftist discourse of peace and democracy and echoed earlier critiques of Communist depravity.¹³⁷ Walid al-A'zami poem "Dove of Peace" mocked the symbolism of peace employed by the Communists:

Flutter above the graves
Hover over corpses of birds
Call out to death so you may live
The slogans of the defender
Dance upon the cheeks
And the eyes and the throats
Make your nest upon the rope

¹³⁶ Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 912-21.

¹³⁷ Hilal Naji, *Ughniyat Huzn ila al-Kirkuk*, 2nd Edition (Baghdad, al-Matba'ah al-Misriyah, 1963)

Around the neck of the criminal
What sort of collar is this
Have you thought of this fate
Have you heard the rattle of death
From an old and blind man
With his right leg dangling
As his spirit ascended to the light¹³⁸

Other Ba‘thist poems about Kirkuk simply recycled imagery of the slaughter of children, rape of women, and desecration of bodies, signaling a new emphasis on communist immorality and a further move away from ideological disputes about pan-Arab unity.

The public execution of Staff Brigadier Nadhim al-Tabaqchali, Colonel Rif‘at al-Hajj Sirri, and eleven other military officers convicted for their role in the Mosul Revolt in the public square in front of Um al-Tabul mosque on September 20, 1959, however, provided one final spark for the radical nationalist opposition. As Batatu has commented, "this, to borrow from Talleyrand, was worse than a judicial slaying, it was a political blunder."¹³⁹ As a new wave of anti-Qasim demonstrations erupted, the Ba‘thist poets circulated new poems to rally support for their new martyrs. Rawi opened his poem "Um al-Tabul" by mocking Qasim's popular appellation "The Sole Leader":

Say to the sole leader, say to the one and only Karim
Say to the police tyrants trembling in fear of tomorrow
Kneading the blood of the youth: Here is the clay of restitution
Clingers to the truth, a declaration from one who does not praise
The new tyrants, the people in the night of blackened Iraq¹⁴⁰

Cognizant that Qasim and the Communists had effectively portrayed the December Rashid ‘Ali plot as the lost cause of fascists and reactionaries, Rawi now invoked the longer history of Iraqi anti-colonialism to justify the anti-Communist stance:

O Great Revolution of 1920
O Symbol of the Eternal Struggle
The nights of the traitors have returned
To their country... So let us bear witness
The tyrant has returned to his refuge
And in this return there is nothing commendable

¹³⁸ Walid al-A‘zami, *Aghani al-Ma‘rakah* (al-Kuwait: Maktabat al-Manar 1966), 92-95.

¹³⁹ Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 931-32.

¹⁴⁰ al-Rawi, *Diwan al-Sha‘ir al-‘Arabi*, 767-769.

The land of Rumaytha still remains
Thirsty for that most precious well
For blood to dye the river valley in a ravine of sovereignty

Rawi ended the poem with a seamless conflation of the 1920 anti-British struggle, the Rashid 'Ali Movement of 1941, the July 1958 Revolution, the 'Abd al-Salam al-'Arif plot, and the Mosul Rebellion:

July... O July... Return... Return to your refuge... And renew
Wash away the tears of the forty victims with your burning light
'Abd al-Salam... Over there... O July... Under fetters
And Rashid, the prisons are compressing him in their spiritless shadows
And the remained of the free men trapped between confinement and exile
Untie the hostages... O Iraq... With your just army
And bring a resolution for those worthier like their forbearers, pave the way
For the great revolution shall topple the reckless and the rogues

The Um al-Tabul episode marked the end of political debates over the meaning of the anti-colonial struggle, at least until the Ba'athist coup d'état of February 1963. Rawi and fellow Ba'athist poet Hilal Naji were implicated in the October attempt on Qasim's life and fled to exile in Cairo. Qasim now fully embraced the title "Sole Leader" and suppressed both Communist and Ba'athist opposition to his rule and forced open political discussions underground once again.¹⁴¹

Badr Shakir al-Sayyab and the Struggle for Cultural Hegemony

As the political parties were driven underground or into exile in the wake of the October 1959 attempt to assassinate Qasim, Badr Shakir al-Sayyab emerged as the most prominent and articulate spokesman of the nationalist cause. Sayyab boasted of his ability to elude Qasim's censors with caustic political commentaries cloaked in abstract symbolism and mythological references.¹⁴² His 1960 poem "Cerberus in Babylon," used the mythical figure of Cerberus as an obvious metaphor for Qasim. The poem opened with a nostalgic depiction of a past destroyed by tyranny, particularly notable for the obvious religious implications:

¹⁴¹ See Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 942-73.

¹⁴² As Muhammad Mustafa Badawi has noted, Sayyab's abstraction sometimes missed its mark: "On the contrary, the mythological allusion is sometimes, for his Arab reader at any rate, no more than a mere erudite reference for which the poet provides an explanation in a footnote, and at other times is neither an organizing factor nor a device to release an emotional charge in the reader by tapping a common source of attitudes in his culture." Nevertheless, the emotion and tone of his poetry was readily apparent through the mist of mythological allusion. See Muhammad Mustafa Badawi, *A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 256.

Did not life
Wish to live, and the little ones to be safe?
Did the fields not blossom?
Did the skies not rain?
Did women and men not believe
That in the skies there was a force contemplating
Feeling, listening to complaints, meditating
Commiserating, pitying the weak, forgiving sins
Were not hearts
Filled with tenderness, and souls with purity?¹⁴³

Against this idyllic backdrop appears the wicked Cerberus, descending upon his young victim, who was not coincidentally female:

But Cerberus in the hell of Babylon
Loves to run behind her through the trails
Tearing her shoes with his claws, biting
Her supple legs, snapping at her hands, or tearing her gown
Staining her scarf with dried blood
And mixing fresh blood with his howl
Shall Cerberus howl on the trails
Shall he bite the grieving goddess, the terrified goddess
So that her blood will stain the seeds
That shall bring forth the deity, when the apportioned sections
Have gathered? She is restless. Light will be born
From a womb seeped in blood

This imagery of sexual violence would dominate Sayyab's poetry in the post-Mosul period, marking the struggle between Communists and Ba'athists as a fundamentally moral crusade.

A similarly caustic political message is apparent in Sayyab's poem "The City of Sinbad," also intended as a metaphor for Communist violence and terror in Qasim's Iraq.¹⁴⁴ While this poetry obviously lacked the political immediacy that characterized the older tradition of "poetry of occasion" perfected by poets like Bahr al-'Ulum, Jawahiri, and Rusafi, the parallels with news accounts of the Mosul and Kirkuk violence, widely circulated in nationalist newspapers, were obvious:

Death in the streets,

¹⁴³ al-Sayyab, *Diwan Badr Shakir al-Sayyab*, 482-85.

¹⁴⁴ See Badawi, *A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry*, 250-58 and Issa J. Boullata, "The Poetic Technique of Badr Shakir al-Sayyab (1926-1964), *Journal of Arabic Literature* 2 (1971), 104-15.

Sterility in the fields,
 And everything that we love dies
 They have restricted water in houses
 And the dry creeks pant
 They, the Tartars, have drawn near with bloody knives
 Our sun is blood, our provisions are blood upon platters
 They set fire to the orphan Muhammad and now the sky
 Glows with his flames, the boiling blood
 Bubbling from his feet, his hands, and his eyes
 And God is burning in his eyelids
 They have chained the Prophet Muhammad in Hira...
 Tomorrow the Messiah will be crucified in Iraq
 And the dogs will feast on his radiant blood¹⁴⁵

Sayyab used historical metaphors to echo the Ba‘thist poet ‘Adnan al-Rawi in relating these dystopian landscapes of Qasim's Iraq to the regime of Nuri al-Sa‘id:

It is as if the old walled city of Babylon
 Has returned again
 With her towering domes of iron
 With bells ringing as if they were moaning
 In a graveyard, and the sky a courtyard of a slaughterhouse
 With hanging gardens sown with heads
 Lopped off with sharp axes
 And crows pecking out the eyes

While the hellish and nightmarish landscapes of "The City of Sinbad" underscored Sayyab's understanding of Qasim's Iraq, his poem "Return to Jaykur" presented a romantic nostalgia for the prior harmony of the national front period. The poem's final stanza, however, illustrated the poet's obvious apprehension about that history:

Jaykur, your past has returned
 This is the crowing of the roosters: The slumber has thawed
 I have returned from my great nocturnal journey
 The sun is the mother of the green spikes of grain
 Behind the buildings, a loaf of bread
 But it lies on the sidewalk
 More precious than gems
 And Love: Have you heard
 This volcanic cheer?
 What is upon us? ‘Abd al-Latif
 Knows that we... What are you all so wary about?¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ al-Sayyab, *Diwan Badr Shakir al-Sayyab*, 463-73.

The reference to 'Abd al-Latif was footnoted with the instruction to consult his serialized articles on his defection from the Communist Party published in the Ba'athist paper *al-Hurriyah* in the fall of 1959. 'Abd al-Latif was a rival of Sayyab for the leadership of his local party branch and stood in the poet's mind as a particularly pernicious symbol of the moral depravity of the communists.¹⁴⁷

Perhaps the most notable feature of Sayyab's poetry in this period was his obsession with sexuality. The poem "A Vision of 1956" depicted the rape and crucifixion of 'Ishtar, the Babylonian goddess of fertility, which he explicitly connected to the story of Hafsah, a young girl from a nationalist family in Mosul whom the Communists reportedly raped, tortured, and crucified during the March violence¹⁴⁸:

'Ishtar at the trunk of the tree
They crucified her, hammered the nails
In the home of the birth womb
'Ishtar is concealing Hafsah
Inviting her to drink the rains
Inviting her to drink until oblivion¹⁴⁹

Sayyab also resurrected the controversy surrounding his classic 1954 poem "The Blind Whore" in his diatribes of Communism in *al-Hurriyah*. This five hundred line poem details the tragic life story of Salima, an impoverished peasant girl who is forced into prostitution, poverty, and physical debilitation after her father is murdered by their tribal shaykh and landlord. The poem included the following satirical verses expressing Salima's desperate attempts to maintain her dignity in the face of degradation:

However makes love to a dark Arab girl will not die a loser
Your skin is like the color of wheat, O Daughter of the Arabs
Like the dawn between the grape arbors
Like the surface of the Euphrates reflecting
The mildness of the earth and rapacity of gold

¹⁴⁶ al-Sayyab, *Diwan Badr Shakir al-Sayyab*, 420-428.

¹⁴⁷ See Ihsan 'Abbas, *Badr Shakir al-Sayyab: Dirasah fi Hayatihi wa Shi'rihi* (Beirut: Dar al-Thaqafah, 1969) and Terri DeYoung, *Placing the Poet: Badr Shakir al-Sayyab and Postcolonial Iraq* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 222.

¹⁴⁸ See Shmuel Moreh, *Modern Arabic Poetry, 1800-1970: The Development of Its Forms and Themes Under the Influence of Western Literature* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976), 254-55.

¹⁴⁹ al-Sayyab, *Diwan Badr Shakir al-Sayyab*, 429-441.

Do not leave me, for the morning reveals my lineage:
 Descended from a conqueror, a holy warrior, and a prophet!
 I am an Arab: My nation is their blood
 The best of all blood, as my father used to say
 In the filthy parts of my body, in my revealing breasts
 Flows the blood of the conquerors. So come and defile it, O Men
 Ah, the sex of men.. For yesterday the soldiers ravaged it
 Crawling from the seas like a herd of squirming worms
 Would God that my death take my eyes like dust in the wind!¹⁵⁰

Sayyab now recounted that when the poem was published, the Iranian Communists who were sheltering him in exile voiced their pleasure at the violation of Arab honor in his poem. Infuriated by their laughter, Sayyab concluded that Communism and nationalism were irreconcilable and definitively abandoned Communism:

Our understanding of nationalism (*al-qawmiyyah*) has been lost between the internationalists (*al-shu'ubiyyin*) and the chauvinists (*al-shufiniyyin*), but nationalism ought to be populist (*sha'biyyah*) and populism ought to be nationalist. The grandsons of Muhammad, 'Umar, 'Ali, Abu Dharr, the Kharijites, the first Shi'a, and the Mu'atazilites ought to be made to live a life suitable for them as the offspring and heirs to the glory of the Arab nation. For is not a disgrace upon us, the Arabs, that our daughters have become whores who sleep with people from every race and color?¹⁵¹

Sayyab's diatribe underscored the inherent problems of dealing with Arab nationalism as what Eric Davis calls "the chauvinist version [of pan-Arabism] propounded by the Takriti Ba'th." on the one hand, the virulent racism of Sayyab's nationalism undercuts Davis' claim that Ba'thist critics have retrospectively and reductively transformed Sayyab's poem, which was "a complex work filled with stylistic and political ambiguities" into an endorsement of "a parochial pan-Arabism." Davis sarcastically rebuffs the claim of the Ba'thist critic Majid Ahmad al-Samarra'i that Sayyab's commitment to the Palestinian cause after his defection from the Communist Party sets him apart from the his erstwhile Communist comrades by noting Samarra'i's reductive description of the Communist stance on Palestine to the 1948 chant, "We are the brothers of the Jews!"¹⁵² The problem is that while Samarra'i's footnotes are sloppy,

¹⁵⁰ al-Sayyab, *Diwan Badr Shakir al-Sayyab*, 536-57.

¹⁵¹ *Al-Hurriyah*, August 17, 1959 and al-Sayyab, *Kuntu Shuyu'iyah*, 19-25.

¹⁵² Davis, *Memories of State*, 210-11.

Sayyab really did make this claim in the second installment of his serialized account.¹⁵³ Sayyab, in fact, also engaged in a lengthy attack on Jewish Iraqi Communists like Yahuda Siddiq and Shlomo Dallal as Zionist agents intent on expelling the Arabs of Palestine from their homeland behind the Communist slogans of bi-nationalism.¹⁵⁴

On the other hand, even accepting the fact that Sayyab was a principle proponent of Ba‘thist pan-Arabism in 1959 and not simply thrust into that role retroactively to provide some semblance of cultural legitimacy to the Ba‘thist political project, his writing nevertheless challenges the simple reduction of this ideology to chauvinist sectarianism. Sayyab explicitly rejects "chauvinism" as the mirror image of *shu‘ubiyyah* internationalism and instead envisions an inclusive national community on the sectarian and ideological levels, though obviously not on racial grounds. While Eric Davis is right to note the frequent invocations of *shu‘ubiyyah* discourse as a cover for more explicit attacks on the Iraqi Shi‘a, Sayyab's writings indicate that the term held some meaning for its proponents outside of the sectarian context.¹⁵⁵ When Sayyab, who himself came from a Shi‘i family, talks about "grandsons of Muhammad, ‘Umar, ‘Ali, Abu Dharr, the Kharijites, the first Shi‘a, and the Mu‘atazilites," he draws upon the framework of Islamic history to underscore his commitment to Arab equality across diverse religious and ideological backgrounds. ‘Umar and ‘Ali represent, respectively, the Sunni and Shi‘a communities in Iraq, while the Kharijites and the Mu‘atazilites represent fundamentalists and rationalists. Perhaps more importantly, Abu Dharr, one of the first converts to Islam was at that time celebrated by many leftists in both Iran and the Arab world as the "first socialist," and Sayyab's invocation of his legacy thus signifies an attempt to ensure space for the Iraqi leftists in his own imagined national community.¹⁵⁶ In a similar vein, Sayyab's declaration that "nationalism must be populist and populism must be nationalist" signified an obvious appeal to the Kamal al-Chadirchi, Muhammad Hadid, and the National Democratic Party, heirs to the

¹⁵³ *Al-Hurriyah*, August 17, 1959 and al-Sayyab, *Kuntu Shuyu‘iyan*, 19-25. For Samarra‘i's analysis of the episode, see Samarra‘i, *al-Tayyar al-Qawmi*, 146.

¹⁵⁴ *Al-Hurriyah*, September 4, 1959 and al-Sayyab, *Kuntu Shuyu‘iyan*, 103-8. Hanna Batatu, too, hints that behind the "strange behavior" of Siddiq and the "senselessness" of Dallal as party leaders lay political commitments to Zionist subterfuge. See Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 542-43 and 569-71.

¹⁵⁵ See the discussion of *shu‘ubiyyah* in Ba‘thist Iraq in Davis, *Memories of State*, 184-88.

¹⁵⁶ On Abu Dharr, see Qadri Qal‘aji, *Abu Dharr al-Ghifari: Awwal Tha‘ir fi al-Islam* (Beirut: Dar al-‘Ilm li al-Malayin, 1956) and ‘Abd al-Hamid Judah al-Sahhar, *Abu Dharr al-Ghifari, al-Ishtiraki al-Zahid: Masdar fi Bahth al-Ishtirakiyah fi al-Islam* (Cairo: Maktabat Misr, 1948).

sha'biyyah movement of the Ahali Group in the 1930s and currently caught between the Ba'athists and the Communists in their struggle for social democracy.¹⁵⁷

Finally, Davis' contention that in "The Blind Whore" Sayyab "explores sexual oppression, which is caused by domestic culture and society and not just colonial rule" warrants further investigation.¹⁵⁸ However critics may interpret the meaning and significance of sex in the poem, Sayyab was certainly not "exploring" sexual oppression by 1959. His discussions of sexuality and sexual oppression rather reflected a cultural bludgeon to be used against the Communists. Sayyab's crude complaint that "our daughters have become whores who sleep with people from every race and color" was directed at the intermingling of young Arabs, Kurds, and Jews involved in the Communist Party. While Communist poets and intellectuals analyzed the cultural and social origins of prostitution and sexual oppression in universalist language, Sayyab was merely outraged by the fact that an Arab girl should sell her body to non-Arabs.¹⁵⁹ His serialized editorials about his defection from the Communist Party offered a litany of accusations of sexual depravity and perversion by both party leaders and members. In one submission, Sayyab accused the Communist leader Baha al-Din Nuri of raping Madeleine Mir, a young Jewish party member who sought refuge at the party safe house where Nuri was staying.¹⁶⁰ Another installment recounted the tale of a poor young girl from a Communist family impregnated by a much older party member. The girl's father and brother tried to persuade the father of the unborn child to marry his lover, but were forced to bring the matter to Comrade Fahd when he refused, pleading that they would be unable to face their conservative neighbors if the matter wasn't resolved. Fahd counseled the young man to marry the girl, but he again refused and ridiculed the religious beliefs of the community members whom the family feared. The father and brother, according to Sayyab, ultimately despaired of a proper resolution and killed the poor young girl in order to prevent a public scandal.¹⁶¹

Sayyab's concern with Communist violations of female honor were echoed by other pan-Arabist poets, who seized upon the government's treatment of Yusra Sa'id Thabit, a female pan-

¹⁵⁷ On the *sha'biyyah* movement, see Bashkin, *The Other Iraq*, 63-73.

¹⁵⁸ Davis, *Memories of State*, 211.

¹⁵⁹ See 'Abbas, *Badr Shakir al-Sayyab*, 222-24 and Pieter Smoor, "Modern Poets of Iraq, 1948-79: Cockroach or Martyr in the Inn by the Persian Gulf," *Oriente Moderno* 9:1/6 (1990), 7-38.

¹⁶⁰ *Al-Hurriyah*, August 17, 1959 and al-Sayyab, *Kuntu Shuyu'iyah*, 19-25.

¹⁶¹ It is apparent from Sayyab's tone that he blames Fahd and the girl's lover, but not her father and brother, for her death. *Al-Hurriyah*, August 26, 1959 and al-Sayyab, *Kuntu Shuyu'iyah*, 70-76.

Arabist poet implicated in the attempt on Qasim's life, to portray themselves as guardians of female honor. Mahdawi ridiculed Yusra's appearance in the publicly televised trial, mocking the quantity of make-up on her face as she stood in the defendant's cage. 'Adnan al-Rawi composed the poem "Yusra" in her honor, transforming her tribulation into yet another symbol of Communist depravity:

By God, our little sister
We will furnish a brilliant star
To light your path, O Yusra
And on the morrow the great unity...
And although the torture and treachery of the gloomy night grow long
We have the people, we have the defiant army, we have the era
We have the anger to triumph over tyranny and evil
We have our past July, O Yusra, with the dawn
By God, our little sister
We will furnish a brilliant star
To light your path, O Yusra
And on the morrow, the great unity...
The covenant will remain, and we shall not forget the victims in memoriam
We will not abandon the blood of our free sons squandered in public squares
Tomorrow, upon our ascendant dawn, we will construct a free homeland
And announce a great revolution after "The Great Revolution"
By God, our little sister
We will furnish a brilliant star
To light your path, O Yusra¹⁶²

Rawi's fellow Ba'athist poet 'Ali al-Hilli went even further and accused the Communists of raping Yusra in prison in his poem "Yusra Sa'id Thabit":

Yusra... My sister!
A lamp in the night of death
The arctic wind challenges
And the flame remains... for vengeance
Behind the desert walls
The prison deflowers, without a whisper
And drinks down the intimate talk of night¹⁶³

Iraqi women, of course, participated in these new debates about the position of women in post-revolutionary Iraq, but they were largely confined to supporting roles. In addition to Yusra

¹⁶² al-Rawi, *Diwan al-Sha'ir al-'Arabi*, 749-750.

¹⁶³ al-Hilli, *Thawrat al-Ba'th*, 89-94.

Sa' id Thabit, a number of other female poets, including Lami'ah al-'Abbas 'Amarah, 'Atikah al-Khazraji, and Nazik al-Mala'ikah, openly identified with the radical nationalist cause in this period.¹⁶⁴ These women, though, generally refrained from entering the polemical domain of explicitly political and ideological poetry. One notable exception was Mala'ikah, who wrote "Three Communist Songs," an anti-Communist poem that stand out as one of her few political works, in early 1960.¹⁶⁵ The poem satirized Communist discourses of conspiracy, treason, and vengeance:

When night descends over these hills, stand up, O Comrade
We can watch it through dark slits in this deep silence
For perhaps the dusk is plotting in secrecy
Perhaps it is joined by the star light and silence of night
For these hills and that path
And this darkness, all of them are agents!
We shall investigate even the scents and the rains
We shall scrutinize even the beams of light and color of flowers
We shall expose what all of these spying irises have plotted
And what the birds have propagated in their dancing and chirping
For indeed we know that the moon
Is colluding with them, so let us raise the gallows!¹⁶⁶

Mala'ikah's invocation of nature as a metaphor for the Iraqi nationalists underscored the critique of Communism as an invasive foreign ideology and mirrored Sayyab's own attitude toward the Communists. Still, while the most prominent female poets rallied to the radical nationalist cause, the League for the Defense of Women's Rights strongly backed Qasim and the Communists as the most vocal defenders of radical gender liberation.¹⁶⁷ As Noga Efrati has warned, any attempt to draw comprehensive conclusions about women's participation in revolutionary politics must

¹⁶⁴ On 'Amarah, see Hasan Tawfiq, *Shi'r Badr Shakir al-Sayyab: Dirasah Fanniyah wa Fikriyah* (Beirut: al-Mu'assasah al-'Arabiyah li al-Dirasat wa al-Nashr, 1979), 146-57, on Khazraji, see S. A. Khulusi, "'Atika: A Modern Poetess," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 3/4 (1950), 149-57, on Mala'ikah, see Yasir Suleiman, "Nationalist Concerns in the Poetry of Nazik al-Mala'ika," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 22:1/2 (1995), 93-114.

¹⁶⁵ The recurrent suggestion that Mala'ikah wrote primarily personal and non-political poetry is perhaps unfair. As both Orit Bashkin and Noga Efrati have noted, Mala'ikah made important contributions to Iraqi debates on social problems, most notably the problem of honor killings and customary law. See Bashkin, *The Other Iraq*, 136 and Noga Efrati, *Women in Iraq: Past Meets Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 42-43, 72, and 140.

¹⁶⁶ The poem was first published in *al-Adab* 8:3 (March 1960), 1-2 and praised by the Lebanese pan-Arabist Suhayl Idris in *al-Adab* 8:4 (April 1960), 8-9. See Nazik al-Mala'ikah, *Diwan Nazik al-Mala'ikah* (Beirut: Dar al-'Awdah, 1982), 2:566-67 and Smoor, "Modern Poets of Iraq, 1948-79," 27-28.

¹⁶⁷ J.M. Hunter, "Fortnightly Political Summary, March 12 - March 25, 1959," March 26, 1959, FO 371/140897 EQ 1013/10.

effectively mediate between the "war of narratives" produced by Ba'athist and Communist partisans.¹⁶⁸

Conclusion

While the leftist poet Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri never wavered in his commitment to the Communists, he was clearly stung by the bitter denunciations of the Iraqi Left by the radical nationalists. After nearly a quarter century of devotion to the cause of national liberation, Jawahiri was astonished that the nationalists would so quickly turn against their erstwhile comrades. Particularly galling to the poet was the fact that he and his fellow leftists were disparaged as infidels, foreigners, and traitors in their homeland. Jawahiri's bitterly defiant poem "You Became an Infidel," composed in the autumn of 1959, in the wake of the Mosul and Kirkuk violence, challenged the nationalists justification in claiming cultural authenticity for themselves:

They said you became an infidel and perhaps
You wondered, for example, who are the believers?
And in whom did you lose your faith?
And who smeared the eyelashes of whom with kohl?¹⁶⁹

While the radical nationalists denounced the Communists as Soviet agents, bent on destroying Iraq's cultural and religious identity, Jawahiri warned that the nationalists were serving both colonial and personal interests in destroying the country in their lust for power:

But do you dream of what I saw?
For I saw something that galls the eyes
Worshippers of partisan idols
And around them those who buy
The owners of wagging tongues
To the liars they chatter and prattle
Colonized by those who deceive
And seek more victims to colonize
One timber supported by another
And held together by their nails
Rising from the corpses of youths
While they sit in the seat of honor
They behold the redness of their blood
And in its reddish glow they are illuminated

¹⁶⁸ Efrati, *Women in Iraq*, 134-36.

¹⁶⁹ al-Jawahiri, *Diwan al-Jawahiri*, 4:131.

For they have faith in the hungry
 Starving for what they have hoarded
So do you really blame those with faith
 In their people for becoming infidels?

Jawahiri's sad and bitter conclusion may as well have sounded the death knell of the old anti-colonial movement. While the Communists continued to disparage 'Abd al-Nasser and the Ba'athists as servants of the United States, and the Ba'athists continued to denounce the Communists as Soviet stooges and agents, both sides seemed to understand that anti-colonialism had become a cultural bludgeon in their battle against domestic opponents. In 1961, Qasim shut down Jawahiri's newspaper, *al-Ra'i al-'Amm*, and the poet once again left his homeland, this time bound for exile in Prague.

CONCLUSION

'WE ARE WHAT FLOWS IN EVERY SOUL AND SPIRIT'

In 1965, four years after leaving Baghdad for exile in Prague, Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri was invited to recite some verses in commemoration of the *Wathbah* of January 1948. Jawahiri addressed his poem to his old friend and comrade Muhammad Salih Bahr al-'Ulum (Abu Nazim), who had led the massive crowds in poetic chants and cheers against Britain and Nuri al-Sa'id before his brutal arrest and torture. Imprisoned for most of the following decade, Bahr al-'Ulum had rejoiced at the liberation of his country in the revolution of July 14, 1958, but he was once again imprisoned at the notorious Nuqrat al-Salman facility after the Ba'athist coup d'état of February 8, 1963. Jawahiri, alienated and isolated in Prague, longed for the days when he and Bahr al-'Ulum had stood at the forefront of the Iraq resistance movement:

O Abu Nazim, your imprisonment is my own
For I belong to you just as you belong to me...
O Abu Nazim, greetings from a distance
The end of misfortunes is both farther and nearer...
O Abu Nazim, we are the leaders of a generation
We guide it along the path of life and we chant
As dearest partners we commence the journey
Whose terrors we know and yet suffer again...
We will demolish the era constructed by tyrants
And herald that what they destroyed we shall rebuild...
O Abu Nazim, we are assuredly the insomnia of the people and the slaves of art
We are what flows in every soul and spirit
Expelling the drowsiness from every eyelid...¹

Jawahiri and Bahr al-'Ulum were indeed the leaders of a generation, two of the very few Iraqis capable of uniting countrymen from disparate sectarian, social, and cultural backgrounds. Their generation, though, had been swept aside by the violence of the young partisans of the Ba'ath Party and the Communist Party.

The sordid history of the February 8, 1963 coup d'état has been exhaustively documented by Hanna Batatu. After a fierce battle between rebel troops and loyalists, including several thousand workers armed only with canes, 'Abd al-Karim Qasim surrendered unconditionally just after midnight. He and his closest aides were given a drumhead trial and summarily executed

¹ Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri, *Diwan al-Jawahiri* (Bayrut: Bisan, 2000), 4:311-14.

within a span of three hours. The Revolutionary Command Council, a loose coalition of Ba‘thist and allied pan-Arabist officers, were authorized the next morning "to annihilate anyone that disturbs the peace" and "to cooperate with the authorities by informing against these criminals and exterminating them." Several thousand Communist Party members and sympathizers, compared to just eighty Ba‘thists, were slaughtered in three days of brutal violence. The rapid and methodical nature of the house-to-house search for Communists indicated that the Ba‘thists were working from detailed lists, and Batatu and others have offered circumstantial evidence implicating the C.I.A. in the preparation and distribution of these lists.² There is no doubt, however, that whatever assistance they may have received from the United States, the Ba‘thists were settling their own scores.

The Ba‘thist coup had a devastating effect on the Iraqi cultural scene, and the leftist poets suffered as much as anyone. Jawahiri and ‘Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati were already living in exile in Prague and Moscow, respectively. Sa‘di Yusuf, Gha‘ib Tu‘amah Farman, and several others soon joined them.³ The Kurdish Communist poet Buland al-Haydari, was actually sentenced to death but was saved by the intervention of a Kurdish politician on good terms with the pan-Arabists and fled to exile in Beirut.⁴ Those who remained, like Bahr al-‘Ulum, suffered severely in the prisons, just as they had done under the old regime. The most talented of the pan-Arabist poets, Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, finally succumbed to the ravages of ALS at the age of 38 in 1964, just over a year after Qasim's fall. Ba‘thist poets like Hilal Naji and ‘Adnan al-Rawi returned to Iraq from their own exiles, but their political poetry was so bitterly partisan and vindictively violent that it cannot be considered anything more than cultural propaganda. While the exiled poets continued to write poetry, the obstacles of censorship and dictatorship had removed them from the political debates within Iraq. Under the new nationalist regimes, particularly after the rise of Saddam Hussein and the Takriti Ba‘thists, dissident and disaffected poets could not dare to publicly challenge the state as Bahr al-‘Ulum, Jawahiri, and so many others had done during the Hashemite era.

² 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: Princeton University Press, 1979), 974-94.

³ Abdul-Salaam Yousif, "The Struggle for Cultural Hegemony during the Iraqi Revolution," in *The Iraqi Revolution of 1958: The Old Social Classes Revisited*, edited by Robert A. Fernea and Wm. Roger Louis (London: I.B. Tauris, 1991), 190-91.

⁴ Fouad Ajami, *The Foreigner's Gift: The Americans, the Arabs, and the Iraqis in Iraq* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 340-41.

Poetry, Politics, and History

Iraq, of course, was not the only part of the world where poets continued to pose a critical threat to the stability of the political establishment long after the decline of poetry in Western Europe and the United States. A robust body of scholarship produced by historians and literary critiques in recent years has highlighted the vitality of political poetry as a mode of dissent in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, particularly during the Stalinist period.⁵ Collectively, these works have challenged both historical generalizations from the Anglo-American experience about the decline of poetry as a condition of modernity and the theoretical assumption that modern poetry is distinctively anti-social, apolitical, and ahistorical.⁶ Recent historical scholarship on the relationship between poetry, national identity, and cultural politics in both colonial and post-colonial South Asia has further advanced academic understandings of the crucial nexus between poetry, politics, and history in the modern era.⁷ While historians of the modern Middle East have been somewhat slower to engage in critical dialogue with their literary critic counterparts and to take poetry seriously as an historical archive, several scholars have taken preliminary steps to advance this agenda.⁸ My own intervention builds upon these recent developments not only by proposing that modern Iraqi poetry is a critical historical archive that ought to be mined to broaden our understand of the cultural politics of both global and regional geopolitical conflicts, ideological contestations, and the social dislocations and transformations of modernity, but in fact that modern Iraqi history told without reference to poets and poetry offers a necessary constricted vision of popular culture and politics.

⁵ Clare Cavanagh, *Lyric Poetry and Modern Politics: Russia, Poland, and the West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), Edith Rogovin Frankel, *Novy Mir: A Case Study in the Politics of Literature, 1952-1958* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), Donald Loewen, *The Most Dangerous Art: Poetry, Politics, and Autobiography after the Russian Revolution* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), and Kathleen F. Parthé, *Russia's Dangerous Texts: Politics Between the Lines* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004),

⁶ On the relationship between poetry and modernity, see Theodore Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends: Politics and Transcendence in Postindustrial Society* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1973).

⁷ See Nosheen Ali, "Poetry, Power, Protest: Reimagining Muslim Nationhood in Pakistan," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 32:1 (2012), 13-24, Shail Mayaram, *Against History, Against State: Counterperspectives from the Margins* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), Farina Mir, *The Social Space of Language: Vernacular Culture in British Colonial Punjab* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), Gyanendra Pandey, "In Defense of the Fragment: Writing about Hindu-Muslim Riots in India Today," *Representations* 37 (1992), 27-55, and Sadia Toor, *The State of Islam: Culture and Cold War Politics in Pakistan* (London: Pluto Press, 2011).

⁸ See especially Orit Bashkin, *The Other Iraq: Culture and Pluralism in Hashemite Iraq* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009). Joel Beinin, "Writing Class: Workers and Modern Egyptian Colloquial Poetry (Zajal)," *Poetics Today* 15:2 (1994), 191-215 and Elliott Colla, "The Poetry of Revolt," in *Dawn of the Arab Uprisings: End of an Old Order?* (London: Pluto Press, 2012).

The fundamental challenge for any historical study that seeks to salvage poetic archives from the wastelands of bourgeois cultural critiques is to counter theoretical generalizations about the increasing marginality of poetry after the Romantic revolution. In the United States and Western Europe, these critiques of poetry paralleled the gradual marginalization of poetry in popular culture, while in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe they have benefited from their utility to official cultural ideology. Literary critics grounded in critical theory and the logic of New Historicism have overwhelmingly concluded that poetry was transformed by the Romanticists into a reactionary medium that seeks to sever art from both politics and history.⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin's critique of modern poetry informed an entire generation of scholars who now decried poetry as apolitical and ahistorical.¹⁰ Theodor Adorno went even further than Bakhtin in his blanket declaration that the poetic voice "defines and expresses itself as something opposed to the collective, to objectivity."¹¹ Even Marx himself famously declared in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* that "the social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future," and his demand that poetry be reconstituted as revolutionary art was fervently echoed by Trotsky.¹² While Marxist critics assailed poetry for its anti-collectivist individualism and resistance to the demands of historical materialism, indignant poets and critics have at times compounded the confusion by embracing the charge as a badge of honor. Thus, the renowned Mexican poet and critic Octavio Paz proudly declared that although poetry "is the product of a definite history and a definite society," it nevertheless remains "a device which produces anti-history."¹³

Of course, not all poets and critics have accepted the critical parameters outlined by Adorno and Paz. As Clare Cavanagh has noted, the famed Polish poet and critic Czesław Miłosz

⁹ See Cavanagh, *Lyric Poetry and Modern Politics*, 1-44, Marjorie Levinson, *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems: Four Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), Jerome McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), and Sarah Zimmerman, *Romanticism, Lyricism and History* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999).

¹⁰ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogical Imagination: Four Essays*, edited by Michael Holquist and translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) and Susan J. Wolfson, *Formal Charges: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

¹¹ Theodor Adorno, "On Lyric Poetry and Society," in *Poetry in Theory: An Anthology, 1900-2000*, edited by Jon Cook (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing 2004), 342-349.

¹² See Karl Mark, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd Edition, edited by Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), 597 and Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, translated by Rose Strunsky (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960).

¹³ Octavio Paz, *Children of the Mire: Modern Poetry from Romanticism to the Avant-Garde*, translated by Rachel Phillips (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), v.

fiercely resisted interpretations of poetry as anti-social and anti-historical, arguing instead in "A Poet Between East and West" that "the problem of [his] time should be defined as Poetry and History."¹⁴ Cavanagh and others have explicated the extent to which lyric poetry was capable of undermining the grand historical narratives promulgated by the Soviet Union. The British poet and critic Donald Davie's celebration of Miłosz's revolutionary poetics highlights the capacity of poets to transcend traditional stereotypes about poetic frivolity:

So long as the poet, East or West, appears before the public only as a lyricist, banking on the irresponsibilities traditionally associated with that role, he will be tolerated by the governing class and allowed to communicate with his readers. It is only when he oversteps that pariah's privilege that he is in trouble.¹⁵

The Irish poet and critic Tom Paulin has likewise championed Eastern European poetry as a political foil for the ahistorical and apolitical universalizing aspirations of poetry in the Western democracies. Paulin points to dual commitment to art and society in the work of Polish poets Zbigniew Herbert and Tadeusz Różewicz and the Czech poet Miroslav Holub as evidence of the extraordinary achievements of political poetry in Eastern Europe.¹⁶ Cavanagh likewise complicates Adorno's reading of poetry as self-absorbed detachment from society by arguing that the work of the Russian poet Anna Akhmatova functions "self-conscious lyricism as a form of social protest."¹⁷

If historians have largely ignored or overlooked the contributions of their literary critic counterparts to our understanding of the relationship between poetry and politics in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, literary critics have been quite hostile or critical to the nascent attempts of historians to read poetry as an historical archive. This critique has been most apparent in recent scholarship on poetry in South Asia, largely driven by the ambitious efforts of historians to incorporate poetic verse and voices into revisionist historical narratives. Jill Didur's critique of Gyan Pandey's approach to literary sources offers the most instructive and most troubling corrective to those interested in historical interventions.¹⁸ While praising Pandey's

¹⁴ Czesław Miłosz, *Beginning with My Streets: Essays and Recollections*, translated by Madeline G. Levine (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1991), 157. Quoted in Cavanagh, *Lyric Poetry and Modern Politics*, 7.

¹⁵ Donald Davie, *Czesław Miłosz and the Insufficiency of Lyric* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986), 28. Quoted in Cavanagh, *Lyric Poetry and Modern Politics*, 8.

¹⁶ Tom Paulin, *The Faber Book of Vernacular Verse* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), 51-52.

¹⁷ Cavanagh, *Lyric Poetry and Modern Politics*, 24-26.

¹⁸ Jill Didur, *Unsettling Partition: Literature, Gender, Memory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 42-66.

openness and innovation in using poetry and other literary texts to challenge state narratives of Hindu-Muslim violence, Didur argues that "Pandey's analysis is concerned more with what he characterizes as the 'authenticity' of Harganvi's representation of the 'riots' than with the critical/imaginative relation this fragment has with the discursive and material conditions that produced the rioting."¹⁹ This concern with the evidence of "experience" and "authenticity," she argues, obscures broader questions about "how this transparency is constructed and the power relations that constructions makes visible in the sociocultural context."²⁰ Pandey, in other words, is guilty of reading poetry like an historian who has not fully grasped the theoretical lessons of the cultural turn.

Didur's critique of this type of instrumental reading of literary narratives provides an important reminder that interdisciplinary historical approaches require not only openness to new source material, but also critical attention to the theoretical and methodological approaches of scholars working in different fields. Her own invocation of feminist and labor historians like Kathleen Canning, Alf Lüdtke, and Joan W. Scott offers a desperately needed theoretical grounding for historical readings of literary archives.²¹ Nevertheless, this demand for self-reflexive and deconstructive readings of literary narratives should not obscure the tremendous utility and vitality of particular categories of literature as historical archives of experience. Clare Cavanagh's comparison of political poetry and photography, as artistic genres that strive to capture a particularly moment in time while calling our attention to the futility of such endeavors any more than and thus illustrate the inherent tension between the artist's pretense to objectivity and the reality of subjective experience, provides one path toward the reconciliation of these critical demands. Poetic and other forms of literary narratives must not be read as mere representations of reality and experience, just as reports and documents in the colonial archives must not be read as impartial statements of fact. The poet, like any other agent, not only documents historical facts and experiences, social transformations, and cultural attitudes, but also helps to construct the cultural meaning and understanding of these events and the experiences.

¹⁹ For Pandey's analysis of Harganvi's poetry, see Pandey, "In Defence of the Fragment," 47-49.

²⁰ Didur, *Unsettling Partition*, 49-50.

²¹ Kathleen Canning, "Feminist History after the Linguistic Turn: Historicizing Discourse and Experience," *Signs* 19:2 (1994), 368-404, Alf Lüdtke, "Organizational Order or *Eigensinn*? Workers' Privacy and Workers' Politics in Imperial Germany," in *Rites of Power, Symbolism, Ritual and Politics since the Middle Ages*, edited by Sean Wilentz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985), 303-33, and Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17 (1991), 773-97.

Historical readings of poetry narratives must devote adequate attention to both the social context in which poetry is produced and consumed and the cultural context that shapes and is shaped by poetic verse and interventions.

These theoretical interventions ought to shape new critical readings of poetic contributions to modern Arab history by prompting historians and other critics to move beyond parochial understandings of poetry as either literary text or social document and toward an interdisciplinary reading of poetry as both productive and documentary historical archive. While the social, political, and historical dimensions of modern Arabic poetry have rarely been called into question by area scholars, an explication of these dimensions nevertheless offers a useful and much-needed corrective to theoretical generalizations about the limitations and insufficiencies of modern poetry. As in Eastern Europe and South Asia, Arabic poetry has long enjoyed a considerable advantage in both prestige and popularity over all rival forms of cultural production. Perhaps even more distinctive, though, is the peculiar relationship between poetry and history in the Arab world. In his incisive study of historical memory and contestation among the tribes of Jordan, the anthropologist Andrew Shryock details an exchange with Shaykh Sa'ud Abu al-'Amash of the 'Adwani tribe on the comparative reluctance of the rival 'Abbadi tribe to have their oral history recorded:

The 'Abbad have no history. Why? First, no famous shaykhs rose up among them. Shaykhs of mighty deeds. So they composed no poetry to remember them by... They have no history, really, so they stay quiet.²²

In this remarkable passage, Shryock's tribal interlocutor underscores the mutual dependence of poetry and history in Jordanian bedouin society; without history there is no poetry, and without poetry there is no history.

Shaykh Sa'ud's striking formulation calls to mind Hayden White's contention that narrative history requires moralizing judgments to produce meaning.²³ In the contemporary Arab world, poets offer more than just another voice or perspective to be considered and analyzed alongside the myriad of alternative historical agents catalogued and documented in archives and libraries. Rather, poetry simultaneously lends cultural authority to the significance of particular

²² Andrew Shryock, *Nationalism and the Genealogical Imagination: Oral History and Textual Authority in Tribal Jordan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 162-63.

²³ See Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 1-25.

historical events and perspectives and ensures that this authority will be preserved, contested, or overthrown, but certainly not ignored and forgotten. Roland Bleiker's assessment of Pablo Neruda's historical legacy offers a useful model for thinking through the unique contributions of poetry and poets to the modern historical experience:

One may or may not agree with the content of Neruda's politics, but one can hardly deny that his influential poetry fulfils the function of a historical memory. It testifies to the controversies and complexities of an epoch gone, to the political contingencies that have rendered some elements of the past into what we call the present. Neruda's poems hold on to faint voices and perspectives that may otherwise have vanished into the dark holes of historical narratives. For better or worse, Neruda's poetic testimonies are part of today's collective consciousness. They have entered the canons of Western thought. That is why even those commentators who are hostile to his politics readily accept the central role Neruda has played as a poet and poetic chronicler of our time.²⁴

I could scarcely offer a more fitting analysis of the importance of figures like Ma'rif al-Rusafi, Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri, and Badr Shakir al-Sayyab as poets and chroniclers of the modern Iraqi historical experience. I would, in fact, argue that the historical significance of the Iraqi poets far outstrips that of Neruda due to the comparatively broader resonance of poetry and poetic canons in Iraqi society.²⁵

Finally, we must note that the historical significance and utility of poetry extends far beyond its contribution to and preservation in the literary canons of the modern era. Poetry is significant not only because of its *prima facie* position as the hegemonic domain of cultural production in places like Iraq and Jordan, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, and Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Russia, but also because its specific forms of production and methods of transmission have proven resistant to the repressive capacities of the modern nation-state. The rhythm and rhyme of poetry produce a mnemonic effect that aids memorization and transmission and enables what had always been, at least in the Arab world, an oral tradition to undermine the stultifying effects of official censorship. Even where the poet cannot evade punishment for the transgressions of his political dissent, he can rest assured that his contribution to the political culture of dissidence will survive in a way that the novelist's will not. Equally significant is the

²⁴ Roland Bleiker, "Pablo Neruda and the Struggle for Political Memory," *Third World Quarterly* 20:6 (1999), 1130.

²⁵ Bleiker's later efforts to integrate aesthetics and international politics are worthy of considerable attention for anyone interested in a broader argument for the relevance of poetics to political histories. See Roland Bleiker, *Aesthetics and World Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

incomprehensibility or inscrutability of poetry to government officials not fully versed in the cultural discourses of poetry. This protective valence is particularly apparent in colonial contexts where colonial officials are incapable of distinguishing the transgressive nature of political attacks beyond the shrouds of poetic metaphor, verse, and vocabulary.

Even beyond the context of colonial domination and repression, though, poetry maintains a critical political function as the dominant discursive medium for countering official political and cultural narratives. Poetry remains an integral component of the "dual culture" dynamic articulated by James C. Scott in his analysis of power relations between dominate and subordinate classes:

The official cultures is filled with bright euphemisms, silences, and platitudes and an unofficial culture that has its own history, its own literature and poetry, its own biting slang, its own music and poetry, its own humor, its own knowledge of shortages, corruption, and inequalities that may, once again, be widely known but that may not be introduced into public discourse.²⁶

Badr Shakir al-Sayyab famously boasted that in poems like "Cerberus in Babylon" and "City of Sinbad," both composed in the wake of the 1959 violence between Communist and Ba'athist partisans, he "satirized Qasim and his regime severely and his myrmidons did not realize that."²⁷ Sayyab's boast is difficult to take seriously as an impartial analysis of the parameters of cultural dissent in the Qasim period, given Qasim's well-known celebration of Jawahiri's poetry and the regime's crackdown on opposition poets like Ba'athist ideologue 'Adnan al-Rawi. After all, if even passionate admirers of poetry like Qasim could not comprehend the thinly veiled political attacks in Sayyab's poems, how effective could such poetry really be in shaping popular opinion? More likely, following Scott's formulation, is the probability that the Qasim regime was forced to tolerate the subtle expressions of cultural dissent from the opposition so long as they refrained from making their political commentary explicit.²⁸ 'Adnan al-Rawi's ham-fisted attacks on Qasim and transparent allusions to Rashid 'Ali simply violated this covenant in a way that Sayyab's allusions to Greek mythology did not.

²⁶ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 51.

²⁷ Quoted in Issa J. Boullata, "The Poetic Technique of Badr Shakir al-Sayyab (1926-1964)," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 2 (1971), 113.

²⁸ On the dynamics of cultural opposition under authoritarian rule, see also Miriam Cooke, *Dissident Syria: Making Opposition Arts Official* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007) and Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

The Historical Contributions of Iraqi Poetry

The historical analysis of modern Iraqi poetry dramatically alters academic understandings of ideological contestations, social mobilizations, and cultural conflicts. Popular Iraqi poetry from this period provides a critical historical archive of local cultural representations of revolutionary politics. Poets occupied a unique position within Iraqi society and both the size and the composition of their audiences distinguished them from other artists and intellectuals. As an alternative to political memoirs, poetry offers a more immediate and more accurate reflection to popular attitudes at particular historical moments and remains insulated from the problematic intrusions of historical memory and the temptation to read history backwards. This distinction has significant consequences for contemporary understandings of Iraqi constructions of nation and community in the Hashemite period. Perhaps more importantly, though, popular poetry cannot and should not be read as mere representation of political attitudes and actions. Rather, public poetry served as a crucial cultural domain in which political attitudes were constructed and contested, political dissent was composed and articulated, and political action was given rhythm, history, and meaning. As I have argued throughout this dissertation, poets like Bahr al-'Ulum, Jawahiri, Rusafi, and Sayyab ought to be seen more properly as political agents rather than mere political critics.

The crucial role of poetry in shaping the discourse and dynamics of cultural politics in the modern Iraqi state is evident across several thematic domains explored in this dissertation. The poetry of the Bakr Sidqi period underscores the extent to which the partisan struggle over the post-mandatory state was shaped by poetic contestations over the historical legacy of colonialism in Iraq. The public recitation of poetry in support of Bakr Sidqi's coup d'état by poets like Jawahiri and Bahr al-'Ulum and the poets' organization of massive crowds of workers mobilized to support radical political reform highlights the significance and resonance of these poetic efforts to construct historical meaning from the mire of political turmoil. It was only after the leftist poets who initially supported the coup d'état of 196 had been marginalized and silenced that the events be could reframed as an assault on the pan-Arab nationalist agenda. The striking resilience and effectiveness of these revisionist narratives constructed and reinforced by nationalist poets - consider that even perpetually defiant and proudly rebellious poets like Jawahiri and Bahr al-'Ulum were cowed into recanting their support for the coup - demands a deeper investigation into the political poetry of the mandatory period. While an analysis of these

political contestations framed by the historical context of immediate political events foregrounds the partisan dynamics of the struggle, a wider historical lens might capture the transgressive qualities of this so-called "populist poetry" and their broader historical significance to better effect.

In sharp contrast to the Bakr Sidqi poetry, the poetic archive that frames the Rashid 'Ali movement of 1941 suggests the ability of poetry to provide some respite from the bitter rivalries of partisan politics in the interest of forging national unity. The popular poetry of these period provides an essential corrective to historical readings of colonial archives and prominent (though hardly influential) ideological treatises that draw clear connections between Nazi and fascist ideology and the Iraqi anti-colonial movement. Wartime poetry, though was not merely a vehicle for asserting allegiance and rallying public opinion behind a renegade political and military leadership. Poets instead challenged and corrected the chauvinism and bigotry of fascist politics in subtle but important ways and helped to prevent the devolution of total anti-colonialism into pro-Nazi anti-Semitism. Just as importantly, the sudden emergence and rapid advance of secular and progressive political ideologies in the 1940s and 1950s is scarcely comprehensible without understanding the thawing of partisan tensions between poets, intellectuals, and students from variant backgrounds in the wartime internment camps. The cultural labor of leftist poets in the local construction of the Soviet Union as a utopian symbol of anti-colonial liberation similarly helps to explain the rapid public backlash against any manifestation of pro-Nazi sympathy. This analysis points to the need for comparative studies on anti-colonial and anti-fascist poetry in other parts of the Arab world - particularly Libya, Palestine, and Syria - to determine the extent to which the Iraqi historical experience might be used to generalize about Arab interpretations of and responses to shifting trends in global politics.

It is more difficult, but no less important, to adequately assess the relationship between poetry and the cultural crisis of the Iraqi countryside in this period. While the poetry considered in this study unquestionably documents both the sense of social oppression and cultural malaise experienced by rural Iraqis, the limitations of the project's scope have ensured a necessarily restricted documentation of local attitudes and experiences. While this dissertation aims to capture the contribution of the national poetic discourse to the historical experience of modern Iraq, rather than to document only the reaction of poets to national political issues arising from Baghdad, the trajectory of social transformations in the 1940s and 1950s ensures that rural and

tribal voices are gradually marginalized or objectified in the national poetic discourse. Poets like Jawahiri, Bahr al-'Ulum, and al-Safi al-Najafi grew up in southern Iraq and were deeply acquainted with and passionately interested in the struggles of rural Iraqi peasant farmers, but their movement into the cities and immersion into partisan politics over the course of the 1940s parallels the social migrations of so many rural Iraqis and ensures that the experiences of those left behind are only discussed from distant vantage points. A more complete assessment of rural historical experiences of political transformations in this period requires a broader examination of poetic archives, including both poetry published in regional newspapers and unpublished tribal poetry.²⁹ Still, whatever questions and obscurities remain, the contribution of these poets to the production of a new sense of national identity that drew its inspiration from the street protests, communal life, and cosmopolitan exchanges of urban centers in the 1940s and 1950s clearly appealed to the cultural aspirations of many young Iraqis disenchanted with the restrictive and oppressive conditions of life in the countryside.

The production of radical politics by Iraqi poets is perhaps most evident in my analysis of the protest movements of the post-war period. The role of popular poets like Jawahiri and Bahr al-'Ulum in bringing the discourse of cultural politics into the public sphere had broad implications for Iraqi society. Poets helped to evade the restriction of speech and movement enforced by the state through rigid regimes of censorship, systematic electoral fraud, and the criminalization of certain domains of political expression by transforming the basic dynamics of political discourse and demands. While prior moments of political upheaval were characterized by clandestine negotiations and elite cultivation of popular support, the emergence of genuine popular politics brought the Iraqi public into the political arena as active participants for the first time. In the 1948 protests, Jawahiri and Bahr al-'Ulum emerged as popular heroes, and poets and crowds celebrated one another in euphoric expressions of lyric verse. It is perhaps not so surprising, then, that the crowds of the 1952 uprising were reputed to have chanted for a government led by Kamil al-Chadirchi and Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri. No less surprising is the fact that statues of popular poets like Jawahiri, Rusafi, and Sayyab are among the only public monuments of prominent Iraqi figures that survived the upheaval of the U.S. occupation. The

²⁹ The work songs of tribal peasants briefly alluded to by Batatu would provide an essential starting point for such an important endeavor. See Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, Ba'thists, and Free Officers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 141-42.

broader theoretic relevance of poetic interventions in the public sphere is evident in the renewed attention to the historical tradition of particular forms of "poetry of revolution" from scholars in the wake of the "Arab Spring" uprisings of 2011.³⁰

Finally, the last chapter of this dissertation illustrates the role of poetry in forging political alliances between the leftist and radical nationalist factions of the Iraqi anti-colonial undercurrent. The poetic archive illustrates the often forgotten fact that the Communist Party and Ba'athist Party appeared to converge toward a broad ideological consensus in the 1950s in which the Communists embraced significant aspects of the nationalist political agenda promulgated by the Ba'ath Party and the Ba'athists accepted the need for radical structural reforms to ameliorate the oppressive condition of peasant and worker life in Iraq. The chapter closes by showing how this tentative consensus unraveled as the euphoria of revolution and national liberation began to fade away. While poets like Badr Shakir al-Sayyab cannot be held responsible for the fateful introduction of sectarian strife into the discourse of cultural politics, the construction of Communism as cultural pathology in his and others' poetry would later be appropriated by cynical politicians looking to benefit from sectarian strife. As this analysis indicates, the new cultural politics of anti-colonialism forged by popular poets in the Iraqi public sphere ultimately failed to provide a new model of community, nation, and modernity capable of withstanding the pressures of the post-revolutionary period. Some scholars, like Eric Davis, have articulated this failure in Gramscian terminology, arguing that the Iraqi Left "failed to provide well-articulated counterhegemonic models to challenge existing forms of political praxis."³¹ I argue against this analysis and assert the cultural discourse of public poetry offered a truly alternative vision of post-colonial modernity that brought subaltern classes into politics in a way that the intellectual discourses of nationalist ideologues never could. How, then, can we explain the obvious fact that this vision failed to take root amidst the spiraling descent of polemical denunciations and political violence chronicled by Batatu and Davis? This is indeed a serious problem, but I would suggest that we look for a resolution by exploring in greater detail the unraveling of Iraqi society and the emergence of sectarian politics in the 1960s and 1970s, rather than simply transposing the cruel fate of history onto the distant past.

³⁰ Most notable here is Colla's "Poetry of Revolt."

³¹ Eric Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 92.

The Iraq Times
al-Istiqlal
al-Ittihad
al-Jihad
Liwa al-Istiqlal
al-Mabda'
al-Nahar
al-Nasr
al-Nida
Nida al-Ahali
al-Qa'idah
al-Ra'i al-'Amm
al-Sa'a
Sada al-Ahali
Sawt al-Ahali
Sawt al-Sha'b
al-Sha'b
al-Sijil
al-Siyasah
al-Thawrah
al-Ummah
al-'Usur
al-Yawm
al-Watan
al-Zaman

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