

Reconstructing Life: Environment, Expertise,
and Political Power in Iraq's Marshes 2003-2007

by

Bridget Lauren Guarasci

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Doctoral Committee:

Associate Professor Andrew J. Shryock, Chair
Associate Professor Gabrielle Hecht
Associate Professor Alaina M. Lemon
Associate Professor Erik A. Mueggler
Professor Ann L. Stoler, The New School

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Abstract

The restoration of the southern marshes became one of the most celebrated projects of the post-2003 Iraq reconstruction era. This dissertation examines how during this period environmentalism, as an altruistic movement, enabled foreign investors to both rationalize and mystify political power. Well before the fall of Baghdad in April 2003, Iraqi exiles met with the U.S. Department of State under the rubric of the *Future of Iraq Project* to plan an Iraq in Saddam's aftermath. The country they envisioned aligned directly with the principles and values of a liberal polity: a certain degree of governmental transparency, shared decision-making by way of voting and community participation, individual rights, and the integration of Iraqi businesses and industries into the global market. This dissertation makes two central arguments: first, although the marsh project concerned the environment, the most powerful effects of this project lay not in environmental rehabilitation, but in the support for a new economy. Second, "post-conflict" Iraq established distance as a technology for foreign investment in Iraq. Internationals worked from afar to preserve their own safety, but hired Iraqi project staff to carry out their mandates on the ground. Technologies, like GIS and remote sensing, customized for this distanced approach gave rise to virtual spaces of the marsh which coalesced internationally. As marsh advocates brought a digitally rendered environment into focus to reflect a future they wished to see, they obfuscated human experience of the war and the violence of the present. In this way Iraq circa 2003 came to be defined by a future-oriented politics of life that, in the case of marsh restoration, privileged the ecological over the human.

Chapter One, "Recuperation," analyzes the relationship of Iraqi exiles and the marsh. Chapter Two, "Conference," argues that conferences were critical resources for distanced reconstruction. Chapter Three, "A Holographic Image," demonstrates how the marshes were abstracted via remote sensing technologies. Chapter Four, "Wartime Birding," evaluates *Nature Iraq* birding expeditions. The final chapter, "The National Park," examines wartime conservation. Each chapter contributes to the overall argument that the Iraqi marsh project instituted an economy of life.

Introduction



Figure 1: Photo by Joao Silva for *The New York Times* from Edward Wong's front page story "Marshes a Vengeful Hussein Drained Stir Again"

Kirmashiya Marsh, Iraq, Feb. 16 – Steering his wooden skiff between thick clumps of reeds, Kadum Abdullah took one hand off his pole and held it up for a visitor to see... In the largest and most complex wetlands restoration project being undertaken by the American government, scientists and engineers are grappling with problems ranging from dismal water quality and an absence of health care to uncertainty over whether residents here can sustain themselves through fishing and the selling of reeds and dairy products. The dam-breaking last spring brought some early success. The swamp is teeming with renewed life. Water buffalo lumber through floating algae, and ducks paddle along the surface. It is an environment in which Mr. Abdullah's people, known as the Marsh Arabs, have been living for 5,000 years since the dawn of Sumerian civilization between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers.

-Edward Wong (February 21, 2004)

Renewal

The restoration of the southern marshes became one of the most celebrated projects of the post-2003 Iraq reconstruction era. This dissertation examines how during

this period environmentalism, as an altruistic movement, enabled foreign investors to both rationalize and mystify political power. Well before the fall of Baghdad in April 2003, Iraqi exiles met with the US Department of State under the rubric of the *Future of Iraq Project* to plan an Iraq in Saddam's aftermath. The country they envisioned aligned directly with the principles and values of a liberal polity: a certain degree of governmental transparency, shared decision-making by way of voting and community participation, individual rights, and the integration of Iraqi businesses and industries into the global market (see Harvey 2005; Mouffe 2000; Rawls 2005:35).

This dissertation makes two central arguments: first, although the marsh project concerned the environment, the most powerful effects of this project lay not in environmental rehabilitation, but in the support for a new economy. Second, "post-conflict" Iraq established distance as a technology for foreign investment in Iraq. Internationals worked from afar to preserve their own safety but hired Iraqi project staff to carry out their mandates on the ground. Technologies, like GIS and remote sensing, customized for this distanced approach gave rise to virtual spaces of the marsh that coalesced internationally. As marsh advocates brought a digitally rendered environment into focus to reflect a future they wished to see, they obfuscated human experience of the war and the violence of the present. In this way Iraq circa 2003 came to be defined by a future-oriented politics of life that, in the case of marsh restoration, privileged the ecological over the human.

I argue that environmentalism is an important signature of liberal government. In Iraq, environmentalism expanded a global ethics of care for individuals as citizens of the world, elaborated under the Geneva Convention and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to non-human life and ecologies.¹ The 1991 Gulf War was identified

¹ According to precedence set by the United Nations General Assembly when it adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (December 10, 1948), international humanitarian

internationally as an ecological disaster, evidenced by Iraqi troops blowing up and setting ablaze Kuwait's oil fields upon retreat (Westervelt February 10, 2003) and by the speculation that Iraqi soldiers opened Kuwaiti oil valves at Sea Island to release large quantities of crude oil into the Gulf (Plant 1992:3). In 2003 the US-led coalition marked the "liberation" of Iraq in ecological renewal.

Environmental protection in general was first raised under international human rights law. UN and member states argued that fundamental human rights could not be achieved in a severely damaged environment. Subsequently, international legal treaties and state constitutions guaranteed a healthy environment as a basic human right (Bouvier December 31, 1991). In 1979 the *Berne Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats* was the first to recognize the "intrinsic value" of wildlife and nature irrespective of any benefit to humankind. The *World Charter for Nature* in 1982, a non-binding treaty adopted by the UN General Assembly, confirmed this principle: "Every form of life is unique, warranting respect regardless of its worth to man, and, to accord other organisms such recognition, man must be guided by a moral code of action" (cited in Hulme 2004:15). The 1992 *Convention on Biodiversity* further substantiated the intrinsic value premise. Through these treaties, environment became a category under conventions governing wartime ethics.² In this way environment was

organizations were intended to ensure and protect individual rights, including the right to a certain quality of life, in the absence of an effective state. The 1949 Geneva Convention established the basis of treatment for individuals during war and was a foundational text in the creation of the International Committee of the Red Cross. Together these two major documents began to elaborate a code of ethics governing human life globally, taking individual rights as beyond the limits of state or nation. The UN Security Council 1483 specifically invokes the Geneva Convention and the 1907 Hague Resolution that, together with the Hague Resolution of 1899, formalized the laws of war and war crimes in a neophyte body of international law (United Nations Security Council May 22, 2003).

² Under international law, two instruments protect environment in wartime: one, the *Convention on the Prohibition of Military or Any Other Hostile Use of Environmental Modification Techniques* adopted under UN auspices in response to the Vietnam war and, two, the additional Protocol I of the *Geneva Convention*. Within the protocol, two articles regulate environment during conflict. Article 35 prohibits weapons or "means of war" that will cause long-term environmental damage and Article 55 which prohibits attacks against the natural environment by way of reprisal (Bouvier

defined as a naturalized right and moral terrain. Though some of these international documents were non-binding, they made it possible to criminalize and prosecute governments on the basis of environment and raised new questions about the legislation of life.

In 2003, environment was a fundamental component of Iraq's liberalization by neoconservative advisors to and members of US national government. As a political philosophy, liberalism is so qualitatively broad it encompasses forms of feminism, socialism, and even neoconservative ideologies. Mill (1978 [1859]) and Locke (1988 [1690]) are generally credited as the founding fathers of liberal political philosophy, which at its most basic level advances the idea of political freedom and individual rights, the firm and naturalized division between the political and the non-political, and the naturalized idea of the free market and the right to private property. One of the major problems with liberalism is that these basic elements are either self-contradictory or come into conflict with each other. What constitutes freedom? And who is empowered to exercise it in moments of conflict: is it trade unions who advocate the protection of individual rights or their employers who might seek the freedom to dismiss employees at will? Critics of liberalism cite that the ideology eclipses the political (see Holt 1992; Marx 1978 [1843]), facilitates empire (Mehta 1999; Metcalf 1994), and creates problematic relationships of economy (Polanyi 2001). Harvey attributes the Coalition Provisional Authority's neoliberalism, an element of the neoconservative platform, with the privatization of public enterprises, the elimination of trade barriers, the repatriation of foreign profits, and opening of Iraq's banks to foreign control (2005:6). This created a situation in Iraq in which the UN and the CPA granted foreign businesses and organizations considerable latitude to enter and work in a fragmented, chaotic country

December 31, 1991). Each of these treatises protects the environment based on the notion that it is a common good for humanity.

erupting in violence. The conditions were such that the foreign organizations who entered had relative *carte blanche* to pursue projects desirable to their own interests.

In Iraq, neoconservative political agendas played out in the moral register. Mouffe argues that today the political is more frequently expressed in moral terms (2005:5). The story of the marshes enabled the US-led coalition to argue that it was committed to the creation of a more just government in Iraq. Fukuyama, a well-known member of the neoconservative Bush advisors, outlined four common principles of neoconservative liberalism: “a concern with democracy, human rights and, more generally, the internal politics of states; a belief that American power can be used for moral purposes; a skepticism about the ability of international law and institutions to solve serious security problems; and finally, a view that ambitious social engineering often leads to unexpected consequences and thereby undermines its own ends” (February 19, 2006).³ Two of these ideals were in conflict—the belief that American power could be used for moral purposes and the skepticism for social engineering—but by the time of the Iraq war, neoconservatives’ enthusiasm for using American power for moral purposes outweighed their distaste for social engineering.

Like other campaigns advocating “nature,” the marsh reflected this moral agenda (see Daston and Vidal 2004). Whether they subscribed to the neoconservative and neoliberal ideals of President Bush’s administration or not, governments, environmentalists, and foreign business flocked to the project because it promised one vital thing: a story of redemption.⁴ Investors claimed benevolence as they refashioned an environment from Saddam Hussein’s ruins. Following the 1991 Intifadah, Saddam Hussein launched a major engineering initiative to build an elaborate hydraulic infrastructure of dams and dikes that would siphon water from the marshes over the

³ In this same article Fukuyama distances himself from Bush era neoconservatives, a movement he once advocated.

⁴ On the specifics of neoliberalism in Iraq see David Harvey (2005:6-7).

whole of southern Iraq. In the early 21st Century, Iraqi exiles in Europe and the United States worked to bring the destruction of the marshes to public attention, exposing what they identified as a “genocide” against marsh residents and revealing current maps of the area that showed the extent of their ruin.⁵ The science of engineering enabled Saddam Hussein to drain the marshes and direct waters to other ends and in 2003 marsh advocates turned again to the science of engineering as a technology of renewal.

To make the case for Iraqi military intervention, the Bush Administration, Iraqi exiles, and other governments pointed to the dried marsh and the nearby mass graves as evidence of the Iraqi President’s despotic rule. One of the seven crimes for which the Saddam Hussein was charged was the genocide of marsh residents and the destruction of the Iraqi marshes. Regarding the marshes Saddam was asked to answer not only for the murder of human life, but also for defying the laws of nature by engineering massive territorial re-organization. In the political arena, governments, experts, and environmentalists discussed marsh restoration in these morally charged terms.

Pursuing ethical rehabilitation through the marsh was fundamentally an aspirational project. Appadurai asserts “The idea of human rights or the rights of man brings us closer to the field of hope, since it is about claims that rest on universal capacities, aspirations and possibilities” (2007:30). This is true also for movements of environmental justice that extend ideas about the rights of man to the rights of nature. However, Appadurai indicates that there is a deeper articulation between politics and hope that is not captured by an analysis of rights alone. Miyazaki, arguing that hope is a method for analyzing knowledge formation rather than a subject in itself, attempts to

⁵ Baroness Nicholson, founder of the AMAR Charitable Foundation in the UK to provide local capacity building in the Iraqi marshes, has consistently spoken in EU Parliament about the draining of the marsh and the mass killings of marsh residents and Iraqis involved in the Intifadah as “genocide.” At the United Nations Post Conflict Branch in Geneva, Switzerland, Hassan Partow demonstrated the extent of marsh draining with remote sensing images which he published collectively (see UNEP and Hassan Partow 2001).

address hope as a dynamic process (2004). In a subsequent article, he analyzes neoliberal ideas and economic concepts as sources of hope that reorient knowledge (Miyazaki 2006:151). With respect to the marsh, neoliberal ideals are expressed as an aspiration. As marsh advocates work for the future of the marsh, they reorient Iraqi society toward these political and economic ideals. Marsh restoration brings these new values into being by training Iraqi scientists and government employees to forge relationships with global entrepreneurs and by connecting foreign investors and experts to Iraqi territory. Examining environmentalism in post-2003 Iraq, this dissertation studies the emergence of new valuations of life, from the marsh to the human, and the economic and political reforms they animate.

The second major contribution of this dissertation to anthropology is the critical re-evaluation of war. I join with other scholars in arguing that war is more than military combat (Finnström). I argue that understanding the war in Iraq must include attention to the peripheries of conflict. I concentrate on environmentalists working to restore the marshes as a means by which to explore funding trajectories and the political brokering of relationships between private businesses, humanitarians, and foreign governments mobilizing to enter a post-Saddam Iraq. The money for this environmental project would only be available to *Nature Iraq* during the most intense period of conflict, when investors clamored to establish connections to the country. Once it was gone, marsh advocates lamented, they would have missed their opportunity. The logic ignored the extraordinary sacrifices Iraqis would make in order to see the project through.

This dissertation examines how foreign experts and scientists pursued technologies that would enable them to sense ground ecology without engaging it directly. Nestled within the Bush Administration infrastructure of war, a partnership of Iraqi exile administrators and foreign experts implemented the Iraqi marsh project without stepping foot in the marshes. Instead, to carry out their restoration mandate they

employed teams of local Iraqi scientists, left behind in the recent middle class exodus, and deployed them into the marshes to conduct “ground truthing” missions. Iraqis were asked to shoulder the burden of risk; bolstering the life of the marshes while simultaneously compromising their own.

I examine distance as a physical terrain of war and a conceptual medium. While much Science and Technology Studies literature addresses scientific practice around issues of visibility (see, for example, Haraway 1989; Jasanoff 2006; Jones and Galison 1998; Latour 1999 [1983, abridged 1998]), my work analyzes the stakes of such scientific endeavors. I engage the marsh as literally invisible, as it was for foreign experts who could not apprehend the landscape without remote sensing technologies, and as politically occluded, since the technologically mediated marsh obfuscated an architecture of foreign power in the form of ecological rehabilitation. My research raises questions about the evaluation of organic life and the mortal and moral limits of scientific distancing.

Literature

Environment as Policy and Law

I trace the emergence of the category “environment” in Iraq.⁶ In so doing, I track the relationship of “environment” to political power as it coalesces globally around Iraq. Environment, I argue, is a development of the early twenty-first century in Iraq. Early after the fall of Baghdad, the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) in Geneva assisted the US Government in the creation of Iraq’s first Ministry of Environment. Hassan Partow at UNEP, who had published the organization’s document that made the destruction of the marshes internationally visible (2001), was involved in the project and traveled often to Baghdad during those first few months to advise and

⁶ I sincerely thank Federico Helfgott for encouraging me to develop this line of argument.

assist the nascent organization. Framing the government as one that expressed the liberal ideals of equality and rights, the new national ministry would not only be committed to environmental justice, but to the liberal political principal of equality: the Coalition Provisional Authority slated the ministry to be run by a woman. Mishkat Moumin took the initial post. A year later in 2004, Narmin Othman replaced her and continues to lead the Ministry today. Though the marshes were an object of politics well before the 2003 war, in this new incarnation the area would be governed as an “environment.”

In the 1830s when British explorers began sending scouting missions up the Euphrates to map the area, sketch botanical elements of the landscape, and record what they saw in voluminous texts, the marshes were recognized as both a fearsome and majestic place, a kind of natural wonderland. Writings of British officers mirror literary works by US nature enthusiasts Ralph Waldo Emerson (1836) and Henry David Thoreau (1854). Naturalist exploration was germane to colonial rule for it exposed formerly unknown lands, making them visible and available for analysis in British metropolitan offices by way of maps and published accounts (Mueggler 2005; Pratt 1992; Raffles 2002). Whereas early British officers engaged the marsh as botany, in the late nineteenth century Ottoman agents entered the marsh with the motivation to harness the Mesopotamian backwater through property reform (Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett 1983; Tripp 2000). The marshes were seen as a hydraulic resource to support possible agricultural fields at their shores (Willcocks 1912). As the British gained dominion over former Ottoman lands in the years leading up to World War I, their views of the marsh changed with their political motivations. No longer needing to explore uncharted lands, the British government viewed the marsh not as a botanical discovery or series of wild rivers, as they had seventy years before, but rather much as the Ottomans had, as property and a water resource for an emergent agrarian economy (Dodge 2003).

Not all of the British agreed that the marsh should be governed in economic terms. Continuing up through the mid-1930s when Henry Field sought to discover the origins of man in the Iraqi marsh, to the early 1950s with Wilfred Thesiger's call to preserve the marsh as a Sumerian sanctuary, conservation expressed as an affinity for the "natural world" remained prominent. Here again the perspective fit within a larger movement, one that did not yet profess a unified platform, but which proceeded in parallel fashion. In the United States, President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1933 as part of the New Deal to put unemployed Americans to work in national parks. In one of the largest public conservation initiatives, F.D.R. elevated the parks to national prominence and demonstrated that US patriotism could be powerfully expressed as environmentalism. In many ways, it was the Public Works Administration that married environmentalism and governmental ideals.

Mitchell writes that a project of the New Deal had specific implications for the Middle East: the Tennessee Valley Authority (2002:44). In 1933 when the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) opened its doors, the organization implemented a plan Henry Ford had originally developed for a corner of northern Alabama that included plans for the transformation of an entire river basin into an unlimited hydropower by virtue of an elaborate infrastructure of river damming. The TVA came to represent new possibilities in development and planning, particularly in arid regions like the Middle East. In 1949, the United Nations sent an economic mission to the Middle East under the leadership of Gordon Clapp, the chairman of the TVA board. The result was the construction in Egypt of the Aswan High Dam (Mitchell 2002:45). "Large dams," Mitchell asserts, "offered a way to build not just irrigation and power systems, but nation-states themselves" (2002:44). Technoscience, to borrow Mitchell's term, had its own power in Iraq where transformations of entire ecologies like marshes, from draining to revival, were used as avenues to register political power and signify national political change.

When the Ba'ath government came to power in 1958, the marshes continued to be seen as a potential resource for agriculture. On the one hand in Iraq during this time "Marsh Arabs" were lauded as the descendents of Sumeria, on the other the marshes were seen as a site of political resistance and a threat to national government, much as they had been throughout the previous century. During the 1970s, as Saddam Hussein gradually siphoned the marsh for agrarian purposes (UNEP and Hassan Partow 2001), marsh drainage was a common worldwide phenomena, just as today restoration is globally favored. When Saddam Hussein turned toward the environment in retaliation for the 1991 Intifadah, the marsh narrative took a dramatic turn and became popular evidence in the Iraqi Opposition Movement of Saddam's criminal government. Iraqi environmentalism post-2003 grew directly from the US State Department initiative to plan reconstruction with Iraqi exiles who were members of this opposition movement.

Though the precursor to contemporary environmentalism is commonly identified with US preservation advocates like John Muir, who co-founded the Sierra Club and successfully petitioned Congress in 1899 to pass the National Parks Bill, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) is attributed with launching an international movement. A devoted birdwatcher, Carson argued that there would be fewer and fewer birds each spring until pesticide regulations were adopted. First published as a collection of articles in the *New Yorker* and later as a book, Carson's work was so overwhelmingly popular that it catapulted ecological concerns into national and global politics. Conservation fell out of favor as advocates called for a more aggressive approach, lobbying for regulations intended to rectify large-scale environmental damage by limiting industrial pollution. When the US Environmental Protection Agency opened its doors in December 1970, their demands were formalized as political policy. Two years later environment became a significant arm of international governance when the UN created the United

Nations Environmental Programme. In contemporary Iraq, environment has become a form of governance intimately tied to the exercise of foreign political power.

Exile

This dissertation critically evaluates how exiles are “deeply implicated both ideologically and materially in nationalist projects of their homelands” (Werbner 2000:5). In 2003 Iraq exiles were not just deeply implicated in the nationalist project; they were setting the nationalist agenda. The dissertation demonstrates the diversity of opinion within Iraqi communities outside of Iraq. Iraqis did not unanimously agree that the marshes should be restored. Exiles who lived in the UK and the US were generally members of an Iraqi elite who never lived in the marshes but who visited them as children or for whom these wetlands may have been a refuge during years of repression. For them, restoring the area was the symbolic act of healing a wound opened when Saddam ordered mass executions of Shi’a and communists at the same time that he drained the marshlands. They conflated these two works of destruction in their narratives, as if the recuperation of one, the marshes, could dull the loss of the other, their friends and families. Second, marsh residents who fled to Iran in 1991 and had been living in refugee camps for more than a decade, where they benefited from economic and educational opportunities. These former residents spoke ambivalently about restoration and voiced doubt that in the marshes such opportunities would be available to them. The US noted that when a group of 20,000 refugees repatriated after 2003, they did not return to the marshes but resettled in Basra.⁷ Third, a number of marsh residents never left the country and were internally displaced in Iraq. Members of

⁷ Personal interview with Ed Theriot, Director, Interagency and International Services; Chief, North Atlantic & Gulf Region Division Regional Integration Team, US Army Corps of Engineers, October 29, 2004.

this community, largely the elders, wanted the area to be restored because they wanted to return to fishing as a means of earning income.⁸

It was Iraqi exiles who lived abroad in places like the US and the UK where they had access to power and resources who directed the restoration of the marshes. Many members of this group of exiles returned to Iraq to assume political positions in the nascent government or to form humanitarian organizations after the fall of Saddam. In addition to the formal charges brought against Saddam Hussein, the preamble of the new Iraqi constitution specifically cited the marshes and demonstrates how the area was seen as central to the recuperation of Iraq in general: “we went by the millions for the first time in our history to the ballot box...remembering the pains of the despotic band's sectarian oppression of the majority...inspired by the injustice against the holy cities in the popular uprising and against the marshes and other places” (Ratified October 15, 2005). Iraqi exiles aim to restore Chibayish, one marsh village, as a site for ecotourism where international visitors can “witness Iraq’s great civilization.”⁹ Preparing Iraq to re-enter the global arena involved creating national symbols of the past. Shryock points out that marketing “heritage” has become an important means by which countries of the Middle East, like Jordan, entice transnational visitors (2004). While exiles were interested in the humanitarian attention given marsh residents, for them restoration is less about this community, which is often discussed as “backward,” and more a project of constructing the aesthetics of a national past to provide a vision for the future (see Nakash 1994:47). In Egypt similar twentieth century projects demolished villages to rebuild them anew as model heritage zones for tourist economies (Mitchell 2002:188-192). In the process, Egypt marketed “tradition” for economic opportunity. The marshes are at the symbolic center of such debates concerning the reconstruction of Iraq.

⁸ Personal interview with Baroness Ema Nicholson, Founder and Director of AMAR Charitable Foundation advocating for the Iraqi marshes and member of EU Parliament, October 30, 2004.

⁹ Personal interview with Azzam Alwash, Director of Eden Again, October 30, 2004.

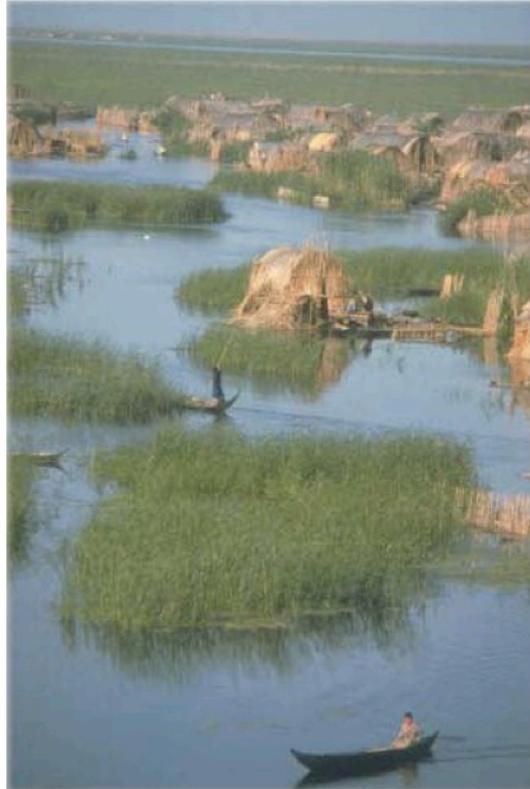


Figure 2: Iconic Nik Wheeler 1974 photo of Iraqi marsh¹⁰

Environment

Current anthropological inquiry on environment and nature follows two major trajectories: one, meditations on nonhuman lifeworlds and, two, consideration of conservation and biodiversity as forms of global political rule. While literature on the nonhuman seeks to ethnographically explore forms of biological life to re-evaluate understandings of life itself, anthropological engagement with conservation identifies the political and economic parameters within which environment was formed categorically and analyzes its effects locally and globally. This dissertation investigates environment at the crossroads of each of these approaches by analyzing emergent evaluations of life

¹⁰ Nik traveled to the Iraqi marshes in the 1970s to extensively photograph the region. His photos were initially circulated as testimony of marsh majesty by Iraqi exiles during early meetings with potential project investors and with media.

and by exploring the ways in which life is scientifically, politically, and economically specified. In so doing, it considers the effects of environmentalism for Iraq.

Anthropologists writing about nature in relationship to political economy argue that new technologies deepen the appropriation of nature (Coronil 2000:362) at a time when nature is redefined as capital (Coronil 2000:366). One way this appropriation occurs, Escobar writes, is through the rise of *technonature*, the mediation of nature by scientific technologies. Elements of nature, like plants, are isolated for their unique properties that are protected as global resources by biodiversity treaties. Biodiversity, Escobar notes, is a relatively new term, coined in the 1980s and instituted with the Rio Convention on Biological Diversity (2008:138-139). Anthropologists point out that international projects to protect “nature,” as biodiversity or through the conservation of whole habitats, are in and of themselves forms of governance and globalization (Hayden 2003:83; West, et al. 2006:265). Peluso argues that conservation has been a means by which states gain control over natural resources by wresting power from local populations to govern resource use (1993). Environment, these scholars assert, has become a way of governing the world through multilateral environmental regulations (Hayden 2003:83; Tsing 2005:270). As Iraq began to adjudicate environmental treaties, like the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, they initiated a process of opening the country to global protocols for the regulation and treatment of environment that would again bring foreign instruments of government into Iraqi territories.

The re-evaluation of life during Iraqi reconstruction is a project of crafting a new vision of the Iraqi nation that registered ecologically and which instituted new forms of citizenships and new configurations of sovereignty. Protected areas, West et. al suggest, matter because they are a way of seeing, understanding, and (re) producing the world. Citing Carrier and Miller, these scholars argue that protected areas are a form of “virtualism” that change the face of the earth by renaming places, drawing boundaries

around areas, and erasing boundaries between states (West, et al. 2006:256). As scientists worked in the marsh, they redefined elements of the wetland by counting and recording species of birds according to British ornithological conventions and recorded and identified plants in similar fashion. Protected areas, scholars state, impose Euro notions of nature onto the parts of the world identified as “nature” and “environment” and thus “have become a new cosmology of the natural—a way of seeing and being in the world that is now seen as just, moral and right” (West, et al. 2006:255). International organizations, like the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, re-organize the world in a neo-colonial fashion such that southern hemisphere environments are restructured to fit northern hemisphere externally imagined categories (West, et al. 2006:256).

In this process environment acts as a vehicle through which power is mobilized. Via environment, the political and economic values of G-8 nations are inculcated not in whole nations, but in ecological regions, in local conservation patches, that are connected to a global infrastructure of governance. As part of this process the constellation of political relationships encapsulated by “environment” “spreads around the world” (Tsing 2005:270). With regard to the Iraqi marsh restoration, one example of the ways “environment” encircles the globe is through activities like birding that connect local ecological hotspots regionally and internationally. Conservationists, Tsing affirms, use the appeal of birdwatching to make the case for protected areas (2005:138).

This dissertation demonstrates how conservation does indeed establish a kind of virtuality. A virtuality of the marshes that was not only metaphorical, but also quite literal as marsh advocates worked *virtually*—from the holograph to the ornithological guide to the national park—to access the wetlands. Distance enabled marsh administrators and experts to linger in the fantasy of Thesiger as they drafted the park’s design. Meanwhile these marsh advocates asked mid-level Iraqi ministerial employees and *Nature Iraq*

scientists conducting marsh fieldwork to recognize and interact with environment according to the standards of conservation science. Meetings in Sulaimaniya often involved Italian engineers, for example, instructing Iraqi ministries on how to conceive of a national park and how to establish educational and punitive mechanisms to protect marsh habitats.

Just as the marsh would reflect new governance, internationals trained their Iraqi colleagues to assume a citizenship aligned with these political ideals. Tsing asserts that the very concept of conservation, like the creation of a national park, involves a project of citizenship because it anticipates participants and visitors who would travel to experience a national “natural” wonder (2005:96). As Iraqis learned to plan the park, they were asked to adopt new subjectivities aligned with opening up the Iraqi economy. For example in pursuing the park, Iraqis at ministries learned the skills of international politics, of courting investors and vying for some control over the process. As Iraqi governmental employees and *Nature Iraq* scientists embodied the ideals of liberal citizenship, they became identified in Iraq as part of the occupation and were targeted by Iraqi militias in protest of foreign occupation.

Investors and environmentalists working on the marsh project encouraged Iraqis to take on a *cosmopolitan* citizenship (Kymlicka 2002:312) that connected them immediately with supranational or international institutions like the United Nations and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, foreign governments including the US, Italy, and Canada, and nongovernmental organizations like BirdLife International and *Nature Iraq*. Attention to citizenship prepared Iraqi leadership to integrate Iraq into global environmental apparatuses, from funding sources to treaties, and fulfilled the mandate of liberalizing the economy set forth by the United Nations Security Council governing post-war Iraq. Ong argues that government “increasingly depends on neoliberal calculation of worth, as individuals and populations become operable through

specific knowledges, techniques, and expertise” (2005:339). As foreign investors trained Iraqis to scientifically study and nationally govern the marsh, Iraqi citizenship did indeed become aligned with specific knowledges, techniques, and expertise. Rose and Novas coin the phrase “biological citizenship” to refer to the ways in which conceptions of citizenship have been linked to the biological existence of human beings (2005:440). Following this analogy, during the reconstruction era Iraqis involved in marsh restoration were asked to assume a citizenship that was connected to life, but it was ecology that was privileged in this formulation over and above the human. The cost of Iraqi marsh restoration was high, but foreign administrators and investors did not experience the violence directly. Marsh advocates did not bear the cost of working in fantasy or of implementing virtually; Iraqis did. As a result, the administrative apparatus pushed for restoration while international funds were available for Iraqi environmental conservation.

This dissertation considers the work that scientists, both Iraqi and foreign, did in the labs to quantify and analyze marsh restoration. There were two fundamental lab projects. The first was at the United Nations Environmental Programme in Geneva, Switzerland where UN scientists made remote sensing maps of the Iraq marsh. The second was at the *Nature Iraq* Baghdad headquarters where teams of Iraqi scientists would study the hydraulic and biological samples field scientists collected during field visits to the marsh. Those who worked in the lab were removed from the field. Latour asserts that labs are ultimate places of politics because their major role is to generate scientific facts. The power of the lab, he states, has to do with their remove from social life, in cordoning off analysis within an enclosed, isolated space (Latour 1999 [1983, abridged 1998]:271-272). In Geneva, scientists worried about the ramifications of their work for Iraqis, but they worked on Iraq from such a great distance, without first hand experience of the marsh, that the remote sensing map became the marsh they recognized. A lab, Knorr Cetina argues, is a virtual space (1999:35). Laboratories, she

writes, recast objects by inserting them into new temporal and territorial regimes (Knorr Cetina 1999:43). She defines labs as “*relational* units that gain power by instituting *differences* with their environment” both between the lab and everyday life and from one lab to another (Knorr Cetina 1999:44). In Geneva and in Baghdad, marsh scientists sought to quantify the marsh in ways that would make the ecosystem available for scientific analysis. In the labs, the marshes became a political object.

This dissertation argues that nature is at its core political. “Nature,” Williams writes, “is perhaps the most complex word in the language” (1985:219). He identifies three major areas of meaning: 1) the essential character or quality *of* something, 2) the inherent force which directs the world or human beings or both, and 3) the material world itself, including or excluding human beings. Within definitions 2 and 3, the reference is broad, precise meanings are variable, and sometimes even opposed. It is precisely this ambiguity that makes the concept of “nature” a political term. Latour stresses that nature and politics were formed in relation: “from the time the term ‘politics’ was invented, every type of politics has been defined by its relation to nature, whose every feature, property, and function depends on the polemical will to limit, reform, establish, short-circuit, or enlighten public life” (2004:1). Environmental advocacy neutralizes politics, he writes, because environmentalists work with a concept of “nature” that is already composed, totalized, and instituted (Latour 2004:3).

I amend Latour slightly to clarify that while the premise of environmentalism is a totalizing concept of nature, the movement is not neutralized but rather actively advances a political platform that concretizes global power in “altruistic” form. True critique of environment is only possible, Latour argues, with an interrogation of the processes of scientific production at the core of political ecology (2004:4). This dissertation analyzes scientific production both in the labs of Geneva where the UN ran a remote sensing project and in the fields of the marshes where *Nature Iraq* scientists

photographed and documented birds. At the same time, it demonstrates how the products of science, namely the marsh and its technological manifestations (e.g. bird data, satellite photos), serve as a basis for economic and political reform.

Anthropologists writing about nonhuman life or transspecies engagement evaluate life in new dimensions (Feldman N.D.; Helmreich 2009a; Helmreich 2009b; Kohn 2007; Paxson 2008; Raffles 2010; Tsing 2009). Donna Haraway's *Primate Visions* (1989) pioneered this field of inquiry by examining the relationship between primate studies, science, and forms of knowledge. Two prominent scholars of the field, Tsing and Raffles, began publishing on the topic while in Haraway's home department at UC Santa Cruz. Raffles' first book *In Amazonia* (2002) investigated the Amazonian environment as a field that was not only shaped by colonial exploration, but which actively shaped political life; it was a book that successfully engaged ecology as a living domain with its own force. Tsing similarly assessed ecology in her second book *Friction* (2005) in which she argued that it is the moments where global movements, from business to environmental, collide that political power gains new force and momentum.

As if on a similar trajectory, each of their new projects moves downscale from global engagement with ecology to small lifeforms. Tsing directs her inquiry to the matsutake mushroom, from the mushroom collectors in Pacific northwest forests to epicurean consumers at Michelin restaurants, to analyze supply chain economics (2009). Raffles turns to insects as a means of engaging the radical dehumanization of genocide (2007) and as a method for expanding understandings of life beyond the human, to demonstrate the complexity and vitality of insect worlds (2010). Raffles writes about high-altitude entomology: "at any given time on any given day throughout the year, the air column rising from 50 to 14,000 feet above one square mile of Louisiana countryside contained an average of 25 million insects and perhaps as many as 36 million. They found ladybugs at 6,000 feet during the daytime, striped cucumber beetles

at 3,000 feet during the night” (2010:7). His work elaborates the world of the insect and exposes new terrain for anthropological analysis.

Raffles is part of a movement in anthropology to push the boundaries of inquiry past common delimitations of fieldwork. Helmreich, studying marine microbiologists, asserts “For marine microbiologists, the ocean teems with newly discovered life forms” (2009a:6). His work engages life forms as “those embodied bits of vitality called *organisms*” (2009a:6). Turning to the ocean, Helmreich expands understandings of life and contextualizes human experience in relation to scientific exploration of the oceanic worlds. Paxson, who studies the bacteria in cheese, calls for work on *microbiopolitics* to address the creation of microscopic biological agents and their evaluation in relation to human practices (2008:17). Battaglia pushes scholars to move beyond the terrestrial by directing ethnographic inquiry toward outer space (2009). Together these scholars recalibrate ethnographic scale, introduce subjects of inquiry, and open up a methodology for research that engages global power as it coheres in biological registers. At their most basic level, they reconceptualize what counts as the anthropological “field.”

This dissertation draws inspiration from this recent scholarly engagement on life and similarly turns toward an investigation of holographic frontiers of atmosphere opened by remote sensing technologies. At the same time, however, the dissertation investigates scientific invention as part of a wartime initiative; the violence that I write about not only concerns how science apprehends its objects, but also about the life and death cost of scientific exploration during wartime. Unlike other texts in the anthropology of life, this dissertation considers the politicization of life in an active conflict zone where human survival was a daily mission and death an ever-present reality. In the context of my work, it was essential to account for the human. To focus on the ecological would have played into a global environmental myopia that favored the life of the marsh.

Each of these works in the anthropology of life is politically motivated, but in turning their attention to ecological life and by concentrating on revision of ethnographic scale, the details of how ecologies are politicized and the consequences for the people who live within them are left ambiguous. These scholars attempt to address what could be perceived as the over-determination of political economy by academics writing about conservation and nature as forms of global governance. They explore nonhuman ecologies as an ethnographic subject, rather than an object of investigation. To examine the marshes, this dissertation draws upon such works to investigate emerging life forms in reconstruction Iraq, but turns back toward political economy to demonstrate the effects of this shift for Iraqis immediately involved in the project. In so doing, the dissertation demonstrates that the politicization of life in Iraq through environmental reform produced new arrangements of sovereignty. Agamben writes that every politicization of life necessarily imposes new standards of evaluation to determine which lifeforms were expendable. Every society, he states, decides who that sacred man is (1998:139). My dissertation demonstrates that the sacred life in question wasn't human, but ecological. "The ultimate expression of sovereignty," Membe asserts, "resides, to a large degree, in the power and capacity to dictate who may live and who must die" (2003:11).¹¹ In the case of Iraq marsh restoration, the sovereign was undoubtedly the cohort of foreign experts, businesses, humanitarians, and governments collaborating to rescue a dying ecology at a time when Iraqis perished daily.

Expertise, Humanitarianism, and War

In his formulation of sovereignty Agamben asserts that humanitarianism objectifies human life. Citing the example of the Rwandan refugee who imploringly stares in posters, Agamben argues that humanitarianism resolutely separates the

¹¹ See also (Agamben 1998:142).

concept of the refugee as a second category of person (1998:134). In so doing, the life of the refugee is defined as an object of aid; the refugee is dehumanized. Fassin writes that humanitarianism actualizes a “politics of life” through its mandate to save individual lives (2007:501). He asserts that at the basis of this politics is the fact that humanitarians will play a role in deciding which lives may be risked and which may be saved. They are endowed with unique power in the evaluation of life. As humanitarian intervention has become a dominant component in the response to war and conflict, a kind of humanitarian government, defined by the introduction of morality into politics, is emerging at both the local and global levels (Fassin 2007:508; Feldman 2007:131; Stoler 2006). In 2003 Iraq everything from the provisional government to military operations to the regulation of nongovernmental organizations and private businesses fell under the mandate of the United Nations Security Council Resolutions. Humanitarianism was quite literally a form of Iraqi governance. Through projects like marsh restoration, their role was to introduce a code of ethics into Iraqi government. Environmentalists, under the terms set forth in international conventions, were grouped under the rubric of humanitarianism as well. Though their response prioritized the environment, their non-combat efforts shared the moral goal of protecting life with other humanitarian operations in “post-conflict” Iraq. Unique about *Nature Iraq* was their focus on rehabilitating an environment, not to meet any immediate public sector demands like clean water or functional sewage systems, which were the criteria of other aid and development projects in the humanitarian sector, but to revive a wetland as a conservation area and a tourist destination at a time when even those working on the project could not safely visit the area. When asked why they moved forward with such a future-oriented project, Azzam and other administrators would reply that the money was available now, i.e., during the period of concentrated violence, when Iraq captured the attention of potential investors. The circumstances of marsh investment raise questions

about the motivation of humanitarian aid: if the project would not have benefits in the present, why move forward?

Traditional formulations of humanitarian–state relations are organized in what Ferguson identifies as a “topography of power” (2006:90). Here the state is imagined as occupying the highest slot on the vertical index with the family at the lowest point and civil society in between (Ferguson 2006:92). Under this model, development is seen as societal progress, limited only by the state (Ferguson 2006:97). In Iraq, as elsewhere, transnational organizations bypassed the state by connecting to the local directly (see Ferguson 2006:111). Marsh advocates, including foreign governments, funneled money and expertise into Iraq through *Nature Iraq*, the NGO that had the ability to connect them directly to the marsh. At a time of radical instability at all levels of Iraqi society, *Nature Iraq* and its investors worked to side-step the insecurity of the present through international conventions and treaties that offered protection for the marsh ecosystem globally and which, even if nonbinding, would be difficult for the Iraqi government to break without raising international protest. *Nature Iraq* involved Iraqi ministries responsible for environment, water resources, and conservation areas in restoration in order to attain their approval and win their cooperation in the pursuit of treaties, in the allocation of resources (like water) to the ecosystem, and in the planning of the national park. The NGO’s relationship with Iraqi ministries was less collaborative than it was advisory. *Nature Iraq* formulated plans for the marsh and presented them to ministries as a formality; the plans were completed documents that could be revised, but not dramatically altered.

Unsurprisingly, given the future-oriented nature of the project and the physical constraints under which the team worked, *Nature Iraq*’s efforts did not have noticeable effects on the ecosystem or for communities living in the region. Recent reports indicate that areas of the marsh are drying yet again due to water shortages (Flintoff March 9,

2009; Robertson July 13, 2009), a factor beyond the organization's influence. Ferguson argues that even failed development projects create important structural change (1994:275). When viewed in these terms, the marsh restoration project was a success: while it might not have produced visible changes in the marsh, it facilitated the introduction of foreign businesses, humanitarians, and governments in Iraq for the first time in decades; where classes in ecology may have been overly simplified, it started a series of educational training programs for Iraqi employees and ministerial colleagues that effectively imparted lessons of citizenship; and where the organization may have yet to build the national park, Iraq successfully signed on to the Ramsar Convention for the protection of wetlands and launched a well-received campaign at UNESCO to make the marshes a World Heritage Site. More than any other achievement, *Nature Iraq's* chief success was in assembling a collaborative network of environmental organizations, governments, and businesses that ensured the project would be flush with cash. These transnational alliances around the marsh project did not constitute a government, but it defined a global system that would govern Iraq (see Ferguson 2006:100). In the mid-1990s Escobar identified that discourses of development produced the "Third World" (1995:4) by creating abnormalities it would treat or reform (1995:41). In reconstruction era Iraq, environment produced relations of political power that privileged globalized foreign governance.

In light of the project's limitations to effect change in the marsh, what made the project so pressing during wartime? I assert that the popularity of marsh restoration had to do with its broad appeal, it was a "feel-good" story when there wasn't much good news to report out of Iraq, and the fact that the project fit the parameters of economic and political reform in Iraq set out by the United Nations, the US Government, and the Coalition Provisional Authority. Mitchell writes that in the twentieth century, the economy became the most important set of practices for separating the real world from its

representations, things from values, actions from intentions, the object world and the realm of ideas (2002:6). In much the same way that academics write about environment, he argues that the idea of economy provided a mode of seeing and a way of organizing the world (Mitchell 2002:272). Instrumental to the power of economy was a politics of techno-science; the expertise of modern engineering, technology, and social science marshaled to “improve the defects of nature, to transform peasant agriculture, to repair the ills of society, and to fix the economy” (Mitchell 2002:15). Expert knowledge worked to format social relations, never simply to report or picture them (Mitchell 2002:118). Mitchell argues that for many postcolonial governments (like Iraq), the ability to rearrange the natural and social environment, through projects like damming, demonstrated the strength of the state as a techno-economic power (2002:21). This dissertation shows the expertise of techno-science continues to be an important means by which political power is exercised and revealed.

During the time of marsh draining and continuing into the period of restoration, what appeared as “nature” was, as Mitchell claims, already shaped by forms of power, technology, expertise, and privilege (2002:210). Scholarship on nature in political-economy emphasizes the human, but Mitchell demonstrates the importance of non-human experience when he analyzes how damming projects on the Nile created conditions favorable for the mosquito to jump river systems. The result was the introduction of malaria to communities previously unaffected. Mitchell’s analysis offers a means by which to bridge anthropological approaches to environment by materially contextualizing the nonhuman, demonstrating how lifeforms are intercepted by science, and by analyzing their local and regional effects. As Mitchell asserts in relationship to twentieth century projects of expertise: “Nature was not the cause of changes taking place, it was the outcome” (2002:35). The reflooded Iraq marsh provided the clearest picture of anticipated political change.

To think through the connections between seemingly unrelated processes in Iraq like the relationships of humanitarianism, war, environmental rehabilitation, and the liberalization of the economy, Mitchell's call to attend to *circuits* of political power is especially helpful (2002:33). In Iraq, alliances between environmentalists, governments, and private businesses acted in relation to the marsh. In the process they confirmed the political power of this network to reform Iraq according to their political ideals. This dissertation demonstrates that the global is not an aspect of "late modern informational aesthetics" (Riles 2000:20) but an assemblage of moral, political, and economic institutions that together comprised a sovereign power.

At the same time that the UN and the provisional Iraqi government rigorously pursued the liberalization of the Iraqi economy during the "post-conflict" period, the country entered its most violent period of intensified conflict. This dissertation differs from other anthropological accounts of war and conflict in that it addresses an environmental project pursued during wartime. In so doing, the dissertation concentrates on exiles, environmentalists, foreign governments, and private contractors working on reconstruction and not on combat specifically. Several war ethnographies focus on the personal and collective experience of conflict from life in war-torn communities (Finnström 2008; Nordstrom 1997), to the trauma and violence of conflict (Daniel 1996; Malkki 1995), to the creation of illicit economies (Nordstrom 2004; Nordstrom 2007), to proud memories of participation in rebellions and wars (Cooke 1996; Swedenburg 2003). Scholars of science and technology studies in anthropology and history move away from everyday experience to explore expertise by analyzing the relationship of nuclear production in weapons labs (Gusterson 1998) and nuclear power in relationship to national cosmologies (Hecht 1998; Masco 2006). Students of mediation, inspired perhaps by Baudrillard (1995), assess combat as another reality: that of the televisual media war (Der Derian 2001). Like the Science and Technology Studies scholars, I

study elites inside and outside of Iraq—from returning Iraqi exiles and foreign nationals investing in Iraq to the Iraqi scientists employed by *Nature Iraq*. My engagement with the war in Iraq takes shape around the peripheries of combat, primarily in Amman and in Sulaimaniya, where foreign national environmentalists and experts working for governments, businesses, and nongovernmental organizations worked to plan marsh restoration from within the industry of post-conflict reconstruction. It was an industry that included temporary UN compounds, ringed in razor wire and cordoned off by cement blast barriers, in different Amman neighborhoods and international nongovernmental organizations that ran reconstruction operations out of Amman apartments doubling as dorm-like staff residences. My ethnography concerns “post-conflict” operations in this elsewhere Iraq. By conducting an ethnography of those who worked on, but did not visit the marsh, I demonstrate how Iraq became the lab for which wartime technologies were perfected for distanced humanitarian and environmental intervention.

This dissertation investigates war and environment as interrelated fields. Edwards (1996; n.d.) and Masco (February 2010) have both argued that, beyond the treaties that regulate environment in wartime, this relationship has been long-standing. The science enabling the US nuclear arsenal produced unintended byproducts, Masco argues, in that they generated heavy investment in the earth sciences. Military interest in technologies of surveillance like remote sensing, which enable war strategists to obtain high resolution images of earth (including details of human and plant life) from space satellites, sparked quick innovation in instruments that earth scientists found useful in tracking climate change by surveying changes across broad swaths of territory like the arctic glaciers. Since 1945, Masco asserts, there have been two major ideas of planetary crisis: nuclear war and climate change (February 2010:7). By producing a vision of the globe as an integrated political, technological, and environmental space, the cold war nuclear project enabled a new vision of the planet as an integrated biosphere (Masco

February 2010:9). Of the two crises, Masco writes that the nuclear state privileged response to military threat over that posed by a fragile biosphere (February 2010:17). In Iraq, where restoring the marsh ecosystem was prized, this was not the case. This dissertation demonstrates that it was the rhetoric of ecological revival that enabled investors to make economic and political changes, such as increasing foreign investment in and direction of national environmental policy, in line with the established UN mandate of Iraq's liberalization. Hecht writes of the nuclear program in France that: "Industrial, scientific, and technological development would not only rebuild the nation's economy but also restore France to its place as a world leader" (Hecht 1998:2). Similarly marsh advocates, including the governments and supranational organizations that supported them, saw investment in scientific and technological development for ecological revival as an important step in restoring Iraq's global esteem.

By working in the surround of war, i.e., in the conglomerate of humanitarian and environmental organizations working on Iraq from afar, my approach to war is one that elaborates a concept of distance. Anthropologists and scholars working on distance have done so primarily through the lens of science and technology studies with inquiries into the concept of reality (Baudrillard 1994; Latour 1999) and ethnographies of the virtual (Boellstorff 2008; Der Derian 2001). My work challenges the Baudrillardian hyperreal (1994:2) by demonstrating that the business of environmentalism had its own specific locations and geography that maintained a continuous partial reference to the ground in Iraq (see Boellstorff 2008). Much of my own work resonates with Der Derian's analysis (2001) of the ways in which virtual technologies enabling distance, such as remote sensing, obscure the mortality of the human body; but I do not dwell in the virtual alone. As much as this dissertation elaborates the materiality of distance, from the conferences to the international travel, it also analyzes the experience of Iraqi scientists working in Baghdad and in the marshes. This dual approach facilitates an ethnography

of wartime distance that considers the effects both inside and outside of Iraq. Finnström writes that increasingly wars are fought in which perpetrators of violence are unseen and unidentifiable because weapons are deployed through technologies of air, vehicles, landmines (2008:208). I consider the invisibilities of conflict in a different way in my analysis of the wartime violence of environmentalism whereby foreign investors sought to restore a marsh by asking Iraqis to risk their lives on behalf of ecological revival. Eagleton asserts that the ultimate binding force of bourgeois social order is the habits, pieties, sentiments, and affections such that power is aestheticized (1990:20). The restored marsh is exactly this kind of aestheticized regime, for the violence of the project is rooted in the prioritization of the sentiment of the marsh as not only a moral and ethical space but also as a space of nostalgia over and above the integrity of Iraqi human life. The political power of Iraq's new government and the ideals by which it ruled—freedom, equality, and morality—would be clearly pictured in the image of the restored marsh. The result was a radical inequality of life whereby foreign investors heavily promoted ecological life at the same time that they asked Iraqis to compromise their own lives to carry out the project. In the last three years, this experiment of distance that began in Iraq, and which so dramatically revalued life, became a paradigm for military and humanitarian involvement in conflict areas throughout the Middle East and South Asia. In other words, it became the paradigm for establishing sovereign foreign political power in conflict zones.

The Marshes

Marsh communities were organized genealogically into large ruling confederations with a separate system of justice, political power, and land ownership that did not fit neatly into the dynamics of arising Mesopotamian and Iraqi polities. Autonomous as they were, communities were historically connected regionally and

globally through ties of commerce, tourism, and religious pilgrimage (to Shi'a sites and centers of scholarship).

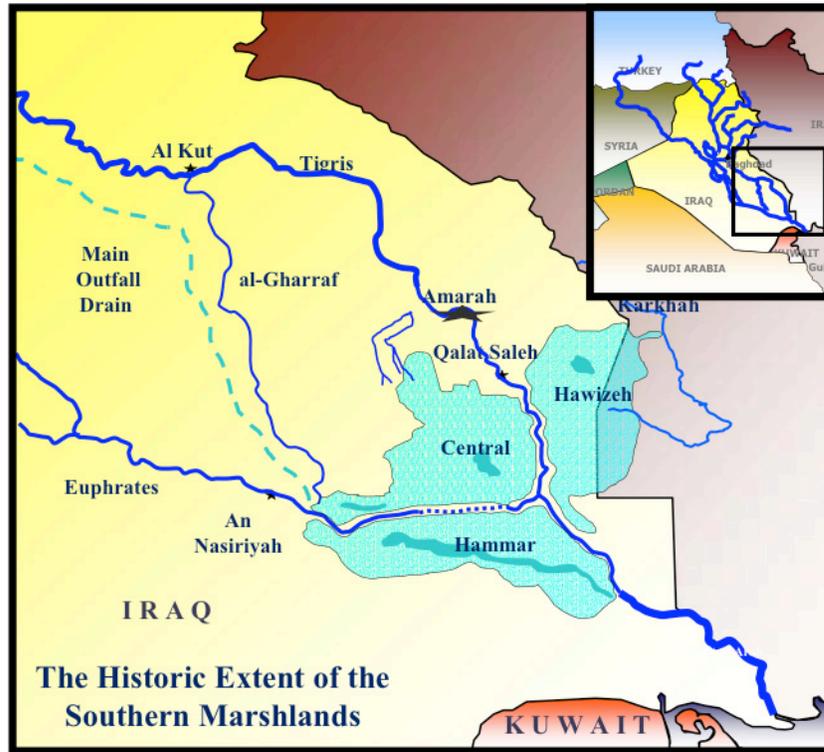


Figure 3: Map of the Iraqi marshes¹²

Geographically, the Iraqi marshes are a system of three primary and interlocking wetlands—the Central, the Hawizeh, and the Hammar—in the southern part of Iraq. The marshes take form from the surplus waters of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers at their merging point into the Shatt al-Arab that directed these riparian waters through the river's mouth and out into the Persian Gulf. The marshes were seasonal: their size fluctuated as runoff from the northern melting snows and periodic rains swelled the river capacity. At its largest extent in the early 1970s, the marsh was a 15,000 to 20,000 square kilometer ecosystem. For comparison, the Iraqi marsh expanse was roughly equivalent to the area of New Jersey and was three times larger than the Florida

¹² (US Aid April 2004)

Everglades National Park.¹³ Average temperatures range from between 55 degrees Fahrenheit in the winter months and well over 100 degrees Fahrenheit at its hottest in summer months.¹⁴



Figure 4: Aerial view of marsh homes on individually constructed islands

The marshes are geographically diverse. Some parts of the marsh are overtaken by 15-foot reedbeds, traversable only by narrow cut channels that permit navigation only by small vessels like canoes. In other areas marsh reed vistas open into expanses of still water. Some parts of the former marsh are salt-encrusted fields of dried land and still others are agricultural fields. But the most popular marsh reference is the image of still water speckled with small reed islands that support individual marsh homes. The

¹³ According to year 2000 statistics, the land area of New Jersey is 7,417.34 square miles. See: <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/34000.html> The Florida Everglades National Park gross area acres are, in October 2009, 1,399,078.26 or approximately 2,186 square miles. See: <http://www.everglades.national-park.com/info.htm#size>

¹⁴ See the CIA World Factbook. Under the category “Environment -- current issues” there is a paragraph exclusively about the destruction of the Iraqi marshes. Even the CIA had the marshes on their radar. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.html>

photograph above is a perfect example.¹⁵ It's an image that lends to the utopian ideal of the marsh; one in which people lived off the land in structures fashioned from mud and reed, on islands that supported livestock like chickens and buffalo alongside the families who husbanded them. This ideal image features marsh residents making their way in handmade boats, known as *mashuf*, guided by a standing attendant who poled them across the marsh expanse.

Foreign visitors and returning exiles described residents as living a life close to the land without phones, Internet, or motorized vehicles of any kind. Commonly, foreign writers refer to people living in the marsh as "Marsh Arabs," a moniker denoting a brutish but honorable group. These accounts conveniently ignore the cell phones and motorboats that marsh residents use. They acknowledge but downplay the host of diseases, including bilharzias, to which residents of the marsh are uniquely vulnerable. Exile memories selectively ignore the mosquitoes, the scorching heat, and the isolation of marsh life. The marshes and the people who inhabit them are, by these accounts, simply from another time (see Fabian 1983; Trouillot 1991).

Iraq Marsh Historiography

Historically, restructuring Iraq was tied to the marshes and to waves of land reform implemented by the Ottomans, the British, and the Ba'ath party to refigure the landscape. This initiative, they believed, ensured that the country's physical compartment would reflect particular visions of statehood, production, and modernity (Tripp 2000). Though Saddam Hussein is famous for draining the marshes to a fraction of their original size, the Ottomans and British too thought this was essential to Iraq's entrée into the global economy, and each developed plans to drain them. Given this history it is not surprising that the marshes have again become central to politically

¹⁵ This photograph by Nik Wheeler was likely taken in 1974 when he was on assignment in the Iraqi marshes for *National Geographic*.

restructuring Iraq. The state of Iraq was born in the wake of massive land reforms undertaken by the Ottoman Empire in the middle of the nineteenth century. These were anxious times for imperial powers with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and the transformation of rivers into international trade routes (Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett 1983:493). By conducting property reform the Ottomans sought to harness the territories of what is now Iraq to a centralized authority, thereby paving the way for its development as a modern nation-state, an agricultural power, and a global trading partner. The campaign of land reform was designed to restructure tribal confederations by permanently settling them in fixed territories, thereby altering kinship structures and cultural practices of regional movement (Dodge 2003; Tripp 2000).

In the midst of reform the Ottomans commissioned a British officer, Sir William Willcocks, to survey the irrigation potential of the southern province. Willcocks suggested water from the marshlands could provide the much needed resource for making large tracts of land fertile and ripe for commercial agricultural production (1912). Eden, he argued, would be possible again only by developing an irrigation infrastructure to support lush gardens and fields. For Willcocks, Eden was not understood to be the marshes themselves. Rather, Eden was what could be *produced* from water siphoned from the marshes to transform neighboring dry lands into fields of agricultural prosperity and imperial wealth.

Willcocks' survey was followed in 1951 by a study prepared for Iraq's Irrigation Development Commission by British engineer Fred Haigh. Haigh's report is now recognized as that which provided the framework leading to the reclamation of the marshlands (UNEP and Hassan Partow 2001:33). Construction on the Main Outfall Drain (MOD) began in 1953 in an attempt to increase agricultural production in Iraq. Work continued in a piecemeal fashion for a time, but as the project progressed during

the 1970s and '80s focus shifted from irrigation to a more ambitious project of draining the marshes themselves (UNEP and Hassan Partow 2001:34).

Still, it was not until 1991 following the Intifadah that the most ambitious and aggressive campaign of draining the marshes began (Human Rights Watch 2003b; Tripp 2000). On March 7th 1991 what had been sporadic and spontaneous civil unrest became a concentrated internal demonstration of opposition to the state. The movement began in the region of the Iraqi marshes. Iran, the US and some of its Arab allies, as well as Iraqi opposition groups in exile encouraged the uprising and sought to use the growing disorder in Iraq to achieve their own goals (Nakash 1994:275). Within weeks Saddam isolated centers of resistance and regained control of virtually all cities and towns in southern Iraq. Whatever anti-government fighting continued following the repression took the form of guerrilla warfare confined mainly to the marsh areas (Nakash 1994:276). The government crushed the insurrection by summarily executing, torturing, and detaining large numbers of people, many of them Shi'a. Perceiving the marshes as a threat to the stability of his government, Saddam launched a massive campaign to drain them.

His handiwork was nothing short of a massive engineering feat. Engineers erected an elaborate system of dams and dikes that siphoned waters into the Main Outfall Drain, funneling them into the Gulf. The team cut river channels ceremonially named "Mother of Battles River" and "Fidelity to the Leader Canal" in a statist campaign of territorial retribution. As the waters retreated, what was wetland became arid, barren, and dry. By 2003 a small portion of the ecosystem remained (approximately 5,790 to 7,722 square miles).¹⁶ Thousands of Shi'a from the south and about 40,000 marsh

¹⁶ "The Central and Al Hammar marshlands have completely collapsed with respectively 97% and 94% of their land cover transformed into bare land and salt crusts, while less than a third of the transboundary Hawr Al Hawizeh/Al Azim remains." UNEP. 2001. *The Mesopotamian Marshes: Demise of an Ecosystem*. Geneva: UNEP/ DEWA/ GRID, p. ix.

residents fled the country for Iran as the violence continued (Human Rights Watch 2003b).

The Future of Iraq Project

Tom Warwick at the US Department of State began recruiting Iraqi exiles for the Future of Iraq Project in October 2001. His exhaustive efforts brought together over 200 Iraqi exiles (including lawyers, doctors, engineers, businesspeople, and other experts) from around the world to consult the US government on post-war Iraq. Warwick organized this diverse crew into a system of seventeen working groups structured around various topics like public health and humanitarian needs, transitional justice, local government, and civil society. Azzam and his father, a once prominent irrigation engineer in Iraq, participated in the working group on water, agriculture, and environment. The *Future of Iraq Project* met thirty-three times between July 2002 and early April 2003, and produced a 1200 page, thirteen-volume report full of recommendations for post-war planning. The recommendations were never implemented. Instead under the National Security Presidential Directive 24 signed into law on January 20, 2003 the Department of Defense's Office of Humanitarian and Reconstruction Assistance (ORHA), to be later replaced by the CPA in May 2003, pushed aside the Department of State and took responsibility for post-war policy (The National Security Archive September 1, 2006; Woodward 2006). Jay Garner replaced Tom Warwick as the architect of Iraqi reconstruction and Warwick returned from Iraq to his desk at the Reagan Building in Washington, D.C. (Packer 2005). Even though their recommendations were never implemented, the Future of Iraq Project solidified a network of prominent Iraqis who continue to collaborate today. Azzam Alwash has been able to use his connections to former Iraqi exiles, who later assumed governmental positions in Iraq like Barham Salih (the former Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq and current

Prime Minister of Kurdistan) and Ayad Allawi (the former interim Iraqi Prime Minister and leader of the Iraqi National Accord) to bolster his organization and gain access to Iraqi ministries and resources.

Coalition of the Willing

The UN Security Council did not officially sanction the 2003 Iraq war. Instead, to pursue the war without UN approval, the US government assembled a “Coalition of the Willing” that included a critical mass of nations in support of the war effort. The concept had first been invoked by Bill Clinton in June 1994 when he used the term to describe how he would pursue sanctions he wanted to impose on North Korea that the UN Security Council would not officially authorize. In Iraq the US-led “Coalition” formed the Multi-National Forces-Iraq (MNF-I) to take military action against Saddam Hussein’s government in the absence of UN peacekeeping troops. The United Nations and other humanitarian organizations only entered Iraq to oversee and initiate “post-conflict” reconstruction. These governmental details set in motion a complicated political relationship of foreign governments, humanitarians, and private business invested in Iraq war and its aftermath.

When on May 1, 2003 President Bush stood on the U.S.S. Lincoln and declared “mission accomplished” he officially ended the Iraq war. What followed was a powerful denial of war in which escalating conflict in Iraq was not identified as warfare but “sectarian violence.” This denial, fraught with moral, political, and economic complications and complicities, structured humanitarian, corporate, and political relationships with Iraq from that point forward. Since the President had publicly terminated the war, the UN and other relief organizations, mandated to recognize US policy, could not engage the country as an active war zone. The onus for continuing violence was thus on Iraqis; US responsibility for any sustained battle ended aboard the

U.S.S. Lincoln. The President described the involvement of remaining US troops as a presence enlisted to preserve the peace and assist in reconstruction (Murphy May 1, 2003). The Allied war now over, the UN and the wider humanitarian community entered Iraq to mobilize “post-conflict” operations. The “mission accomplished” mantra inaugurated an era of “mission accomplished” economics. Iraq, no longer defined as a war zone, became a new frontier for investors.

President Bush stated:

In the Battle of Iraq, the United States and our allies have prevailed. And now our coalition is engaged in securing and reconstructing that country...Operation Iraqi Freedom was carried out with a combination of precision and speed...From distant bases or ships at sea, we sent planes and missiles that could destroy an enemy division or strike a single bunker...With new tactics and precision weapons, we can achieve military objectives without directing violence against civilians. No device of man can remove the tragedy from war, yet it is a great advance when the guilty have far more to fear from war than the innocent (ABC News May 1, 2003).

Notably, the President credited new technologies as having made it possible for armed forces to launch combat remotely in contemporary warfare. *Distance* was a military strategy for a more humane war.

The UN and other humanitarian organizations entered Iraq to launch reconstruction projects under the permission of the UN Security Council which issued resolutions annually to legally sanction their role in post-war Iraq and the continued presence of the Multinational Force-Iraq in the country.¹⁷ Under the terms of the resolution the UN staff could conduct business in Iraq, with the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) coordinating all UN efforts, but had to travel with an MNF-I escort whenever leaving the UN compound.¹⁸ Furthermore, the resolutions gave military operations a mandate to also provide direct aid and humanitarian relief to Iraqi civilians.

¹⁷ The first of the series was UN Resolution 1483 issued on May 22, 2003 (United Nations Security Council May 22, 2003) which officially ended sanctions and gave the US and its allies a broad mandate to work in Iraq.

¹⁸ UN Resolution 1500 issued on August 14, 2003 (United Nations Security Council August 14, 2003) established UNAMI and outlined the conditions of their mandate and operation in Iraq.

This blurring of the lines between humanitarian and military operations created considerable confusion on the part of Iraqis who commonly came to see the two as one joint occupation venture.

After an initial period as the *Eden Again* project of the Iraq Foundation, *Nature Iraq* split off and became an Iraqi registered NGO. As an Iraqi NGO, the group was not beholden to the same laws governing other NGOs operating in Iraq. Instead, *Nature Iraq* capitalized on its Iraqi status, but used its connections with foreign governments, international donors, and global experts to build an organization that could claim Iraqi indigeneity when needed but capitalize on broader recourses and access greater political power. Organizational headquarters in Baghdad were in the same neighborhood as international embassies and nongovernmental organizations that had moved into Iraq during the reconstruction era. In Iraq, despite the formal registration, many viewed the NGO as part of foreign occupation and some still remembered its previous ties with the Iraq Foundation.¹⁹

In the first year of reconstruction the US government and the CPA issued restrictions on private investment in Iraq. On December 10, 2003 Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz announced that the US Pentagon would ban companies in countries that did not support the war from bidding on reconstruction contracts (BBC News December 10, 2003). While countries like Canada, France, Germany, and Russia who did not support the war could win subcontracts, they were prohibited from bidding on contracts outright. This decision was deeply concerning for government sponsors of *Nature Iraq's* marsh restoration initiative, as Canada was among their principal investors. MSNBC reported "Canada's deputy prime minister, John Manley, said Wednesday that the decision would make it "difficult for us to give further money for the reconstruction of

¹⁹ The Iraq Foundation was directly linked to the Bush Administration. It's director, Rend al-Rahim, was one of the three Iraqi exiles called to the White House to speak to President George W. Bush prior to the 2003 war.

Iraq.” Canadian officials said the country, which did not send troops to Iraq, had contributed \$225 million thus far” (December 11, 2003). Countries, like Canada, that heavily financed humanitarian missions anticipated playing a role in private investments. This was true for Italy which, as a Coalition member, could win contracts and leveraged its support for the Iraqi marsh restoration project to gain connections to Iraqi ministries and regional governing bodies in order to bid on private infrastructure contracts (BBC News December 11, 2003).

When Paul Bremer arrived in Iraq on May 12, 2003, he suspended Garner’s initial efforts to form an interim Iraqi government. It wasn’t until mid-July that the Iraqi Governing Council, the interim government composed of exiles and Iraqi politicians selected by the US government, had its first meeting. During the two months in between, Bremer disbanded the Iraqi army and began ruling almost entirely by fiat, by executive order in what became popularly known as Bremer’s 100 orders (LeMoine and Neumann 2006:78; Scahill 2007:132). On May 16, 2003 Bremer issued order number one: de-Baathification (Ricks 2006:160). Seven days later order number two disbanded the Iraqi army. The combination of these three early moves—suspending the formation of a temporary Iraqi government, de-Baathification, and disbanding the Iraqi army—resulted in immediate widespread looting throughout the country that created major disturbances in the electrical grid and in water and sewage networks. Four months later, the results were even more disastrous.

On the May day Bremer disbanded the army, UN convened first major international meeting on marsh restoration in Geneva. In August, Azzam Alwash returned to Iraq for the first time in decades in order to lead marsh restoration under the auspices of what was then an Iraq Foundation sponsored project, *Eden Again*, and which would become the Iraqi-registered NGO, *Nature Iraq*. By the end of Azzam’s first month in Iraq, Iraqi insurgents protested foreign occupation by bombing the UN

Headquarters in Baghdad. The explosion buried top UN Envoy, Sergio Vieira de Mello, who died from his injuries. The United Nations and international NGOs relocated their operational headquarters to Amman, Jordan and administered humanitarian and environmental projects from a distance. Like the armaments of war President Bush had so proudly recognized for their capacity to pinpoint targets, the nongovernmental response to Iraq was designed to protect the lives of foreign nationals. Their effectiveness depended on teams of Iraqi colleagues they employed for their mobility. By virtue of GPS, international organizations could direct Iraqis to specific locations to deliver aid or repair water networks. As they did so, Iraqis were asked to take on increasing amounts of risk to sustain humanitarian and environmental projects.

Well after the international retreat, Azzam stayed in Baghdad to run *Nature Iraq* and build its program. He maintained an office in Amman where his American administrator coordinated part of their operation, but major work continued in Baghdad where Azzam and his Iraq senior staff were building the NGO and assembling a scientific team of Iraqis to conduct field visits to the marshes. After acting as Ayad Allawi's campaign manager for his unsuccessful bid to retain the post of Prime Minister in January 2005, Azzam began to encounter difficulties living in Iraq. Colleagues like Barham Salih, who became the Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq in April 2006, warned Azzam that he could no longer safely travel to the marshes. By the early summer of 2006, threats intensified such that Azzam feared he would be subject to kidnapping or worse. Through his contacts in the Green Zone he surreptitiously left Baghdad for Amman, entrusting day-to-day operations of *Nature Iraq* to his two Iraqi senior staff members. From August 2006 to June 2007, Azzam ran the organization from Amman where he lived with his American wife and daughters. In January 2007, Azzam accepted the temporary position of overseeing construction on the American University of Iraq-Sulaimaniya campus and hiring the school's chancellor in exchange for Deputy Prime

Minister of Iraq Barham Salih's and President Jalal Talabani's support for relocating *Nature Iraq* headquarters to Sulaimaniya. The move enabled Azzam to work directly with organizational scientific staff once again, but he never returned to Iraq full time. Like the humanitarian projects, *Nature Iraq* administered the marsh from afar.

Special Interest Swamp

Some in American government contested the way the Iraqi marshes had been positioned politically as the justification of war. On January 25, 2004 David Kay, the former CIA chief weapons inspector, announced that the US government was wrong in its pre-war belief that Iraq had stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction (see Clarke 2004).²⁰ In response, US Congress asked the President to provide a list of reasons why he believed war in Iraq was essential despite weak evidence of illicit weapons stockpiles. In March 2004 President George W. Bush cited the marshes as a rationale for war. What followed was Congressional Resolution 564, which cited the destruction of the Iraqi marshes as a crime warranting US removal of Saddam Hussein from office.²¹ On the Congressional floor, Nancy Pelosi challenged this logic, asserting:

When I say that this resolution is in denial about why we went into the war, of course it mentions nothing about weapons of mass destruction, but it does mention that Saddam Hussein drained the Arab marsh, causing an ecological disaster. Did my colleagues realize that that was the reason that we went to war,

²⁰ Clarke was the former National Coordinator for Counterterrorism at the National Security Council made famous when he publicly disagreed with the Bush Administration's dismissal of his suggestion that Al Qaeda constituted a national security threat prior to 9/11 and with the Administration's claims that the Government of Iraq harbored weapons of mass destruction. Clarke testified before the 9/11 Commission on March 24, 2004. By the time Clarke testified, he was a media celebrity who had repeatedly made headlines in national news media in the months leading up to his testimony including an interview with Leslie Stahl for 60 Minutes (Leung March 21, 2004). The charge of faulty US intelligence about Iraq's weapons capabilities was the topic of public outcry well before Congress called the President to account for his decision to go to war in Iraq.

²¹ Resolution 564 stated: "Whereas the regime punished the Marsh Arabs by draining the marshlands, which created hundreds of thousands of refugees and caused an ecological catastrophe...Resolved, That the House of Representatives— (1) acknowledges the belief that the United States and the world have been made safer with the removal of Saddam Hussein and his regime from power in Iraq, and the belief that a final judgment on the value of activities in Iraq cannot be made until Iraq is stable and secure" (United States Congress March 17, 2004).

the same folks who have rolled back 30 years of bipartisan environmental progress are declaring a cause of war, the draining of the marsh in Iraq? It was a terrible environmental disaster.

Nobody spoke about it at the time, but there is another swamp that must be drained and that is right here in Washington, DC, the swamp of special interest money, the swamp that says special interest money calls for giving tax cuts to people making over \$1 million, not having \$1 million, making over \$1 million a year, give them that tax cut but do not provide for our troops and do not provide for our veterans. At the same time, we are giving money to Halliburton, who is ripping off the taxpayer while feeding the troops with overcharges.

Yes, there is a swamp that needs to be drained. It is right here in Washington, DC, and that would not be an environmental disaster (Congressional Record March 17, 2004).²²

Debates about the war were meted out on the US congressional floor in relationship to the marsh. Pelosi's remarks indicated that Iraqi marsh restoration was part of a highly contentious US war strategy.

As an icon for a new political era in Iraq, the promise of freedom offered by the marsh echoes freedom of another kind, the opening of the Iraqi economy to foreign investors. The liberalization of the Iraqi economy was directly tied to the United Nations Security Council Resolutions that created the United Nations Assistance Mission to Iraq (UNAMI), governed the presence of Multinational Forces in Iraq from 2003 to 2008, and outlined a structure for the proceeds of oil exports. In 2006, UN Security Council Resolution 1723 reinforced its general encouragement of opening Iraq to a global economy by formally recognizing the International Compact with Iraq, an agreement between the Government of Iraq and the UN to continue "to build a strong framework for Iraq's continued political, security and economic transformation and integration into the regional and global economy" (November 28, 2006). When Prime Minister Maliki and UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon launched the Compact on May 3, 2007, it expressed Iraq's intention to "create an environment for investment" by restructuring state-owned banks, encouraging private sector growth, and fostering regional and international

²² On March 17, 2004, Congress debated the resolution for hours before referring it to the Committee on International Relations and the Committee on Armed Services.

economic integration by building “capacity across Ministries to negotiate and implement international treaties and agreements” (Ki-moon and al-Maliki 2007:17). In their work with Iraqi ministries to adjudicate international environmental and conservation treaties around the marsh, *Nature Iraq*’s mandate fit right into these guidelines. Funders including Italy, Japan, Canada, and the United States invested in marsh restoration based upon their previous role as members of the US-led “Coalition of the Willing”, as in the case of Italy which sent troops to the marsh region of southern Iraq, or Japan which deployed a small unit to Samawah for reconstruction and humanitarian assistance, or because of their desire to enter Iraq post-war, like Canada. Hayden (2003) and Tsing (2005) have pointed out the ways in which global legislation of environment functions as a form of governance. UN Conventions regulating the war in Iraq were the very same treaties that sanctioned humanitarian and environmentalist projects in Iraq. Militarism and environmentalism were formally linked in this way.

Organizationally, *Nature Iraq* operated with a nested structure of leadership. Most of their funding came directly from the Italian Ministry of Environment and Territory in the form of a bilateral aid grant in the amount of 10 million Euros per annum for three years for a total of 30 million Euros.²³ The terms of the Memorandum of Understanding regulating the funding mandated that eighty percent of the funds be spent on Italian soil. The grant was paid directly to *Nature Iraq*, and Azzam in turn hired Italian engineering firms to develop hydraulic plans for marsh restoration. Gianluca at AcquaTerra first learned of *Nature Iraq* when the organization was *Eden Again* and made the connection

²³ Specifically *Nature Iraq*’s funding came from the Italian, Canadian, and US governments with a small amount from a project of the United Nations Environmental Programme that had been funded by Japan. Italian Ministry of Environment and Territory direct to *Nature Iraq*: 1.2 million Euros in 2003; .95 million Euros in 2004; 10 million Euros each of three years between 2005-2008. Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA is Canada’s USAID equivalent) to the University of Waterloo: 3.2 million Canadian to the University, *Nature Iraq* received 600,000 per annum for two years between 2005 and 2007. UNEP direct to *Nature Iraq* for assistance with their remote sensing project: 100,000 USD. USAID contracted Development Alternatives to run their project in the marshes in 2004 and gave *Nature Iraq* a grant of 143,000 USD to assist their Abu Zirig marsh study.

with the Italian Ministry to secure the funding. *Nature Iraq* hired AcquaTerra to lead the hydraulic modeling project. *Nature Iraq* also contracted Bionatura, one of Italy's largest engineering companies, to develop plans for the national park. The park initiative included Architettura, an architectural firm well known by Bionatura (the men leading the firms grew up together in the small city of Belluno near the Italian Alps) who *Nature Iraq* contracted to survey Chibayish and develop specific plans for park infrastructure. In addition to the Italian funds, the Canadian government through the Canadian International Development Agency funded *Nature Iraq* as the local implementing partner for the University of Waterloo's *Key Biodiversity Areas* study, a study of biodiversity through ornithology using bird populations as the measure of a healthy ecosystem.

Since none of these donors could go to the marsh, *Nature Iraq* hired a team of local Iraqi scientists who were on the faculty at the University of Basra and the University of Baghdad in the biological sciences. These professors would become the field and lab scientists of the organization, collecting water quality samples for the Italian project, counting birds for the Canadians, and photographing specific areas of the marsh for the United Nations remote sensing project. In the case of Italy, it worked like this: *Nature Iraq* contracted the Italian engineering firms according to the provisions of their Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Italian Ministry and these firms then subcontracted *Nature Iraq* scientists to conduct their fieldwork. The result was that while experts in Canada and Italy in collaboration with the UN and *Nature Iraq* administered the project, Iraqis deployed to the marsh procured the scientific research that supported these enterprises.

Marsh restoration contractors leveraged their work with *Nature Iraq*, for which they did not make a profit and in some cases took a loss, to win other for-profit engineering contracts. Italian engineering firms formed a separate organization, called Aden al-Jedidah (an Arabic inverse of its not-for-profit *New Eden* initiative, the name for

the Italian component of work with Nature Iraq) precisely for these kinds of for-profit ventures.²⁴ In Sulaimaniya, Azzam told me that Italian engineering firms were going to pay him five percent of the value of their contracts won for private business in Iraq based upon his role in making connections for them between their engineering firms and the Iraqi government.²⁵ Azzam relayed that he did not seek the additional income and was at first reluctant to accept it, but when the firms insisted he eventually acquiesced. He believed that if he could assist the Italian firms in winning these contracts, he would be able to keep them interested in funding and working on *Nature Iraq* projects.

Fieldwork



Figure 5: Me and Elaine, *Nature Iraq* Amman office manager, at 2006 Azraq Training in Jordan²⁶

This dissertation is not about the marshes. Like most project investors, I have never been to the marshes. Nor is this dissertation an ethnography of people who live in

²⁴ In Kurdistan in the spring of 2007, Italian contractors worked with the government of Kurdistan on a for profit hydraulic project among others.

²⁵ Personal conversation, Azzam Alwash, February 18, 2007. Sulaimaniya, Iraq.

²⁶ At the request of my Iraqi colleagues, I do not include any personal photographs of them in this dissertation in order to protect their anonymity.

the marshes and make the wetlands home. Rather, this is a dissertation about the group of people that worked to restore the marshes, including Iraqi exiles, government employees, scientists, and private contractors. To trace a network of actors whose business acumen depended on mobility, on one's preparedness to jet off to Tokyo at a moment's notice, or readiness to convene international meetings for the Canadian government in Amman, I traveled. From August 2005 to December 2007 I conducted research in London, Geneva, Amman, Montreal, DC, Boston, Delhi, Rome, Padua, Belluno, and Sulaimaniya to investigate contemporary marsh restoration and its historical dimensions (see Appendix I for a complete list). These multiple sites were nodes within a single field, one that was not discretely bound by geography or constituted by ethnicity. My ethnography cohered around a set of positions in the field of cultural production about the Iraqi marshes (Bourdieu 1993).

Marcus famously pioneered multi-sited ethnography; an approach that would account for change, history, and political economy by working through conceptual problems of a world system (1986:165-166). His early writings more than twenty years ago about a *multi-locale* ethnography envisioned a comparative approach whereby the ethnographer would "explore two or more locales and show their interconnections over time and simultaneously" (Marcus 1986:171). Though Marcus seemed to want to argue against it, the approach he advocated did not make significant revisions to the fieldwork process; it simply multiplied the number of fieldsites from one location to two or more. Marcus continued to define ethnography as geographically specified in a conventional sense.

In later work, Marcus refined his approach under a new term, *multi-sited* ethnography. He wrote that "multi-sited research is designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of

association or connection among sites that in fact defines the argument of the ethnography” (Marcus 1998:90). An ethnography that is multi-sited, Marcus noted, defines its object of study through several different modes or techniques including people, things, metaphor, story or allegory, life or biography, conflict, and even a strategically situated (single-site) ethnography (1998). With refinement, Marcus began to reposition the field of inquiry from a place-bound approach to a problem-oriented inquiry. In many ways he opened the door to the reinvention of anthropology’s disciplinary hallmark: fieldwork.

I engage the field not as multiple sites, but as a *conceptual* whole. Marcus does point in that direction in his later work (1998), but scholars working between anthropology and history define geography differently, following historical trade routes and patterns of movement and by looking at regions connected by oceans (Ho 2006). Recently anthropologists have defined the geography of the field by spaces that are not territorial, but biological (Mol 2002). I conceive of the field as the conceptual and physical geography of the Iraqi marsh both in and outside of Iraq. Virtually no one working on the marsh project went to the marshes. My research therefore follows the network of marsh advocates into critical locations of marsh activity: international conferences, *Nature Iraq* offices in Amman’s humanitarian community working on Iraq reconstruction, *Nature Iraq* headquarters in Sulaimaniya, and the dusty pages of the British archives at the India National Archives in Delhi. This dissertation is a political history of the marsh that attends to contemporary politics while also considering the historical dimensions of this project.

I first heard about the existence of Iraqi wetlands in May 2003 when I began preliminary dissertation fieldwork on the marshes in London. At that point, based on my professional experience working on issues concerning refugees and political asylum seekers in New York City for the two years prior to graduate school, I envisioned my dissertation as an ethnography of exiled Iraqis living in London. I arrived in London three

weeks after Iraqi civilians and American soldiers toppled Saddam Hussein's statue in Firdos Square, Baghdad. Iraqis in London were abuzz about when and how people might return home to visit for the first time in decades. I concentrated this early research in a community organization that served Iraqi Londoners by providing specialized courses and workshops, on subjects ranging from health to personal finance, and offering specially hosted celebrations during important holidays.

I worked most closely with one of the project directors who was especially eloquent and spoke at length about childhood outings to the Iraqi marshes. Captivated by the lyrical poetry of her stories rich with swimming serpents and towering reeds, I began to notice that her breathtaking narrative of childhood marsh discovery and exploration served as a powerful metaphor for an Iraq of bygone years. Her anxieties about what she would find upon return were more easily expressed allegorically than they were directly. I began to pay attention and concentrated my inquiry on the restoration of the Iraqi marshes.

A well-timed conference "The Mesopotamian Marshes" at Harvard in October 2004 opened many doors for me to the international community involved in marsh restoration. At Harvard, I developed strong connections to humanitarians and environmentalists, Iraqi exiles, businesses, and government officials leading marsh restoration that served as the basis for my dissertation research. Much like the *Future of Iraq Project*, this conference, and others like it, solidified a network working in the marshes. Some conference participants—including a host of academics engaged in the project in summer 2004, the AMAR International Charitable Foundation run by Baroness Nicholson to build health clinics in the Iraqi marshes, and the US Army Corps of Engineers who had initially advised the Iraq Minister of Water Resources under the CPA—fell away from the movement that *Nature Iraq* championed. Others, like Jordan's Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature and the United Nations Environmental

Programme, assisted the growth of *Nature Iraq*. Still other movements, like the Canada-Iraq Marsh Initiative (CIMI), developed as a result of Canadian representatives' participation in the Harvard conference. The contacts I made and the questions I began to ask during the conference laid the foundation for my dissertation research. I would later learn that in post-war Iraq, conferences were intense vortexes of activity where treaties were negotiated, relationships brokered, and funding extended. International conferences were the sole moments when this network of international actors would assemble. They did so rapidly and two days later flew off to Tokyo or Geneva or Rome or Montreal or Baghdad, disassembling just as quickly as they gathered. Such was the pulse of international business in Iraq during the years of reconstruction.

In August 2005 I reconnected with Alwash and met Canadian officials at the INTECOL (International Ecology) conference in Montreal. I spent time with a team of twelve Iraqi scientists who presented their work at the conference, conducting interviews and documenting efforts to reintroduce extinct marsh flora and fauna to re-flooded areas. Scientists expressed frustration that such attention was not given to cities and one said, "The marshes are part of the country as well and we want to see every part of the country coming up. [But] the best way to reconstruct the country is to distribute those resources evenly throughout the provinces."²⁷ His comments were an important indication of the magnetism of marsh restoration for foreign investment. I noted how the marshes operated as a portal through which foreigners could extend their reach into Iraq, concentrating resources to produce specific political results.

In September 2005 I returned to London for four months of ethnographic and archival research. I participated in meetings on the Iraqi constitution and worked closely with an organization serving the Iraqi Shi'a community in London. Through work with

²⁷ Personal Interview with Husain Hassan August 10, 2005.

Shi'a exiles I explored popular memories of the marshes with emphasis on the 1991 Intifadah.

Back in the US in the winter of 2006 I researched the marshes within the larger context of Iraq's reconstruction. In DC I spoke with representatives of the US State Department, US AID, and the Army Corps of Engineers. At the State Department I met with Tom Warwick, former director of the Future of Iraq Project, and interviewed his project assistants at length about the inclusion of the marshes in post-war planning prior to the war. In Boston I met Kanan Makiya, one of three exiles privately consulted by Bush at the White House prior to and after the official war, about his involvement in Iraqi nation building and the iconic role of the marshes in that process. In Boston I also interviewed the former Minister of Environment of Iraq and learned about the battle between competing Iraqi ministries to take ownership of the marsh restoration project.

In May and June 2006, I conducted ethnographic research with Hassan Partow at UNEP's Post Conflict Branch in Geneva, Switzerland. I worked alongside scientists learning their remote sensing methodology for the *Iraqi Marshland Observation System* (IMOS) project. During this time I participated in a two-week remote sensing training of Iraqi scientists slated to take over responsibility of the project as UNEP transferred ownership responsibility to Iraq. At UNEP, I noted instructions on technique, questions concerning practice, and interviewed Post Conflict Branch administration about how marsh restoration fit into their overall mandate in Iraq.

In August 2006 I began research in Amman, Jordan where Azzam Alwash had recently relocated and where *Nature Iraq* had opened a branch office in 2005. To conduct participant observation research, I visited the *Nature Iraq* offices multiple times a week and assisted programmatic staff on editing documents, facilitating training courses and workshops, or assembling exhibits of marsh photographs around the city. Through my research I observed that *Nature Iraq* had unique connections to the

Jordanian government that other development organizations or relief programs present in Amman but working on Iraq did not enjoy. In addition to research at *Nature Iraq*, I attended numerous events in the international humanitarian community in Amman. Trainings led by international organizations, from NGOs to the UN, were ubiquitous as foreign humanitarian staff tried to adapt post-conflict programs to a distanced working arrangement whereby administration worked outside of Iraq but Iraqi staff implemented their programmatic recommendations inside the country. International staff trained Iraqis to takeover project implementation, providing instruction on everything from labor organizing (ICFTU, the International Trade Union Organization, offered a course in October 2006) to creating transparency in government (as the Czech group PIN, People in Need, did during their August and November 2006 courses).

In early December 2006, the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN) offered a customized training for *Nature Iraq* and representatives of the Iraqi Ministries of Environment and Water Resources on wetland rehabilitation and the creation of a national park based on their restoration of the Azraq oasis. In 1978 RSCN established the Azraq Oasis Wetland Reserve to conserve this wetland in the heart of the eastern desert. In 1977 Ramsar listed the oasis as a wetland of international importance, extending international protection to the area. *Nature Iraq* looked to Azraq as a model for their own plans to create a national park in Iraq's marshes.

In September 2006, CIDA held a major international workshop to strategize potential projects that they could fund in the Iraqi marshes. They flew 95 representatives from the Iraqi marshes, from local politicians to tribal Sheikhs, to Amman, issued each a per diem, and paid for accommodation at the luxury Kempinski Hotel for a four day series of meetings. I found that CIDA administrators and Iraqi residents were at fundamental odds; whereas CIDA was eager to fund capacity building initiatives, residents wanted money for direct service programs like building schools or health

clinics. This disagreement highlighted that international investors working on Iraq from abroad and Iraqis living in country had two radically different understandings of Iraq itself, the former heavily informed by future aspirations and the latter by demands of the present.

In 2007, I continued ethnographic research in Amman and expanded my inquiry to Sulaimaniya, Iraq where Azzam Alwash relocated *Nature Iraq* headquarters. I was interested in two simultaneous processes: first, the business of marsh restoration through *Nature Iraq's* initiative, and second, the humanitarian investment in Iraq's reconstruction based in Amman. *Nature Iraq's* work was my chief concern. To research the organization and its ongoing commitment to marsh rehabilitation, I turned my attention toward Azzam Alwash who is the director of the organization. I interviewed Azzam at his home every week or two over the course of six months to construct an oral history of *Nature Iraq* and to contextualize Azzam's environmental platform with his initial work in the Iraqi opposition movement and his continuing relationships with the US State Department and Iraqi politicians, including former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi, then Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih, and President Jalal Talabani.

With the assistance of Barham Salih, a great colleague and supporter, Azzam assumed responsibility for launching the American University in Iraq-Sulaimaniya and was able to secure permission to relocate *Nature Iraq* from Baghdad to Kurdistan in January 2007.²⁸ Obtaining permission to work in Kurdistan was not easy for Baghdadi

²⁸ Regents of The American University of Iraq-Sulaimani are Jalal Talabani, Chairman and current President of Iraq, Adil Abdul-Mahdi Vice President of Iraq, Hacem Al-Hassani, Ayad Allawi former Prime Minister of Iraq, Nechirvan Barzani, Zalmay Khalilzad US Ambassador to the UN under President George W. Bush. Trustees include Barham Salih, President of the Board and former Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq and from September 2009 the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government, John Agresto, Fu'ad Ajami, Azzam Alwash, Rajaa Khuzai, Kanan Makiya, Jamil Mroue, Herish Muharam, Abdul Rahman Al-Rashid, and Faruk Rasool, and Basil Al-Rahim the brother of Rend al-Rahim and former managing director for the Carlyle group a private equity firm renowned for its political connections. Basil al-Rahim was featured in Michael Moore's "Fahrenheit 9/11" where he came under scrutiny for his advocacy of neoliberal economic

organizations, and even though no international borders were crossed, *Nature Iraq* employees had to produce visa-like permission papers granting them entry when traveling between Baghdad and Sulaimaniya. Conditions for Iraqi staff had become increasingly more dangerous in the capital and, concerned about the future of the organization and the welfare of his staff, Azzam seized the opportunity to withdraw from Baghdad.

During ten-day trips to Sulaimaniya at two-month intervals between February and July 2007, I researched the business of regulating and financing Iraqi marsh restoration. I conducted participant observation at meetings between Italian engineers, project investors, *Nature Iraq* staff at all levels, and Iraqi ministerial employers, noting financial presentations, debates about marsh development, and the facilitation of Iraq's membership in UN and other international environmental treaties. I interviewed Iraqi residents at length, asking questions not only about their work, but also about how they navigated Baghdad streets in order to get to work and how often they were able to meet with colleagues or friends in other areas of the city—general questions about *how* they conducted business under curfew and under threat.

In Amman I found that *Nature Iraq's* status in Sulaimaniya and their connections with Jordanian, American, and Iraqi governments made them characteristically different from other humanitarian organizations based in Amman and working in Iraq. While Azzam and *Nature Iraq* administrators attended some of the planning meetings run by NCCI (the NGO Coordinating Committee for Iraq), they were not hemmed into the same UN and international infrastructure as other aid and development organizations were. Whereas other international NGOs and UN offices could request funds from the Iraq Trust Fund, *Nature Iraq* received financial support in direct grants from the Italian,

policies in Iraq, see <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/2873085/Lamonts-firm-seeks-openings-in-Iraq.html>

Canadian, and United States governments. And whereas other organizations participated actively in restructuring the UN response to Iraq through OCHA (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) in the summer of 2007, *Nature Iraq* did not have a role to play in humanitarian reorganization. The organization was a registered Iraqi NGO, but it was not embedded in the same infrastructure as other local Iraqi NGOs or even international organizations. By way of Azzam's previous work in the Iraqi Opposition Movement and the Future of Iraq Project, *Nature Iraq* operated with direct aid from foreign governments, solid ties to Iraqi members of government, and with specific connections to first the Coalition Provisional Authority and then the US Embassy in Baghdad as well as with the United Nations. Though most international organizations were subject to additional bureaucratic regulations from the Iraq Trust Fund and the United Nations, *Nature Iraq* was not subject to these same policies and operated with greater political latitude.

At the same time that I delved into the business of marsh rehabilitation and the broader contours of humanitarianism in Iraq, I also reached out to Iraqi refugees living in Amman who had originally come from the south. By spring 2007 UNHCR estimated numbers upward of 700,000 Iraqi refugees living in Jordan and 1.2 million across the border in Syria, but no hard statistics had been gathered.²⁹ At the request of the government of Jordan in May 2007, Fafo, a Norwegian Research Institute, and the Jordanian Department of Statistics conducted an official survey of Iraqi refugees,

²⁹ Personal interview with Robert Breen, Representative UNHCR Jordan on March 17, 2007. See also articles by Senior International Rescue Committee Policy Advisor Anna Husarska in February 2007 <http://www.theirc.org/news/iraqi-refugees-jordan-slate-4210> and Sabrina Tavernise in April 2007 of the New York Times. Robert Breen left his post at UNHCR shortly after our interview because he angered the Jordanian government when he issued unofficial documentation to Iraqis seen at their offices attesting to the fact that they were worthy of state protection. Under their agreement with the government, UNHCR could not officially document refugee status. Jordan was concerned about the obligatory care that official recognition would require of their government and the associated costs for this care that would tax the state coffers. Later in the summer, the government admitted Iraqi students to primary schools for the first time in three years. However, health care and legal employment were not available to the majority of Iraqis living in Jordan.

estimating the number at 450,000.³⁰ Amman hummed with speculations about Iraqi refugees, and while some Jordanians resented the hike in rent and the cost of living that they associated with Iraqi encroachment on Amman and which affected their own quality of life, Iraqi families lived in fear of deportation and many of the former middle class were forced to work menial jobs or spend their savings to make ends meet.³¹ The struggle of the large majority of Iraqis in Amman was a dramatic contrast to experiences of Iraqi elite who had long time investments in the country and were courted by the Jordanian government to stay.³² Iraqis I met in Amman who had come from the south largely did not have these resources, their experience of recent exile was a counterpoint to established communities of Iraqi exiles I worked with in London and to those who had returned to Iraq, or the Middle East region, to assume leadership positions in Iraqi governance.

Chapter Overview

Chapter One, “Recuperation” analyzes the significance of the marsh for Iraqi exiles involved in the Iraqi Opposition Movement in Exile. Through attention to interviews with Iraqi exiles and a careful reading of Thesiger, the chapter demonstrates that current ideas about the marsh as an enclave of Sumerian civilization date back to the post-

³⁰ See the report: <http://www.fafu.no/ais/middeast/jordan/IJ.pdf> Following the Fafu study, UNHCR revised their official documentation to reflect these new numbers. See <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e486426.html>

³¹ Undoubtedly, the end of oil subsidies that the Iraqi government provided Jordan had an impact on the economy and the cost of living, but there has been no official study of the impact of Iraqi refugees on the cost of housing in Amman. Humanitarian administrators at the UN and other international NGOs suggested that the rise in prices may have been influenced by the migration of Gulf residents into Amman. Whether pinpointed to Iraq or the Gulf, debates about the rising cost of housing expressed underlying xenophobia and anxieties about the future of Jordan as hundreds of thousands of new immigrants poured in. These tensions unfortunately exasperated distrust and malcontent in Palestinian refugee camps and settlements for newly arriving Iraqi immigrants.

³² If an Iraqi in Jordan deposited 150,000 USD in a Jordanian bank account for one year, he or she automatically qualified for official residency (Fattah December 8, 2006). For as long as the money remained in the account, the Iraqi applicant could annually renew the papers necessary to live and work legally in Jordan.

colonial British traveler, Wilfred Thesiger, and his protégées. The chapter considers the material fragments around which a marsh aesthetic coheres. The fragments include words from verbal memories to travel writing, souvenirs such as bullets from marsh grounds during the 1991 Intifadah or hair samples from marsh residents collected by Henry Field in 1934 and preserved intact in the Chicago Field Museum today, and iconography in the form of posters and postage stamps.

In Chapter Two, “Conference” I consider how conferences became the staging ground for an international network working on Iraq from a distance. This chapter asserts that unlike earlier campaigns of foreign intervention in Iraq, the post-2003 efforts navigated treaty, not territory. This chapter shows that even though advocates worked virtually, this distance had its own geography, one that privileged speed of travel, rapid assembly and disassembly, and collaboration of actors that were geographically distant over and above permanent locatedness. This chapter asserts that while plans formulated at these meetings may not have had physical effects on the marsh, informal conversation at dinners and over drinks established the network’s cohesiveness.

Chapters Three and Four explore the different understandings of the marsh and Iraq held by Iraqis and foreign advocates. More specifically, they consider the experiences of Iraqi scientists deployed to the marsh field as compared to foreign experts who evaluated these findings from a distance. Chapter Three “A Holographic Image” considers the Geneva-based United Nations Environment Programme’s remote sensing project to produce ecological maps of the marshes. This chapter asserts that as new technologies opened up the atmosphere as a frontier for exploration and discovery, it produced new evaluations of life that favored the ecological over the human. Chapter Four “Wartime Birding” assesses *Nature Iraq* birding campaigns in the Iraqi marshes. This chapter considers how birding expeditions increased the NGOs international profile, adding to its acclaim. The chapter analyzes issues of visibility: because they could be

observed both in and out of Iraq, recording the presence of birds in the marsh added to *Nature Iraq's* credibility. As Iraqi scientists strove to build the organization's reputation by documenting marsh avifauna, they put themselves at immediate risk. The chapter examines how exercises to enhance organizational visibility also came at a cost during wartime. By focusing on a pivotal moment—the invasion of *Nature Iraq* offices by Iraqi militia—I examine the reverberations of wartime violence and environmentalism.

Finally the last chapter of the dissertation, Chapter Five “The National Park,” builds upon previous chapters that considered the creation of alternate marsh realities through technological mediation and analyzed the differential values placed on ecological versus Iraqi human life. This chapter argues that the fantasy of the park, which investors encouraged Iraqis to dream up and then pursue by adjudicating international treaties in real time, was dangerous. On the one hand, it gave internationals an image of Iraq that appealed to investors. On the other, Iraqi ministerial employees who would carry out the work needed to make the national park a reality on the ground, risked kidnappings, bombings, and death to bring the park into being. The chapter demonstrates that what was preserved in the park was global sovereignty over Iraq through the institution of an *economy of life*—one framed by the privileging of ecological over human lifeforms.

Chapter One: Recuperation

Rehabilitation

The Preamble

In the name of God, the Most merciful, the Most compassionate

(We have honored the sons of Adam)

We, the people of Mesopotamia...cradle of civilization, crafters of writing, and home of numeration. Upon our land the first law made by man was passed, and the oldest pact of just governance was inscribed...in the midst of international support from our friends and those who love us, marched for the first time in our history towards the ballot boxes...on the thirtieth of January 2005...recollecting the darkness of the ravage of the holy cities and the South in the Sha'abaniyya uprising and burnt by the flames of grief of the mass graves, *the marshes*, Al-Dujail, and others...we sought...to create our new Iraq, the Iraq of the future, free from sectarianism, racism, complex of regional attachment, discrimination, and exclusion.

—Iraq Constitution (Government of Iraq Ratified October 15, 2005)

The 2005 Iraq Constitution positions the Iraqi marsh to play a pivotal role in the construction of the new state. This chapter analyzes the way in which the marshes became significant for Iraqi exiles who cited the restored marsh as emblematic of the political change they wished to enact in the country. What Iraqi exiles knew about the historical significance of the marsh, they learned outside of Iraq. In Iraq, narratives of the marsh reflected a national ambivalence for the place: first, people living in the wetlands were viewed as *ma'adi* or “backward” and anti-modern; second, the area was seen as a liability for the state since ruling families of the marsh were known to harbor political dissidents and because the region supported rings smuggling drugs and guns across the Iraq and Iran border; and, third, the region was sometimes celebrated as the birthplace of civilization. Residents of the marsh may have been seen as “backward,” but positioned as the living relics of antiquity, they confirmed Iraq’s deep heritage. Mitchell

asserts that the idea of a modern state rested on a recognition of the state as ancient: “A nation that wanted to show that it was up-to-date and deserved a place among the company of modern states needed, among other things, to produce a past” (2002:179). Producing a past was necessary because it established a national legacy to which citizens could claim belonging. In contrast to the dominant Iraqi narrative, British travel writers popularized a view of the marsh as the majestic grounds of a Sumerian enclave. They penned embellished accounts of the region, describing the place with impeccable sensory detail. During Iraq reconstruction, advocates called for marsh restoration by highlighting these British marsh accounts. The 2003 reconstruction-era marshes were only knowable *outside* of Iraq. This chapter demonstrates how the marshes became this kind of knowable entity and how they gained popularity among a community of exiles from London to the US.

This chapter therefore analyzes the historical contingency of marsh ideology by engaging the ways in which the marsh became a political object at different periods in time, for different purposes. The marshes have been instrumental at every political refashioning of Iraq; in the Ottoman era continuing through the British Mandate and into the Ba’ath government, draining the marsh was considered essential for the progress of the nation. In 2003, this changed radically when returning Iraqi exiles argued that marsh *restoration* was critically important not only for the country, but also for the region and the world. This chapter explores how the marsh became such a meaningful space for Iraqi exiles in London and the US. It analyzes how such advocacy for restoration gained momentum by drawing upon colonial and postcolonial British explorers in the Iraqi wetlands to create a dominant marsh narrative. Foucault famously argued: “Every sentiment, particularly the noblest and most disinterested, has a history” (1984:87). Though the marshes were not a sentiment, *per se*, it was exile nostalgia that made the region so compelling in the early twenty-first century. Iraqi exiles draw upon their

memories to justify restoration, but it is important to recognize that: “Memories are not ‘stored’ truths but constructions of and for the present” (Stoler and Strassler 2000:8). The memories of Iraqis who once visited the marshes were a pastiche: they were partly based on experience and partly inflected with colorful prose of mid-twentieth century travel writers. These memories produced a marsh aesthetic that acted as a moral compass for state reconstruction.

Foucault’s *Archaeology of Knowledge* offers a method for investigating object formation, like the emergence of the marsh as a political emblem, by attending not to its internal constitution, but what enables it to appear (Foucault 1972:45). To analyze the formation of an object, he asserts, one must first map the surfaces of its emergence, then describe the authorities of delimitation, and finally analyze the grids of specification (Foucault 1972:41-42). Foucauldian archaeology disaggregates history from chronological time by concentrating on the particular conditions within which an object, such as the marsh, is formed. It offers an important methodology for a critical investigation of marsh formation, but this *archaeology* does not so clearly account for the dynamics of formation and the ways in which objects are clustered with and respond to other materialities, ideologies, and sentiments.

Lemon’s chronotope provides a method for such analysis. A chronotope for Bakhtin, Lemon asserts, relates to a mixture of temporal and spatial logics that “unfold a story in a certain way, according to an identifiable trajectory and principles of agency” (2009:839). Lemon argues, “Chronotope is not simply a point or a plane in space-time, not merely a scenic backdrop or surround of period and place. It shapes the logic by which events unfurl, their syntax, the rhythmic quality of plausible actions and counter-actions” (2009:839). What Lemon proposes is an analysis that accounts for both the historical contingency of such logic and the ways in which it forms through actions in processual relation. A chronotope also differs from Williams’ *structure of feeling* (1973;

1977:128-135) because whereas Williams' emphasizes the structure, or organization, of social life that enables that sentiment to emerge, Lemon emphasizes the *dynamics* of this emergence. Tracking the dynamics of marsh chronotopes enables an investigation of marsh explorers, their movement through the region, the artifacts they collected along the way, and the representations of the marsh they presented to a foreign non-visiting public. It facilitates attention to a cluster of materials, sentiments, and actions in a particular place and time during which the marsh became important.

This chapter accounts for three chronotopic moments of the marsh: the colonial explorer Field's quest from the 1920s through the 1940s to track the races of man through the Iraqi marsh, the postcolonial traveler Thesiger's 1950s and 1960s elaboration of a marsh world through his published prose, and the early twenty-first century popularization of the marsh by Iraqi exiles involved in "post-war" reconstruction. This chapter also demonstrates the ways in which recent understandings of the marsh are inflected with earlier marsh ideologies, attending to what Lemon refers to as "heterochronia" or the existence of two or more chronotopes at the same time (Lemon 2009:843).

The Iraqi marshes came to be a storied and legendary place through travel and through writing. I define writing as the process not only of assigning words to experience, but also assembling a material lexicon from collected artifacts (see Buchli 2002; Hunt 1999; Miller 2001; Steedman 1994). Writing is as much about bodily movement within and through the marsh as it is about putting pen to paper. For colonial botanical explorers roaming the alpine plateaus of Northwest Yunnan and Southeast Tibet, Mueggler states: "the first tool for writing was the gun" (2005:453). Writing, Mueggler indicates, is a process that begins well before that lamplight moment as the explorer set out on a discovery quest. He asserts, "The labors of botanical exploration are the labors of perception" (Mueggler 2005:445) and argues that it was the practices of walking and

seeing that were “the principles of production for text” (Mueggler 2005:446). Much like in Yunnan and Tibet, colonial travelers and postcolonial explorers in the Iraqi backwaters “discovered” a world they strove to elaborate through processes of writing: whereas Field built a craniometric catalogue of marsh residents, Thesiger published travel accounts of his journey and life in the marsh. With its emphasis on creating a unified narrative from culled artifacts and experiences of daily life, writing, I argue, is integral to chronotope. This chapter considers the process of creating a “history of the marsh” through writing. With respect to the marsh, writing included practices of exploration, collection, remembrance, and advocacy. Writing is not only about the production of literary text, but also the creation of narrative much like the story of the Iraqi marsh as a Sumerian enclave worthy of preservation that circulates widely in contemporary movements for restoration.

It was the privileged position colonial explorers and postcolonial travel writers occupied in society outside of the marsh that gave them an audience. Today Iraqi exiles enjoy a global audience because of their unprecedented access to political leadership in the United States. These elites were the public’s window into territories and lands so distant they were unfathomable to most. Crary argues, “the problem of the observer is the field on which vision in history can be said to materialize” (Crary 1990:5). The vision of the marsh these travelers, and later exiles, presented recorded a history of foreign exploration and investment. Particular chronotopes of the marsh reflect the conditions of political power in which they were wrought and these sensibilities were preserved in an aesthetics each author created around the marsh. An observer, Crary specifies, is one “who sees within a prescribed set of possibilities, one who is embedded in a system of conventions and limitations” (1990:6). British travelers like Henry Field, Wilfred Thesiger, and others engaged the marsh uniquely, hemmed in by the political and social

circumstances of their lives. Through the marsh it is possible to analyze how elites direct history to make present political claims.

Exploration—and its associated processes of motion, collection, and vision—primed a marsh aesthetic that supported an international environmental movement in Iraq post 2003. Benjamin meant for his *Arcades Project* to reconstruct historical material, like the found objects at Parisian arcades, as philosophy. He sought to expose what he described as concrete representations of the truth, “in which historical images made visible the philosophical ideas” (Buck-Morss 1991:55). Benjamin’s concept of aesthetics has as much to do with movement through space as it does with the objects one’s gaze apprehends along the way. His aesthetics is a philosophy that takes shape from the material remains of cultural life. At the same time, his work is a critique of progress, for what Benjamin finds through his exhaustive research in the arcades is that what appears new is actually a repetition of the old (Buck-Morss 1991:108). In the marsh these found objects were not souvenirs of the home, not a hairbrush or coffee pot found in Benjamin’s Parisian arcades, but forms of life both human and ecological. The aesthetics postcolonial travelers and Iraqi exiles fashion in the marsh is a politics of life.

In contrast with Benjamin’s anchoring of the aesthetic in the material, Eagleton argues that aesthetics is born as a discourse of the body (Eagleton 1990:13). He states: “The ultimate binding force of the bourgeois social order, in contrast to the coercive apparatus of absolutism, will be habits, pieties, sentiments and affections. And this is equivalent to saying that such power in such an order has become *aestheticized*” (Eagleton 1990:20). Rancière makes a similar claim when he talks about aesthetics as a “distribution of the sensible” but writes about aesthetics as sociality, the “evident facts of sense perception,” and the ways of knowing and being in the world (2004:12). Significant in all of these definitions is that aesthetics is the organization of power and its embodiment corporeally and socially. In relation to the marsh, it was biopower, or

political power in relation to biological life—from the postcolonial racialization of Marsh Arabs to the elevation of a marsh ecosystem as a global priority for state-building in wartime Iraq—that formed the basis of marsh aesthetics.

Rancière and Eagleton both distinguish themselves from Benjamin by arguing that aesthetics is at the core of politics, but that this politics is not derived from the aestheticization of political life. Rather, aesthetics “is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience” (Rancière 2004:13). “Politics,” Rancière argues, “revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of space and the possibilities of time” (Rancière 2004:13). Their work posits a theory of aesthetics that is instrumental for analysis of the Iraqi marsh and the ways in which it became so politically significant in 2003. It is with attention to these details of what is seen (perception), how it is articulated (in writing), and who is endowed the authority of speech (authorship) that enable the analysis of marsh formation as an aesthetic and political regime. With analysis it is clear that those living outside of the marsh and outside of Iraq determined what internationals recognized as the marsh in each of these three periods.

The ways that Iraqi exiles came to identify the marsh as a place of heritage has much to do with their reading of Thesiger and his coterie of marsh explorer protégées who published from the 1960s through the late 1970s. In this chapter I focus on the marsh travels of colonial anthropologist Field and the postcolonial explorer Thesiger because these two figures reappeared in the twenty-first century restoration movement. Thesiger, for example, figured prominently in the PowerPoint slides and public talks of marsh advocates and was cited often in the media as a kind of original Iraqi marsh conservationist. He traveled and lived in the Iraqi marsh during the waning years of the

Hashemite Monarchy when the British maintained influence in the country. Of the marsh, he wrote: "I had spent many years in exploration, but now there were no untouched places left to explore...Here, thank God, was no sign of that drab modernity which, in its uniform of second-hand European clothes, was spreading like a blight across the rest of Iraq" (1964:60). Thesiger approached the marsh as a living Sumerian enclave and advocated preservation by writing impassioned prose about life there (Thesiger 1964).

Thesiger, however, was not the first Brit to explore the marsh; there were several dating at least as far back to the early-nineteenth century. In the 1920s and 1930s, Henry Field, of the Chicago Field family, made several trips to the area. Whereas Thesiger's aims were to enliven the marsh environment for his readers, Field was concerned with tracking the races of man. Marsh residents were specimens for his craniometric surveys (Field 1949). Like many British boys of the ruling elite, as children both Thesiger and Field attended the "nursery of England's gentleman," Eton College, the alma mater of at least nineteen British Prime Ministers (BBC News September 2, 1998). Separated by twenty years in their visits to the marsh, Field and Thesiger may not have known each other but they traveled within the same British governmental and leisure classes of their respective generations.

The marshes were continually being lost and repeatedly being found by foreign nationals visiting the area. Travel writers like Thesiger, and anthropologists like Field, oriented their research around the Iraqi marsh. Recognized as a "culture zone" within the country, ethnographers, both novice and professional, gravitated toward the marsh where they focused on communities of marsh residents they called "Marsh Arabs" or wrote about the changing political institutions and policies that framed their lives. Anthropological engagement with Iraq began in the marsh starting with Henry Field in 1940. In 1962 S.M. Salim, a student of Mary Douglass, published his ethnography *Marsh Dwellers of the Euphrates Delta* (1962) and eight years later Robert Fernea published

Shaykh and Effendi (1970), an analysis of the changing structures of tribal authority under pressure from new systems of agriculture.³³ Academically, Iraq entered anthropological knowledge and debate via the marsh.

Though other scholars wrote about the wetlands, Field and Thesiger offered two distinct accounts that trumped all others at the time. Their work resurfaced half a century later as exiles advocated marsh restoration. These explorers project an image of the marsh that archives the occupation and influence of Britain in Iraq in the early to mid-twentieth century. This image hints at the role that US field science, through the Field Museum archaeological expeditions, played in the organization of political power. These historical relationships of foreign political power in Iraq were established ties that became important again in post-2003 reconstruction. This chapter focuses on the materiality that made that happen and the politicization of life created by foreign intervention.³⁴

Reading and Twenty-first Century Marsh Politics

Iraqi exiles seeking to restore the marshes after 2003 learned to place the marsh in the context of Sumerian civilization by reading. Two prominent leaders of the restoration initiative—Hassan Partow who worked at the United Nations Environmental Programme and Azzam Alwash who directed *Nature Iraq*—learned to value and appreciate the wetlands even more after discovering books by Thesiger (1964) and Young (1977) while living abroad. By reading Thesiger, Hassan discovered the wetlands for the first time. Azzam had been to the marsh many times with his father (a well-known

³³ Though it is outside the scope of this ethnography, analyzing the life and work of S.M. Salim, an Iraqi anthropologist from the marshes who published an ethnography of the marsh in the mid-twentieth century, would provide an important counterpoint to these foreign travel accounts of the marsh.

³⁴ I use “foreign” here to refer both to groups of non-Iraqi internationals and Iraqi exiles living abroad for several decades.

irrigation engineer) when he was a small child and visited again during college on weekend outings with his friends. When his wife Suzie gave him Young's book with Nik Wheeler's photojournalist images of the marsh in glossy color, Azzam had a source to draw on to express how emotionally evocative the area had been for him. He told me, "Look half of the stuff I learned about the marshes and Sumer and the history of Iraq, I did not learn in Iraq. I learned when I came to the West."³⁵ In the West, the marsh was part of an exiled cultural renaissance, becoming a muse for London Iraqi artists and Danish Iraqi filmmakers.³⁶ The marsh was significant also for a group of exiles who had challenged the Ba'ath government or who participated in the 1991 Intifadah and hid out in the marshes or fled through them.

One contingent of Iraqi exiles active in the Iraqi Opposition Movement in Exile drew on the artistic flourishes of British travel writing to make the case for the vital importance of restoration, as Iraq was itself restructured. Azzam and other engineers described the Iraqi marshes as the lungs of the country, as natural filters of upriver impurities. They spoke about the marshes' *hydropulse*, the seasonal rhythmic expansion and contraction of marsh waters based on cycles of rain and drought. The metaphor likened the marshes to a beating heart that would sustain the pulse of the Iraqi nation at the same time that it supported the wetland's ecosystem. Iraqi exiles advocating restoration turned to British anthropologists and travel writers as resources to build their

³⁵ Azzam Alwash. October 30, 2004. Personal Interview. Harvard University. Boston, MA.

³⁶ In addition to film, Arab authors wrote about the marsh. Syrian novelist Haydar Haydar's *Walimah li-A'shab al-Bahr (Banquet for Seaweed)*, published in 1983, interweaves narratives: one recounting the Communist Uprising in the Iraqi marshes in 1968 and the other chronicling Algerian life in the 1970s (where Iraqis who fled persecution from their participation in the uprising resettled). The novel is widely considered to be a literary masterpiece, its reputation only enhanced by the widespread outrage it sparked in Egypt when a review suggested the novel was blasphemous (Hafez 2000). The novel captured the significance of the marshes for a different contingent of Iraqi exiles who were active in the Communist Party and who found shelter in the wetlands. It would be interesting in future work to explore in greater detail how these narratives from Iraqi communist youth in the mid-twentieth century, both published and unpublished, portray the marsh and how this experience compares to Thesiger's account and the dominant restoration narrative that emerged in relationship to the 2003 war.

case and attract international investors. This was crucial, for most foreign investors and experts on the project had never been to the marshes. Their knowledge depended on what they read and on the memories of Iraqi exiles, who have themselves been influenced by the writings of British explorers including Wilfred Thesiger.



Figure 6: Azzam at the Iraq Foundation, April 2006

Marsh restoration grew out of an Iraqi Opposition Movement campaign to first become a project of the Iraq Foundation, known as *Eden Again*, with initial support from the US Department of State. In the Opposition Movement, Azzam was known for his no-nonsense political impartiality and his charisma. He knew how to excite, solemnize, and inspire: Azzam's magnetism drew global investors. Shortly after his initial involvement in the Opposition Movement, in 1998 the Iraq Foundation invited him to join their Board of Directors. As a member of the Board, Azzam was asked to develop a compelling project that he could travel around and talk about. In consultation with his wife, Suzie, who also held a PhD in the Biological Sciences, Azzam chose Iraqi marsh revival. Together he and Suzie lobbied the cause; they presented publicly on the 1991 Intifadah and Saddam

Hussein's retaliation by means of marsh destruction. In Los Angeles, where he lived and worked as an administrator at a large engineering firm, Azzam met former marsh residents who had been displaced after the first Gulf War. In his work with the Opposition Movement, Azzam established his own relationship with Ayad Allawi with whom his sister had been employed as his personal assistant for years in London. She continued to work with him after his return to the Middle East and following his post as interim Prime Minister that concluded in 2005 when he established residence in Amman.

Upon completion of the *Future of Iraq Project*, Tom Warwick invited Azzam to assemble a Blue Ribbon Commission of leading experts in wetland science to discuss the feasibility of restoring the marshes. Up to that point, Azzam and Suzie had been paying for advocacy of marsh restoration out of their own pockets. The State Department granted Azzam, as a member of the Iraq Foundation board, twice what he requested: up to \$300,000 USD. Azzam assembled the panel that met in February 2003 and in March 2003; the Commission issued a report that stated restoration was not only feasible, but also warranted. Azzam remembered, "The 'but warranted' part of it is a political statement, scientists don't do that. So it was really something."³⁷

What would compel this team of researchers to act in such an unorthodox way? While their motivations cannot be certainly known, the Blue Ribbon Commission announced their findings on March 17, 2003, two days before the war. On March 23rd, a few days into the war, the Commission held a press conference to publicize their results. Azzam told me "Maybe it was fortuitous, maybe it was serendipity, maybe we were manipulated. Who knows? But it coincided with the start of the war so there was a huge amount of interest."³⁸ Following the press conference, the Italian government and US Aid approached Azzam to talk specifically about planning restoration. Azzam recalled, "The

³⁷ Azzam Alwash. September 6, 2007. Personal Interview. Amman, Jordan.

³⁸ Ibid.

Italians asked 'what are you going to do next?' Who knows what I was going to do next! We went to the marshes with US Aid. I will say this on the record, they played me like a ping pong."³⁹ As Azzam learned the ins and outs of global politics and as global investors turned toward the marsh to support a benevolent project during the intensification of war, Azzam felt that he was sometimes manipulated by organizations that wanted to buy into his 'feel good' project.

At the same time, Azzam and marsh advocates capitalized on the attention for marsh restoration and used the support to develop the Commission's findings into *Eden Again*, a nongovernmental organization affiliated with the Iraq Foundation. The beginning of Azzam's involvement with the marsh project clarifies the connections between ecological rehabilitation and governmental transformation exiles and the US "Coalition of the Willing" sought through war in Iraq. Azzam described that the marsh restoration project was initially a device that gave him a platform to claim a position from within the Iraqi Opposition Movement and then later in the reconstruction of Iraq. He selected the first project name, *Eden Again*, "for purely political purposes."⁴⁰ Azzam recalled, "As I told you it initially started as a political ploy. Okay let's use his attempt to get out of the sanctions to try to get the marshes back."⁴¹ Azzam capitalized on the interest in Iraq to push forward marsh conservation as a priority of Iraqi governance.

Azzam did not anticipate leading the restoration movement; he initially thought that he would leave that for others to do. He decided to handle the project himself because "if I don't do this now and the marshes do not get restored, I will never be able to live with myself."⁴² In 1991 he did not get involved in the Iraq war effort and regretted it for all the years leading up to 2003. When he had a second chance to use his influence

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Azzam Alwash. October 30, 2004. Personal Interview. Harvard University. Boston, MA.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

to make a change in Iraq, he jumped at the opportunity. He said, "I'm hopeful that it's successful, but if something happens and it all falls apart, if Iraq falls apart, you know into civil war, I can proudly say that I did what I could."⁴³

When I asked Azzam what motivated him to leave his wife and two young daughters in Los Angeles, give up his career as an executive at an engineering firm, and move back to Iraq to work on marsh restoration full time, he was not able to answer directly. He replied:

I don't know. I haven't really thought about it...I just know that if I didn't do it I'm not gonna be able to live with myself. I don't like myself...I don't want to relive 1991 through 1995, the most depressing part of my life until my kids were born. Maybe it's not eloquent, but I don't have an answer for you. It just is. It's a goal.⁴⁴

What is telling about this statement is that for Azzam, the restoration of the marshes is an attempt at his own personal redemption. He added, "It's not the love of the marsh people, it's not the love of Iraq, it's not just the love of the marshes... These are my memories..."⁴⁵ For Azzam there was something inexplicably personal about his investment in the marshes that had to do with traveling there as a child with his father, an irrigation engineer, who would take him to the marshes during site visits to the area for his work. Azzam remembered those trips as rare moments when he was able to spend time with his father just the two of them. As a kid along for the ride, the marshes were the most adventurous place he experienced and, later, as a college student, they offered him a chance to escape from the chaos of his busy life and spend some time in what was for him a serene oasis.

In this way, Azzam was much like Thesiger and other explorers who sought refuge from the noise and busyness of city life by dwelling in the marsh for a time. For Azzam in 2003, turning toward the marsh again was both a way to recover a place that

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

had been so meaningful to him throughout his childhood and early adult years and a way of participating in a political reimagining of Iraq as many of his other colleagues from the *Future of Iraq Project* were doing. His dream was to revive enough of the marshes that he could kayak with his daughters all the way from Kut to Chibayish, moving from a relatively new city in the northernmost marsh expanse through various marsh lakes and ecosystems to reach one of the oldest and historically most significant cities in the southern marsh region. Perhaps unwittingly his dream offered the fantasy of spending time with his daughters in exactly the same way he had spent time with his father at their age: by sharing in an experience that would become meaningful across generations.

As Azzam contemplated his return to Baghdad, two major political developments pushed him in that direction. In late May 2003 Pekka Haavisto, head of the United Nations Environmental Programme Post-Conflict Branch (from 1999 to 2005), convened a conference on the marshes for experts and potential project investors at UN offices in Geneva, Switzerland. Around the same time Douglas Feith, then the US Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, called Azzam in for a meeting. Azzam remembered that Under Secretary Feith was interviewing him for a position at the Coalition Provisional Authority, an opportunity that did not come to pass. Azzam's political work would bring him back to the marsh instead. At the Geneva conference an Italian engineer, Gianluca, approached Azzam with a potential grant from the Italian government. Simultaneously US Aid composed a team of scientists and experts, that eventually included Azzam, to head to the Iraqi marshes in a provisional assessment team. In the end, US Aid encouraged agricultural development of the marsh. This created animosity with Azzam who wanted to conserve the area as a national park, but their project was not long lasting. Whereas Azzam viewed the marsh as a sanctuary of ecological life, including the "Marsh Arabs" who lived there, US Aid looked to the marshes as an economic resource through agricultural development. US Aid's marsh project ran for one year only (US Aid

April 2004). In the battle of projects for life and economy, the movement to conserve life in the marsh ecosystem won.

With even greater funds from the Italian Ministry of Environment and Territory in the form of a bilateral aid grant, Azzam turned away from Aid's platform and moved forward with his plans for conservation. There were limited restrictions on how these funds could be used, save for the hiring of Italian contractors, and this enabled Azzam to surpass other nongovernmental organizations, like AMAR Charitable Foundation, or political projects, like US Aid's marsh program, to pursue his goal of restoration for ecotourism. Azzam defined his project as a scientific organization that would attract international scholars to study unique marsh properties and publish the results. His organization concerned itself with the hydrological modeling necessary to ensure the marshes would continue to be supplied with water and to manufacture a once naturally occurring hydropulse, the pulse of water from seasonal inundation needed to support the ecosystem. *Eden Again*, which later became *Nature Iraq*, would be different from other nonprofit organizations that had worked in the marsh, like AMAR, and it would distinguish itself from governmental projects in the area in that it would not be a direct aid organization. It was primarily concerned not with the people who lived in the marsh, but the ecology of the marsh itself. Azzam and other marsh investors made this separation between human and ecological life consistently as a means by which to describe and defend their work from their critics. Azzam told me that the marsh restoration project "started as a vehicle, as a political vehicle but as soon as I got into it, as soon as I got into the scientific challenges, it became an end in themselves. I just got into the science."⁴⁶ As a former engineer, Azzam ran *Eden Again* as he would a corporate engineering project; he brought experts in wetland ecology, which he knew nothing about, together with hydrological engineers, financiers, international

⁴⁶ Ibid.

organizations, and foreign governments to work on restoring the marsh. With their stress on conservation, this group found an ample resource in Thesiger's writing which elaborated the marsh as a delight of nature.

At international conferences, Azzam and other marsh advocates drew upon Thesiger directly to make their case for restoration. Thesiger wrote about the marshes in grand terms:

It was back on the edge of the Marshes that human history in Iraq began. Far back in the darkness of time a people, already socially and culturally advanced, moved down from the plateau of Iran and settled in the Euphrates delta, where, in the fifth millennium B.C., they built reed houses, made boats, and harpooned and netted fish. They lived there as men do today, in an environment that has changed but little (1985:94)

In 2005, at the International Ecology (INTECOL) conference in Montreal, Azzam introduced the work of his organization, now *Nature Iraq*, to a global scientific community. Presenting his case in PowerPoint, Azzam spoke about the marshes with a tenderness that echoed Thesiger's own accounts: "The pulse of fresh water is a breath of life...Inside the *mudhif*, there's a oneness with God."⁴⁷ Azzam spoke in poetry: he described the marshes as a living organ, as a kidney, purifying the water not only for Iraq on the whole, but also for the entire Gulf region. As if citing Thesiger directly, Azzam stressed that the marshes were akin to a living Sumeria. He clicked to a slide of a recent photo of a *mudhif*, a Shaikh's community center and guesthouse built entirely in reeds, and juxtaposed the meeting hall with an image from a Sumerian tablet. References to Thesiger's work abounded at each of the global Iraqi marsh conferences, and even the working meetings in Iraq.

⁴⁷ Ibid.



Figure 7: Azzam's mudhif slide and Sumerian tablet⁴⁸



Figure 8: Azzam's slide showing individual marsh homes⁴⁹

It was as if the words of this British adventurer, and his colleagues, could alone demonstrate the worth of the marshes. Well after *Nature Iraq* actualized Iraqi marsh

⁴⁸ Azzam Alwash. August 2005. "The Marshes of Southern Mesopotamia." Powerpoint Presentation Slide with Caption. Press Conference for the International Conference of Ecology (INTECOL) conference. Montreal, Canada.

⁴⁹ Ibid. These photos were likely taken from Nik Wheeler's photographs in Gavin Young's *Return to the Marshes* (1977).

restoration, in 2007 Penguin Classics re-issued Thesiger's *The Marsh Arab* with a new forward by Jon Lee Anderson, the famed *New Yorker* reporter who had written extensively for the magazine in the years immediately following the 2003 war (Thesiger 2007 [1964]). Within the community of marsh advocates, Thesiger was heralded as the original marsh champion. Conference organizers reviewed the new edition of his book on Amazon (France April 12, 2007), Italian engineers referenced him in presentations to Iraqi ministries, and Azzam spoke with an eloquence evocative of Thesiger's own style.

Important for Iraqi marsh advocates were three things Thesiger (1964) immediately provided: first, the sense that the marshes were continually lost and perpetually on the verge of extinction; second, an alluring account of the marshes as a place of magic, wonder, and discovery that did not exist in the West, and; third, a call for immediate action to rescue the region from ruin and bolster the life of the marsh. Drawing on Thesiger made the unmistakable point that the marshes *required* foreign intervention in order to guarantee their protection.

While foreign investors emphasized the significance of the marsh via Thesiger early on at international conferences, foreign marsh advocates made these connections even more explicit in 2007 as they lobbied the Iraqi ministries to build a national park. One of the Italian engineering contractors, Bionatura, hired an architect to research the historical significance of the marshes to support their agenda. Mia Knight established the prominence of the marsh by referencing works by Thesiger (1964) and his marsh students, Young (1977) and Maxwell (1957), and even including Field (1940; 1949) and his critic Salim (1962). At international conferences it was Thesiger and the voices of select Iraqi exiles, like Azzam, that drew potential investors into the marsh and persuaded them to renew what they described as the radical devaluation of the marsh. Thesiger's prose was so detailed, he recreated the experience of living in the marsh in his writing.

To present historical data related to the tradition and livelihood of the marshlands tribes of south Iraq, the New Eden team has based the research on three scientific texts, written in diverse period and by expert of different discipline, and on three travel texts, one based on trip conducted in 1927, the other two on 1951/1958 period.

Scientific texts	Travel texts
<p>THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF IRAQ PART I, NUMBER 2 - THE LOWER EUPHRATES-TIGRIS REGION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> By Henry Field Field Museum of Natural History- July 8, 1949 <p>MARSH DWELLERS OF THE EUPHRATES DELTA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> by Shakir Mustafa Salim London School of Economics Monographs on Social Anthropology - 2004 First published in 1962 by The Athlone Press London, UK (Al-Chibayish, dirasah anthropulijyah li-qariyah fi ahwar al-Iraq. Publisher: Baghdad, Matba'at al-'Ari, 1955) <p>IRAQ'S MARSH ARABS - In the garden of Eden</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> By Edward L. Ochsenschlager University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archeology and Anthropology – 2004 	<p>THE TRIBES OF THE MARSH ARABS OF IRAQ</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The world of Haji rikkan By Fulanail Kegan Paul Limited 2004 Report of a trip conducted in 1927, along the villages near the Al Hawiza Marsh and among the tribes that inhabit the region <p>THE MARSH ARABS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> By Wilfred Thesiger - 1964 Kegan Paul Limited 2004 <p>A REED SHAKEN BY THE WIND</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> By Gavin Maxwell First published in paperback by Eland in 1994

Figure 9: Italian April 2007 presentation slide on national park⁵⁰

THE MARSH ARAB
By Wilfred Thesiger

Objective of the Text: Between 1950 and 1958, Wilfred Thesiger lived among the Marsh Arabs of southern Iraq, attracted by the traditional life-style of the people. He published his famous account of his experiences in *The Marsh Arabs* (1964).

The Author: Wilfred Thesiger was one of the best known explorers and travel writers of the 20th century. He was born in Ethiopia, schooled in England (studying at Magdalen College) and in 1935 joined the Sudan Political Service. In World War II he was transferred to Syria, after which he spent 5 years travelling with the Bedu in Southern Arabia. He then spent 7 years living in the Marshes of Iraq. From this time onwards he lived as a writer and traveller, later settling in Kenya and eventually England. Since his death at age 93 in 2003, his photographic collection (consisting of 38,000 negatives, 75 albums and thousands of loose prints) has been housed at the Pitt Rivers.




Travelling by canoe. Marshes, southern Iraq. 1953
Image used courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum

Waterproofing the hull of Wilfred Thesiger's tarada (sheikh's canoe) with pitch, Huzair Marshes, Southern Iraq. 1958



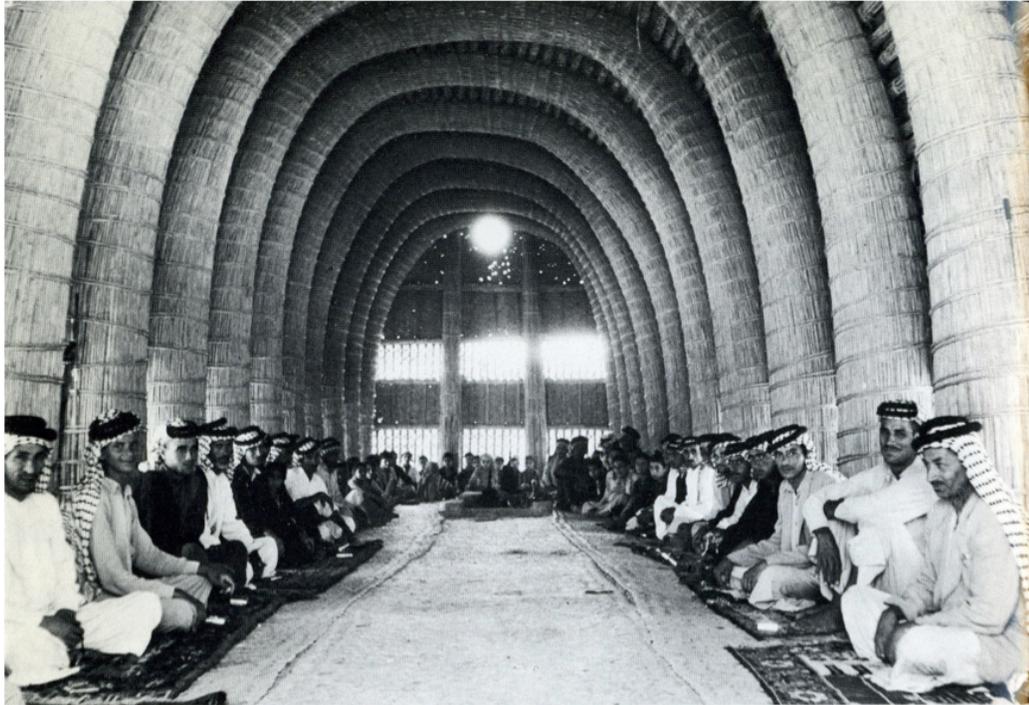
Spear fishing Umm al Abid, Marshes, Southern Iraq. 1958



Figure 10: Thesiger slide from national park presentation

⁵⁰ Bionatura. April 28, 2007. Feasibility Study for Mesopotamia National Park. "Marshlands Dwellers Livelihood Information from Scientific and Travel Texts." Powerpoint presentation. Sulaimaniya, Iraq.

Honor



Among the Muntifiq.

Figure 11: Thesiger's photo inside a mudhif "Among the Muntifiq"

Memories of that first visit to the Marshes have never left me: firelight on a half-turned face, the crying of geese, ducks fighting in to feed, a boy's voice singing somewhere in the dark, canoes moving in procession down a waterway, the setting sun seen crimson through the smoke of burning reedbeds, narrow waterways that wound still deeper into the Marshes. A naked man in a canoe with a trident in his hand, reed houses built upon water, black, dripping buffaloes that looked as if they had calved from the swamp with the first dry land. Stars reflected in the dark water, the croaking of frogs, canoes coming home at evening, peace and continuity, the stillness of a world that never knew an engine. Once again I experienced the longing to share this life, and to be more than a mere spectator (Thesiger 1985:23).

Beloved for his lauded book, *The Marsh Arabs*, Thesiger was known in the UK where colonial era travel writings still today have a place on the mahogany shelves of the Baker Street and Soho bookshops. Born in 1910 in Addis Ababa, where his father was the British Minister at the Court of the Emperor of Abyssinia, as Ethiopia was then known, Thesiger was a man of private wealth and great desire to explore the most remote locations. He attended lectures at the School of Oriental Studies in London (the precursor to the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London), and

hobnobbed with the educated elite, British political leaders, and an English leisure class that debuted its daughters at balls in Cairo. Unlike his compatriots, he “loathed cars, aeroplanes, wireless and television” and preferred life in “a smoke-filled hovel with a shepherd, his family and beasts” (Thesiger 1985:59). He wrote:

In such a household, everything was strange and different, their self-reliance put me at ease, and I was fascinated by the feeling of continuity with the past. I envied them a contentment rare in the world today and a mastery of skills, however simple, that I myself could never hope to attain (Thesiger 1985:59).

Despite disease, mosquitoes, and hunger that marsh residents weathered, Thesiger’s text romanticized life in the marsh as a unique way of life that survived into his contemporary present. For Thesiger the marsh was supreme, untouched nature; life in uncorrupted form.

From 1951 to 1958, Thesiger took up residence in the Iraqi marshes, publishing a collection of his pursuits in 1964. His text *The Marsh Arab* (Thesiger 1964) reads as an elegy for a paradise lost at a time when the marshes were thriving. At the heart of each is a journey for self-discovery, one that seemed to elude Thesiger for most of his life and which made his writings so relatable to popular audiences (Quennell November 1, 1959). For these reasons, his work is more a biography of the British leisure class in post-Mandate Iraq than it is a historiography of the marshes proper. He created an image of the marsh as a British counterpoint; the area is everything the Empire, in its years of decline and retreat, was not and had never been. The marshes, Thesiger writes, had been a center of lawlessness and rebellion from the earliest times. Thesiger dates the revolutionary character of the region back to the time of the Abbasids who tried to drain the marshes because marsh communities offered refuge for insurrectionists who challenged their power (1985:100). Thesiger writes about marsh rebellion as a way to demonstrate the commitment of “Marsh Arabs” to live an honorable life and to fight for those ideals. At these moments Thesiger pointedly directs a critique of British politics

through his elaboration of the marsh. Iraqi exiles share this in common: they similarly directed a critique of government, the deposed Iraqi government, through the marsh. Exiles found enchanting in Thesiger (and his protégées) his ability to make a full sensory world come alive at the tip of his pen. What Thesiger accomplished in writing, they sought to do by conservation. Exiles sought to write into being liberal political ideals through territorial reform, reorganizing the marsh to reflect the world they came to know in part through Thesiger.

Thesiger cultivated a sense of delight at every opportunity; from his description of “firelight on a half-turned face” to details he provided about the variety of bird species he encountered. Thesiger invoked birds and other elements of the marsh to capture an image of the area with precision and detail and to convey its serene beauty. He told stories of great adventures like wild boar hunting and navigating dense thickets of towering reeds. Mueggler writes that in colonial exploration, “The pen was an instrument of perception, and as the field of perception to which it gave access was purely visual, it was an optical instrument” (Mueggler 2005:466). Thesiger used his pen in this way, exposing the “closed community” of marsh life to an outside world he claimed marsh residents viewed with suspicion (1985:54). He was exhaustively detailed and wrote about every mundane aspect of life including methods for building homes (Thesiger 1985:75), lavatory practices (Thesiger 1985:54), food taboos (Thesiger 1985:81), fishing techniques (Thesiger 1985:92), worry beads and customs of use (Thesiger 1985:82), and singing (“In the Marshes a song was in vogue for six months to a year. Then people got tired of it and another took its place”) (Thesiger 1985:79). His numerous photographs reflect a fascination with marsh youth, canoes, and travel across the expansive waterworld. His writing reveals a marsh panorama of reed vistas, birds in flight, and visits in mudhifs.

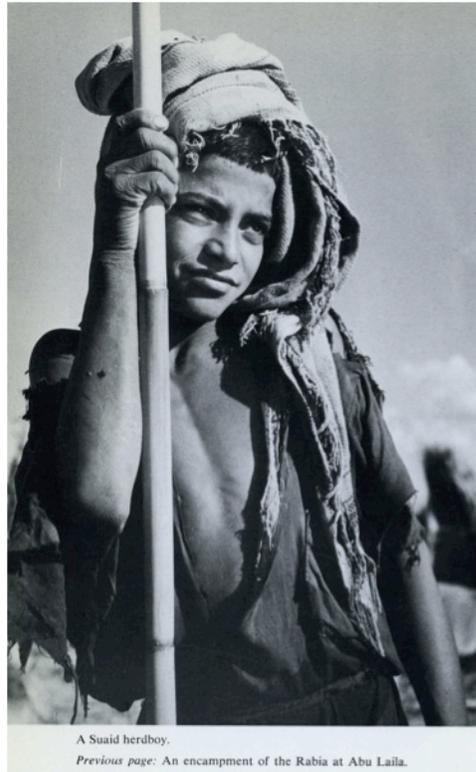


Figure 12: One of Thesiger's many photos of marsh youth

Thesiger described marsh residents as quintessential regal primitives. As if describing a breed of animal, Thesiger writes that “Marsh Arabs” were from “Bedu stock” (Thesiger 1985:97). At the same time, they were royal descendants: “In the Marshes there were few villages that did not boast at least one family descended from the Prophet” (Thesiger 1985:74). He described some marsh residents as Madan, as people who were

stoical in pain and often very brave, they lived for raid and counter-raid, which were conducted according to set rules and usually with great chivalry. They took a fierce pride in danger and suffering...Thoroughbreds, they called themselves...They came indeed from the purest race in the world (Thesiger 1985:97).

Thesiger completely racialized marsh “Thoroughbreds” in much the same way that other explorers had before him. His numerous pictures underscore the idea of marsh inhabitants as more an element of marsh ecology than a fully endowed person. For Thesiger the “Marsh Arabs” were a radically distinct category of person. This

dehumanization is underscored by the optics Thesiger instituted in writing, which exposed marsh resident bodies as biological, even savage beings, while preserving his own privacy and refinement. He penetrated marsh society in writing, describing the most intimate, shameful moments of biological bodily function like defecation. In this way Thesiger's optics were an exercise of power: he claimed the authority to unveil marsh life with vigor, but offered limited opportunities for marsh residents to participate in the production of text. Thesiger did with words what his earlier archaeological compatriots sought to do by digging. He meticulously documented what he established as a heritage site and made his findings public and available, not for Iraqis, but for an international audience.

Exhaustive in his pursuit, Thesiger detailed characteristics of marsh residents and community life. He described Marsh Arabs as arrogant, individualistic, intensely proud people who would rather die than be shamed (Thesiger 1985:98). He listed further traits: Marsh Arabs were gossips, loyal, honorable, humorous, poets, and overwhelmingly hospitable (Thesiger 1985:99). He wrote about the conditions of life in lyrical prose: "Sometimes it was unbearably hot. Mosquitoes danced in hovering clouds" (Thesiger 1985:46). He revealed that marsh residents braved harsh conditions where hunger was a constant. They dealt with such challenges by staving off food for as long as possible to stretch it as far as it could go, but sometimes they "miscalculated and died" (Thesiger 1985:97). Thesiger's comment about death was made without analysis or nod to context, it was simply presented as a natural outcome of a life lived close to nature.



Figure 13: Steering canoe

The Marsh Arab is an index of Thesiger's power to *explore*, to travel freely from one place in the marsh to another and to make public all that he wished to expose for his foreign readers. Thesiger's book moved with the author as he travels the marsh by canoe. He traveled the marsh by *tarada* (a sheik's vessel) given to him by his friend Sheikh Falih who insisted Thesiger navigate the marsh as an honored member of society. Throughout the text Thesiger moved from one marsh village to another, from one season to another. He welcomed the reader to join and, by elaborating his own experience in extensive detail, acted as a sort of marsh guide, serving as a bridge between his readership and the world of the marsh he experienced:

There were eighteen houses in Bu Mughaifat, clustered together, with the reedbeds pressing in upon them. We landed at one of the largest, scrambled up a slippery black bank, and squeezed through a narrow slit into the house. Several people were inside, all getting in each other's way as they laid down rugs and scattered cushions about. 'Welcome. Welcome, Sadam. Welcome, Sahib' (Thesiger 1985:70).

In this passage Thesiger connected with his reader by conveying the welcome he received in written text and, in this way, extending that invitation to his reader. His

recounted memories served to make the book interesting, but they also served to orient and position the reader in relation to the text and the marsh. Similarly, Thesiger's tarada functioned narratively as a literary device designed to move the reader through the marsh as much as to document Thesiger's experience of it.

As much as Thesiger drew the reader into the marsh, and as much as he traveled the area personally, the text charts and preserves a distance between the marshes and Thesiger. From the racialization of "Marsh Arabs" to his critique of British governance, Thesiger's book documented the marsh as a completely separate space from the world to which Thesiger belonged. This distance enabled Thesiger to position the marsh as a moralizing space that marsh advocates in 2003 drew upon to make their claims for political reform. At the same time, it established the marsh as a fundamentally different category of life.

Thesiger's romantic account differed strikingly from what his research assistant and traveling companion said about his own community. Sadam, his assistant, told Thesiger, "The Madan are thieves," (Thesiger 1985:65) and added, "The Madan are ignorant. They live here in the Marshes like their buffaloes and are scared of the Government" (Thesiger 1985:75). Thesiger included his remarks, but did not dwell on them. Instead he used his text to advocate for preservation of the area. Setting his intentions in stark contrast with his British peers in government, who he believed wished to see the whole of the area converted into a large suburbia, Thesiger was the original conservationist that marsh advocates drew upon to marshal support for their plans to create a national park in the area. In 2003, advocates would politically implement Thesiger's calls to preserve life in the area in ways he could not have anticipated.

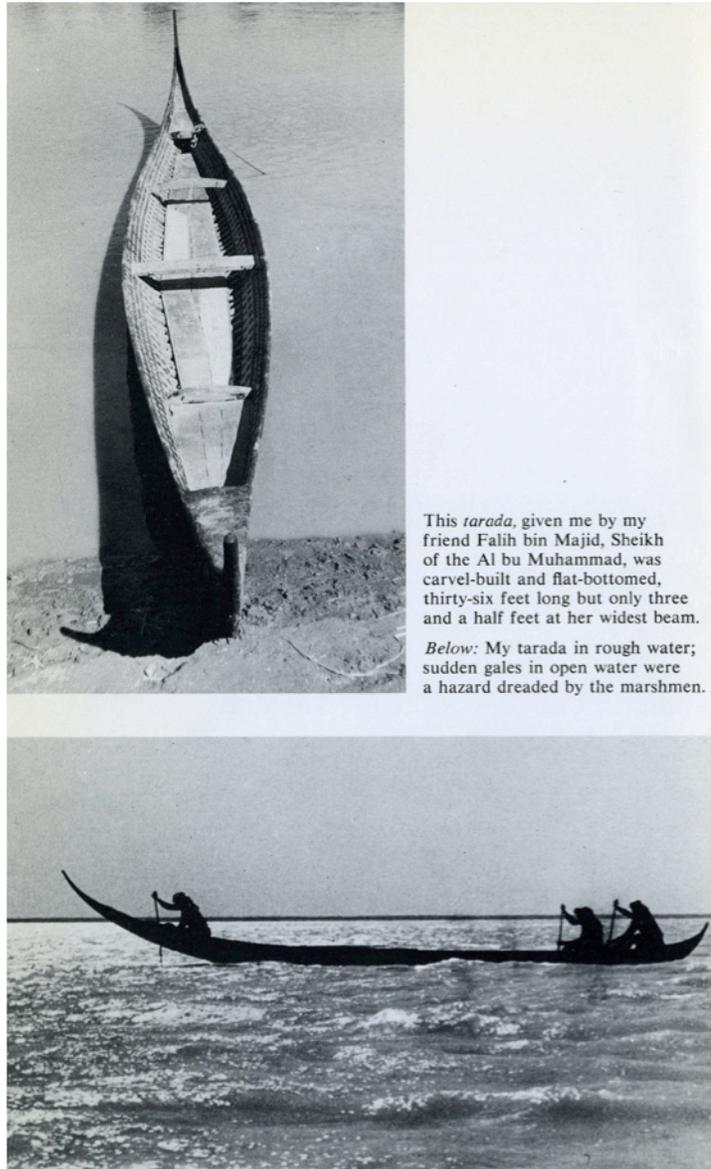


Figure 14: Thesiger's *tarada*

In contrast to Saddam's critique, Thesiger wrote about his own experience of the marshes as a sensory delight. His book included passages like:

That evening, back at Saddam's *mudhif*, I stood watching the sun go down behind the reedbeds that stretched to the world's end... From all around, as if the Marshes breathed, came the massed voices of frogs, an all-pervading pulse of sound, so sustained that the mind ceased to take note of it. More than any other, even than the crying of geese in winter, this was the sound of the Marshes. A dog barked; a buffalo grunted with a noise surprisingly like a camel's; a man called out a long, and to me, unintelligible message; a pause, and someone answered (Thesiger 1985:57).

The details of his writing are so precise, so rich that they make it possible to imagine the marsh as a real place. Of colonial explorers' writings in Tibet and Yunnan, Mueggler argues that text "with all of its climbing and wading, and all its uncertainties about the names of places and flowers" became a "full-voiced optical drama" (Mueggler 2005:467). Thesiger's text similarly created an optics of the marsh that invited investment and advocated foreign intervention to ensure the protection of the wetlands.

Thesiger perceived his role as both a documentary scribe and a cultural rescuer and he was quick to admit that he was not a specialist, not an anthropologist, but that he lived in the marshes and continued to return because he enjoyed being there. At the time of his writing (his book was published about seven years after his last visit), and as British, Thesiger wrote in and around the same time that the discipline of anthropology came into formation. Works by Durkheim (1997 [1893]; 2008 [1912]) and Mauss (1954 [1922]) and with Malinowski (1984 [1922]), E.E. Evans-Pritchard (1940), Radcliffe-Brown (1922; 1931), Van Gennep (1960 [1909]), and Audrey Richards (1939) pioneered the British school of Social Anthropology by developing a canon of cultural analysis and ethnographic method. In the States, Boas (1911b; 1911c; 1927; 1928; 1940; 2004 [1928]) and Mead (1928; 1930; 1932; 1935; 1942; 1949) were widely published. In France Lévi-Strauss was his contemporary, publishing classics like *Tristes Tropiques* (1992 [1955]) and *The Savage Mind* (1966) during the time that Thesiger lived in and wrote about the marshes. It is unclear whether Thesiger had read any of these scholarly works, whether he knew about earlier anthropological expeditions to the marsh, or even ethnographic projects in the wetlands that were ongoing while he frequented the area. In a style akin to T.E. Lawrence (1935), he adopted the clothing and personal habits of his marsh hosts, and he wrote with great admiration. Nonetheless the surrounding context is important for it indicates the support at the time for projects of ethnography, both naïve and scholarly.



Figure 15: A view of a mudhif from Thesiger's canoe

Thesiger ended his book abruptly. On the final page he recalled boarding a plane and leaving for England. In London, Thesiger learned of the 1958 revolution and predicted that he would never be able to return to Iraq. His anger raises questions about the implicit political message of book. This final passage makes clear that his book is also a critique of Ba'athist policies shutting out foreign nationals. It is surprising because for all that Thesiger criticized British policies in the marsh, he was outraged by the Iraqi government's decision to limit the presence of foreign nationals in country. His implication was that the Iraqi government would not value and protect the marshes as a handful of conscientious foreigners would. This combination of exalted ecology and condemnation of Ba'ath governance provided a fifty-year precedent for the claims marsh advocates made about the Iraqi wetlands in 2003. During the time Thesiger lived in the marsh, in 1951 the Iraqi government hired British irrigation engineer Fred Haigh to draft

plans for draining areas of the marsh to support the development and expansion of an agricultural industry initially envisioned by Willcocks at the turn of the century (UNEP and Hassan Partow 2001). As construction on the Main Outfall Drain began in 1953, during the time that Thesiger lived in the marsh, local authority underwent several changes as the government implemented new irrigation systems throughout southern Iraq (Fernea 1970). Despite his class status, Thesiger had little ability to influence the British advisors and Iraqi political leaders who pursued draining as a development project. His book may have been his way of making his argument for preservation public; it wasn't until half a century later that his text would become politically instrumental.

From 1956 and 1958, during the last two years Thesiger lived in the marsh, Robert Fernea, a PhD Candidate in Anthropology at the University of Chicago, and his wife Elizabeth lived in the town of Daghara in the marshland region of Iraq and studied the impact of changing irrigation systems on local political and community life. Robert Fernea's account of marsh society eschews romance. Instead he presents a rigorous analysis on the possible impact of newly instituted irrigation systems would have on the centralization of tribal leadership (1970). His ethnography provides a much different account of marsh life, demonstrating that far from being an isolated enclave even small communities of the marsh were tied into national and global political and economic movements of the time.

Despite his limited impact on Iraqi policy governing the marsh, Thesiger had tremendous influence on a number of British luminaries who followed him into the Iraqi marsh and wrote their own published travel accounts that replicated Thesiger's marsh romance in their own terms. By co-opting Thesiger's experience and integrating it into their own, his British protégées like Gavin Maxwell (Maxwell 1957) and Gavin Young (Young 1977) continually renewed his plea for protection and conservation with their publications in the 1950s and the 1970s. In 1956 Maxwell went to the marshes with

Thesiger and published his account of marsh life *People of the Reeds*, which was initially published in 1956, even before Thesiger's own text. Due to his own popularity Pyramid issued reprints twice over (Maxwell 1966; Maxwell 1969). In 1994, just after the Gulf War, Eland Press reissued the book under a different name, *A Reed Shaken by the Wind* (Maxwell 1994), and in 2003, on the heels of *Operation Iraqi Freedom*, they released the book again (Maxwell 2003). Similarly inspired, Gavin Young too spent time in the marshes with Thesiger throughout the 1950s and returned in 1973 to write a "memorial" to his friends who lived there. In 1977 Young published *Return to the Marshes* with photos by photographer Nik Wheeler that updated Thesiger's collection and provided a renewed glimpse into marsh life (Young 1977).⁵¹ Young did not have Thesiger's writing talent, but his book emphasized the long history of great civilizations arising from the marsh area beginning with the Sumerians:

The natural history of the place was hypnotic. Black and white pied kingfishers dived for their prey all around us, clusters of storks arced high above, snow-white flotillas of stately pelicans fished the lagoons; there was always at least one eagle in the sky. The reeds we passed through trembled or crashed with hidden wildlife: otters, herons, coot, warblers, gaudy purple gallinule, pygmy cormorants, huge and dangerous wild pigs. And often, out of some apparently deserted reed-jungle, a full-throated human voice soared into the silence...The young voice throbbed and choked with sadness, real or feigned. In that great solitude, where the men of Ur once poled their canoes and where 'in the beginning,' according to Sumerian legend, Marduk, the great God, built a reed platform on the surface of the waters and thus created the world, the effect is one of unquenchable and universal yearning (1983:21)

The yearning to which Young referred is generalized, but foreign explorers, like him, who found a special affinity with the area, commonly perceived these feelings of desire. Since the voices of marsh residents are circumscribed in these texts, it is difficult to know whether people living in the marsh experienced the same kind of loss or melancholy. The yearning Young describes appears self-referential and indexes the distance between foreign travelers and the world of the marsh they wished to intimately know.

⁵¹ A later edition of *Return to the Marshes* (Young 1983) omitted Wheeler's photographs, replacing them with illustrations.

Drawing inspiration from Young and Thesiger, Iraqi exiles expressed a similar desire for the marsh in 2003 when they spoke about the loss of an Iraqi national treasure.

In 1979, the year Saddam Hussein came to power, the BBC made a film using *Return to the Marshes* as a basis for their piece (BBC Film 1979). In 1980, at the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war, Young published *Iraq: Land of Two Rivers* employing Nik Wheeler again to do the photography for his account of their through Mesopotamia (Young 1980). Their writings were continually renewed and ever popular. In post-2003 Iraq, Thesiger provided the language Iraqi exiles and nongovernmental organizations needed to push for Iraqi marsh conservation.

Adventure

Adventurer's all

True adventures are no longer easy to come by "But 200 Chicagoans have found, in one way or another, new worlds to conquer, or at least to look upon...They have formed a club 'to provide a hearth and home for those who have left the beaten path and made for adventure.'...Henry Field, assistant curator of physical anthropology for the Field Museum, and John T. McCutcheon, who owns Treasure Island, have had adventures of which the world has heard (Pepper May 28, 1930:7).

Henry Field was a great collector. As Field studied at Oxford for his B.A. in Anthropology, archaeologists unveiled King Tut's tomb in Egypt. In the early 1920s, archaeology was front-page news. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, archaeological practice took a new turn in Iraq and in the Middle East. Under the 1874 Ottoman Law of Antiquities, foreign countries were able to roam Mesopotamia in search of artifacts that they moved to museums in Europe and the United States in a relative free for all (Bernhardsson 2005:11). As the British established the Hashemite Monarchy in Iraq, archaeology, still a very young discipline, played an important role in creating a *history* for the new nation that would demonstrate its ancient, if unknown, roots (Bernhardsson 2005; Goode 2007). British political officers like Gertrude Bell pursued

heritage as a means by which to unite an *Iraqi* citizenry for a neophyte nation. Field could not wait to be part of the action. He recalled, "With special interest I pored over the pamphlets sent me each month from the Field Museum in Chicago...Studies were fascinating, but how much more fascinating if it were possible to do what Uncle Barbour was always advising: be done with books and lectures and start digging on one's own!" (Field 1953:46). Shortly thereafter Field did participate in his family's Field Museum archaeological expedition at Kish, an ancient Sumerian site, where he assisted in the ongoing excavation throughout the 1920s.

Field's most notable contribution to anthropological scholarship was his twin volumes that together formed *The Anthropology of Iraq* (1940; 1949). His multi-volume work immediately stirred controversy at the Field Museum for its questionable science and astonishing images. The tome is a catalogue of craniometric indices, body measurements, and haunting surveillance photographs of individual marsh residents. Race was a popular topic in US anthropological scholarship of the time. In the early 1900s a wave of anti-immigration anxiety swept the United States, culminating in Madison Grant's *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916; Higham 1955:271-272) and President Roosevelt's pleas with Anglo-American women to save the race by having more children (Barrett and Roediger 1997:11; Higham 1955:147). The US government launched a major reform in immigration leaning on these social Darwinist and revisionist Mendelian studies of race.

Franz Boas, who Field greatly admired, persuaded the US Immigration Commission to fund his own study of race and immigration which, in considerable detail and using similar methods of skull measurements, concluded that an individual's bodily expression of race adapted upon migration (Boas 1911a). In short, Boas' study questioned previous received logic about race altogether by demonstrating that race was a *phenotype* that was not immutable, but environmentally responsive. Regardless, the

1924 Immigration Law refigured United States racial categories, constructing a white American race that homogenized European ethnic groups while specifying the racialization of Chinese, Mexicans, and Filipinos (Ngai 1999:69-70).

When Field went to Iraq in 1934 to pursue research for his compendium of racial types in Iraq, he used phenotypic measurements, from craniometric variables to his own observations in body traits, to classify Iraqis into distinct racial categories. Field's objective was to classify all the races of man, starting with Iraq, in order to make a grand future for himself as a scholar. Despite his admiration for Boas and his overwhelming personal desire to be accepted as a great anthropologist, his methods were ascientific by anthropological standards. In 1941, Field's position ended as Head Curator of Physical Anthropology and his personal papers indicate that he experienced some difficulties with the Museum thereafter. Despite the reception of his work in the discipline, Field's *Anthropology of Iraq* specified a racialized marsh aesthetic that appeared as a counter-narrative to the 2003 marsh restoration movement, but which also contributed to contemporary denigration of marsh residents as "backward."

Henry Field moved to Chicago in the 1920s to work full time for his Uncle Stanley's Field Museum of Natural History in the Physical Anthropology department. Uncle Stanley also owned Marshall Field's, then a luxurious department store in Chicago with all the trimmings of an Art Deco era: hats decorated with the plumes of New Guinea Bird's of Paradise and curiosities from the Near and Far East. Art Deco peaked in the 1920s and combined the structure of mathematical geometric shapes, the "primitive" arts, and Greco-Roman classicism in a distinctly modern form (Benton, et al. 2003). Art Deco not only referenced material form, but the cultural exploration of a roaring twenties globally mobile class, of which Field was part. The fortune that funded foreign "adventures" also gave rise to an aesthetics of their political power.

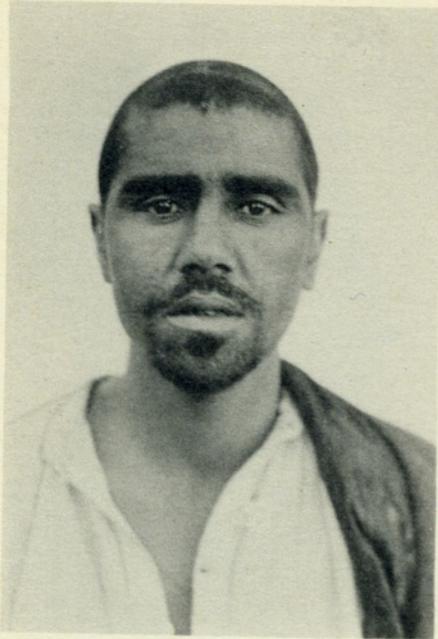
During the Art Deco craze, the Field Museum prepared to create a hall of life-like human sculptures highlighting the different races of the world as “The Hall of Man” exhibit for the 1933 World’s Fair in Chicago. The undertaking was a massive investment for both the Museum and the artist. The Museum contracted Malvina Hoffman, a student of Rodin’s, to sculpt 105 sculptures all together including 35 full figures, 1 half-size figure, 30 busts, and 39 heads almost all entirely in bronze with a few marble productions. Though artists and social scientists almost immediately criticized the exhibit, the premise that humanity was comprised of separate and distinct “races” of man went largely unchallenged. Boas’ work had not yet gained popular sway.

In residence at the Museum during this time, Field was almost certainly influenced by the magnitude of this collection and turned to Iraq to do in the field what Hoffman had assembled in bronze. In 1934 he set out to classify the racial types of man in a region of Iraq with which he was familiar: Kish, the site where he participated in the archaeological excavation of one of the earliest human settlements, Sumerian civilization. The two volume *Anthropology of Iraq*, one on the upper Euphrates (Field 1940) and the other on the Lower (Field 1949), reads as a collection of statistics. The river, and not Iraq, was the point of orientation around which his study revolved. The published account was more a surveillance of the “Marsh Arab,” as Field referred to marsh residents, and a biometric tome than it was an academic inquiry about the communities of people living in the marsh.

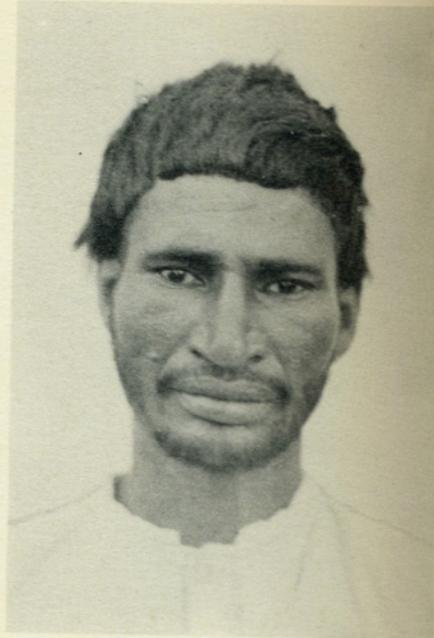
Much as Field collected data about archaeological digs in Iraq, he collected photographs of marsh residents, took their cranial measurements from the size of their skulls to the length of their jaws, recorded individual hair texture, noted eye color, and evaluated people’s height. To assist his exhaustive project, Field asked Lady Drower, wife of a British colonial officer, to accompany him. She would be responsible for collecting the words and phrases of members of the Al Bu Muhammad tribe. Together,

Field, Drower, and a few other assistants set up central tents in marsh villages where they measured, photographed, and evaluated the physiognomy of each and every willing male marsh resident. It was an unprecedented exercise of biopower as Field reduced Marsh Arabs to ecological specimens.

Marsh advocates working in 2003 knew of Field's work and cited it superficially, making reference only to its existence, when making presentations to the Iraqi government or potential foreign partners. Mia, one of the architects contracted by Bionatura, once asked me in Sulaimaniya if I had read Field's book. It was clear from our conversation that she found something just a little creepy about Field's photographs. In them Iraqi subjects sit and peer into the camera, totally dehumanized. Foucault argues that the "disciplines of the body and the regulations of the population constituted two poles around which the organization of power over life was deployed" (1990 [1978]:139). Field's photographs were this kind of exercise of biopower. They referenced the separation of human life into two distinct categories: one, the man in the photograph, signified species life at its most base level and, the other, Henry Field and readers of his text, represented human life as complex being. Agamben describes biopolitics as the politicization of this separation. He writes: "The same bare life that in the *ancien régime* was politically neutral and belonged to God as creaturely life and in the classical world was (at least apparently) clearly distinguished as *zoë* from political life (*bios*) now fully enters into the structure of the state and becomes the earthly foundation of the state's legitimacy and sovereignty" (Agamben 1998:127). Field's project did not immediately enter this dichotomy into the politics of statecraft, but he was and continues to be recognized as a pioneer in Iraqi anthropology.



No. 765 (age 25)



No. 840 (age 25)



No. 822 (age 65)

AL BU MUHAMMAD ABERRANT TYPES

Figure 16: Al Bu Muhammad "Aberrant Types"

UPPER FACIAL LENGTH

	x-63		64-69		70-75		76-81		82-x		Totals	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Total facial length											10	4.54
x-109	2	0.91	7	3.18	1	0.45	0	....	0	....	66	30.00
110-119	11	5.00	36	16.36	15	6.82	4	1.82	0	....	119	54.09
120-129	2	0.91	35	15.91	62	28.18	16	7.27	4	1.82	25	11.36
130-x	0	....	1	0.45	10	4.55	11	5.00	3	1.36	220	99.99

NASAL BREADTH

	x-29		30-35		36-41		42-x		Totals	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Nasal length									54	24.55
x-49	2	0.91	30	13.64	20	9.09	2	0.91	148	67.28
50-59	7	3.18	87	39.55	46	20.91	8	3.64	18	8.18
60-x	0	....	8	3.64	9	4.09	1	0.45	220	100.01

MEASUREMENTS AND INDICES OF AL BU MUHAMMAD TRIBESMEN

Measurements	No.	Range	Mean	S.D.	C.V.
Age	220	18-70	34.05±0.48	10.50±0.34	30.84±0.99
Stature	220	143-187	166.71±0.29	6.36±0.20	3.82±0.12
Sitting height	219	72-98	87.79±0.18	3.84±0.12	4.37±0.14
Head length	221	167-205	187.26±0.26	5.82±0.19	3.11±0.10
Head breadth	221	126-164	145.75±0.26	5.76±0.18	3.95±0.13
Minimum frontal diameter	221	101-124	113.02±0.20	4.44±0.14	3.93±0.13
Bizygomatic diameter	221	120-149	135.45±0.23	5.05±0.16	3.73±0.12
Bigonial diameter	221	86-129	104.94±0.26	5.76±0.18	5.49±0.18
Total facial height	221	100-144	121.75±0.30	6.55±0.21	5.38±0.17
Upper facial height	221	50-89	70.55±0.24	5.35±0.17	7.58±0.24
Nasal height	220	40-71	52.98±0.23	5.00±0.16	9.44±0.30
Nasal breadth	220	25-51	34.85±0.17	3.75±0.12	10.76±0.35
Ear length	221	44-75	58.98±0.25	5.52±0.18	9.36±0.30
Ear breadth	221	23-43	32.19±0.14	3.06±0.10	9.51±0.31
Indices					
Relative sitting height	219	48-57	52.78±0.07	1.64±0.05	3.11±0.10
Cephalic	221	68-88	77.94±0.17	3.69±0.12	4.73±0.15
Fronto-parietal	221	69-86	77.62±0.14	3.18±0.10	4.10±0.13
Zygo-frontal	221	72-95	83.26±0.14	3.00±0.10	3.60±0.12
Zygo-gonial	221	63-92	77.35±0.18	3.99±0.13	5.16±0.17
Total facial	221	75-109	90.05±0.25	5.45±0.17	6.05±0.19
Upper facial	221	43-66	52.13±0.18	4.05±0.13	7.77±0.25
Nasal	220	44-95	66.02±0.42	9.16±0.29	13.87±0.45
Ear	221	37-76	55.02±0.27	5.92±0.19	10.76±0.35

Figure 17: Field's indices

Field's text spoke to his own aspirations to discover the great secrets of the world and expose them for a US and European public. His photographs contributed to an aesthetic—from Art Deco to the “Hall of Man”—that placed “primitive man” in an order of social ranking. Stoler asserts “Colonialism was not a secure bourgeois project. It was not only about the importation of middle-class sensibilities to the colonies, but about the *making* of them” (1995:99). Field entered Iraq in the early years of the Hashemite Kingdom, just after the end of the British Mandate in Iraq in 1932, when the British maintained considerable political influence in the country. Much like marsh advocates in 2003, he worked to create a national Iraqi past, but in the 1930s he pursued the past through the evaluation of marsh resident bodies. Today advocates seek to establish that heritage by creating political emblems for a reconstructed Iraq. It was a time when the British hoped to create a national *Iraqi* past by unearthing treasures to establish the country's heritage. Field hoped to make his own contribution by classifying the races of man in order to demonstrate the antiquity of Iraq *biologically*. His *Anthropology* creates a recognition of the marsh as racialized life. Field rendered the marsh a biopolitical aesthetic wherein “Marsh Arabs” became a qualified form of human life.

At the same time that Field's volumes are filled with craniometrics, indices, and statistics, his book also includes photographic images of canoes and mudhifs much like Thesiger's own almost twenty years later. One image stands out. It is a photograph of Sheikh Falih of the Al Bu Muhammad confederation. Is this the same Sheikh Falih that would welcome Thesiger by gift of tarada in the early 1950s? We cannot be sure. It is clear, however, that as travelers and explorers frequented the marsh they visited the same places and the same families over and over again in a kind of recursive history beginning with at least with Field, extending through Thesiger, and into contemporary marsh advocacy.



SHEIKH FALIH AS SAIHUD, PARAMOUNT SHEIKH OF THE
AL BU MUHAMMAD TRIBE

Figure 18: Sheikh Falih

After publishing *The Anthropology of Iraq* Henry Field would never again conduct an expedition on behalf of the Museum. In 1941 he finished his post as the Head Curator of Physical Anthropology at the Museum, but remained active in the anthropology. He served on American Anthropological Association committees and in 1941 became an advisor to President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "M" Project, a study of world population, migration, and settlement to assist the re-location of displaced populations following WWII so as to prevent future conflicts. Field continued to advise President Harry S. Truman. In 1950 Harvard University appointed Field a Research Fellow in Physical Anthropology at the Peabody Museum and in 1959 he became a Research Associate



Fig. 1. Primitive type of craft, made of reed bundles



Fig. 2. A hunting expedition

AL BU MUHAMMAD BOATS

Figure 19: Field's photos of canoes

in Anthropology at the University of Miami. Field may have been castigated for his embrace of biometrics, but he continued to earn recognition as a credible expert in anthropology. Field never stopped collecting even when he had retired in Coconut Grove, Florida. He created catalogues of archaeological digs in Iraq (Al-Haik 1968). When the spirit moved him, Field set out into his backyard in search of treasure. A file in his archive "Collecting—1967" notes his backyard findings: spiders, scorpions, native insects and their respective types.



Figure 20: Field's hair sample

Seventy years later, forgotten in the lower basement of the Field Museum, hair samples from one marsh resident that Henry collected in 1934 were still preserved, in tact. There was no identifying information as to whom the hair had belonged, no detail about its former owner. The archival record simply read “hair samples” and noted its archival location. When I asked to see what was in the file, a Museum archaeologist, Tim, took me by elevator all the way down into darkened cavern of the subbasement. We searched for lights and walked past aisles of aging boxes. Tim found the crate in question, fished out a small sealed paper envelope, and sliced it open. A locket of black hair spilled out from inside. Benjamin writes about fetishized objects of the past as if they were “fossils,” remnants of an age preserved from decay. Buck-Morss argues: “But in the image of the fossil, Benjamin captures as well the process of natural decay that marks the survival of past history within the present, expressing with palpable clarity what the discarded fetish becomes, so hollowed out of life that only the imprint of the material shell remains” (Buck-Morss 1991:160). The hair was a direct biological sample of human life in the marsh. It had a materiality far different than the photographic image. The hair indexed the power of Henry Field, the Museum, and the whole of the

archaeological and physical anthropological enterprise in Iraq in the 1930s to determine categories of human life. In the Field Museum basement, a bit of a “Marsh Arab” body existed in preservation long after the man from whom it came died. The hair was evidence of the precedence of foreign control over biological life in the marsh.

In 1953, a young Iraqi student of Mary Douglas at University College London, S.M. Salim, began his fieldwork in Chibayish. There he worked closely with the esteemed al-Hasani family. Ali al-Hasani, a descendent, popped up several decades later in 2004 at Harvard’s conference on the *Mesopotamian Marshes* which would provide the jumping off point for twenty-first century Iraqi marsh restoration. Ali’s appearance created a temporal link back to the moment in the marsh that Salim experienced. Salim’s ethnography delivered a pointed critique of Field, but conference participants missed the connection between Ali and marsh historiography.

Salim was born in Amara and had entered the PhD program in Anthropology at UCL in 1950. His purpose in conducting ethnographic fieldwork in the marshes was to challenge the dominant logic about the marsh that circulated the halls of the academy based on assumptions that scholars like Field made about the Sumerian heritage of marsh residents. Salim argues, “Field recalled ‘the theory that the Marsh Arabs are the direct descendents of the Sumerians who lived in Iraq about 5,000 years ago, and that they were driven into the marshes for protection...’ Where did Henry Field hear of this theory? He does not state, nor do we know, whom exactly he means by ‘Marsh Arabs’” (1962:7). Salim instead provides a rigorous ethnographic account of life in the marshes that includes an analysis of marsh economic and political organization, contact between residents of the marshes and towns, and an account of migration out of the marsh. Salim’s ethnography is rigorous and well researched, but his work did not garner the popularity that Field and Thesiger’s more romantic accounts enjoyed internationally.

Marsh investors occasionally referenced Field during PowerPoint presentations on the history of the marshes, but it was Omar Dewachi's exhibit of Field's racial types photographs at Harvard where he became most visible. Harvard had its own archive of Field photographs given its relationship with him after he left the Chicago Museum. In 2004 Omar, a doctoral student in Anthropology and a former physician in Iraq, had an opportunity to assemble several prints for a special exhibit at Harvard's Peabody Museum. Omar argued that the photographs indicated the marshes were a space of "ungovernability" in Iraq and pointed to a biopolitics that the photos suggested. The word "frontal" in Field's captions offended for it marked human life as an animalistic being, separating the subject into a lesser category of person. Omar's exhibit was a planned evening activity for all participants in Harvard's *Mesopotamian Marshes* conference. Rather than ask Omar about his motivation for the exhibit, Azzam and others questioned his knowledge of the marsh by asking Omar to name the different canoes found in the photos. As marsh advocates looked into the faces of the photos, they did not comment on the most obvious message about the dehumanization and racialization their subjects. Embedded within Omar's critique was another argument: marsh residents historically have not had the right to determine their presentation to the world.



Figure 21: "Frontal portrait of a Dulaim man from Iraq"⁵²

⁵² Henry Field's photo in Harvard Peabody Museum Exhibit curated by Omar Dewachi in October 2004 to correspond with Harvard's Conference on the Mesopotamian Marshes (Oct. 21, 2004 - Feb. 28, 2005 #520).



Figure 22: "Profile portrait of a Dulaim man from Iraq"



Figure 23: "Henry Field measuring Arab man's jaw"



Figure 24: Examination⁵³

⁵³ Harvard caption: "Field work with Shammar Jarbah man being observed by a western woman." In all likelihood the unnamed woman is Lady Drower who accompanied Field on the expedition. Field himself may be the standing man with the hat on the right side of the image.

Exile Memory

*“Ever the river has risen and brought us the flood,
the mayfly floating on the water.
On the face of the sun its countenance gazes,
then all of a sudden nothing is there.”*
—“He who saw the Deep”
(*The Epic of Gilgamesh*, 1,200 B.C.)

Figure 25: Epigraph to UNEP’s 2001 report

During the 1970s as the Ba’ath government cracked down on youth movements vocally opposed to its policies, those who dared to publicly challenge the government sometimes found refuge in the Iraqi marshes. The marshes had historically been notorious for sheltering dissidents and leadership opposed to the central ruling polity, dating as back as far as the known history of the marshes themselves. During the repressive period of the 1970s Iraq when the Ba’ath party cracked down on youth movements and outspoken critics of the government, intellectuals and dissidents found refuge in the marsh. Zain al-Mousawi, an Iraqi exile living in London, told me that following dental school when it was time to do his government service in a rural area, he strategically selected Suq al-Shuyukh, the furthest place from Baghdad. He left for the marshes on May 2, 1978 and remained there until the government forced him to leave in 1980 as they prepared for the Iran-Iraq war. Zain told me:

So that returns back to my childhood because I was brought up in an environment where most of the people were descending from the south and they were all leftists in those days. By the standards of these days. They were nice people, I loved them. I had a dream, I always wanted to work in the Arab marshes. I went to Suq al Shuyukh in two weeks time and as a punishment they placed me deep into the marsh because I wasn’t a Baath, I wasn’t a Baathi, I wasn’t a Baathist. I was against them, I was a leftist. They made a mistake.⁵⁴

Zain recalled that the marshes were in their heyday when he arrived; everywhere he looked it was a feast for the eyes. Like Thesiger, one of the things that Zain said he liked most about the marsh was the “simple life” it afforded; it was a place of peace without the stress and social obligations of Baghdad, he remembered. When Zain was forced to

⁵⁴ Zain al-Mousawi. November 27, 2005. Personal Interview. London, United Kingdom.

leave the marshes, he feared for his life in Baghdad because he had been a critic of the government, the police had previously questioned him, and he had concealed his activities. He told me that others he knew who did the same were eventually discovered and killed for their transgression against the government. In trouble in June 1981 Zain managed to get accepted to school in London. When he arrived at the airport, he was stopped by border guards who would not let him on the plane because he was on a list of those who couldn't leave the country. A senior-ranking officer finally passed by, saw the commotion, and granted Zain permission to board. For years after that, he told me, he would wake up with nightmares that he couldn't escape Iraq. His wife would have to remind him that he was in London, not Baghdad. Zain said that the nightmares persisted for decades all the way until Saddam Hussein's government was toppled by President Bush. That's why, he said, he calls President George W. Bush the second messiah.

In Zain's narrative the peace of the marsh is a direct contrast with the terror of Saddam Hussein's reign. Faleh Jabar too remembered living for years in fear that his passport would not carry him out of the country. Over dinner at his house, Faleh told me that he had a recurring nightmare that he was in the Kurdish mountains of Iraq again and didn't have a real passport. He had severe anxiety at the time, he told me. If Saddam's army found him with no passport they would kill him and if they found him with a passport that said his real name, because he was a known opponent of the government, they would kill him. It wasn't until recently when he went back to the Kurdish mountains and spent some time there that he was able to shake this nightmare. "Ask any Iraqi," he suggested, "and they'll say the same thing."⁵⁵ Within Iraq, the marshes were one of the very few, very unique places, young Iraqis could flee to escape the repression of Saddam's government. For this reason, throughout the 1970s, the marshes became a

⁵⁵ Faleh Jabar. October 21, 2005. Personal Conversation. London, United Kingdom.

place of safe harbor for intellectuals, artists, and political leaders who feared for their lives.

During the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s, Saddam Hussein had been particularly concerned about the marshes area because the border, concealed as it was by the thicket of marsh reeds, was so porous that it was next to impossible to monitor. On the eve of war with Iran, he tried to redirect the public appearance of his relationship with the marsh. To demonstrate his allegiance with Iraqi Shi'a in the south—with people who, following the 1979 Iranian Revolution, he feared would oppose the war with Iran (given their ties to other Shi'a living there)—he traveled to the marshes with a team of faithful reporters. One among this team spoke with me about the trip in London in 2005. He kept a photo from the event. Even despite his concerns, it wasn't until the 1991 Intifadah that Saddam Hussein took action to systematically drain the ecosystem. Memories of the Intifadah and the violence Iraqi exiles personally experienced there, or which their family and friends suffered, are used to make the case for marsh restoration. The revival of the marshes, the argument goes, would redress the persecution Iraqis faced under Saddam Hussein.

The Intifadah began in the first days of March 1991 when Ba'ath soldiers who deserted the army retreated Kuwait through southern Iraq, firing at Saddam's murals as they went (Jabar 2003:269). Iraqis recalled that President George H. W. Bush on February 15, 1991 publicly called for Iraqis to rise up against Saddam, but that the US did not support the insurrection when it happened. Incited by the deserting soldiers and fueled by the promise of international support, the revolt immediately gained momentum as protesters in southern cities joined the rebellion taking Basra on Friday, March 1, Suq al-Shuyukh in the marshes on Saturday, March 2, Nasiriya and Najaf on Monday, March 4, Karbala on Thursday, March 7, and then spreading through Amara, Hillah, Kut and further throughout the south (Jabar 2003:269).



Figure 26: Iraqi reporter in marsh with Saddam Hussein

The Intifadah spread to northern Iraqi Kurdistan within days of the siege of Basra and quickly spread throughout the northern region, capturing every city save for Kirkuk and Mosul within ten days. In the end, sixteen of the eighteen provinces were under the control of the Intifadah leadership. One London Iraqi exile, Jassim, fought in the Intifadah and remembered:

By Monday all of Najaf was under our control. Karbala and all south, Basra to Babil were under our control of al-Khoei. All people listened to the news, looking for somebody to help us. At that time, we said that it was necessary for us to take Baghdad...We stayed two weeks and nothing.⁵⁶

Jassim indicated that instead when Saddam sent his military planes to squash the Intifadah, the US government watched from their aircraft, making peace symbols in the air, but did nothing.

Jassim remembered watching Saddam Hussein's helicopters approach the gathering of rebels. Next to them, he recalled seeing two US air force F-16 planes. He told me "The USA by smoke made a victory sign in the air. When the air force left, the

⁵⁶ Jassim. December 1, 2005. Personal Interview. London, United Kingdom.

helicopter continue to shoot people. My friend was injured and lost his leg. They left the helicopter to kill the people.”⁵⁷ Jassim was able to escape Iraq, first living in the Saudi Rafha UN refugee camp and then making his way to London. Human Rights Watch estimated the deaths of thousands of unarmed Iraqi civilians that day (Middle East Watch 1992:1). Several disappeared remain unaccounted for and mass graves were discovered in Iraq post-2003.

Following the Intifadah, Saddam Hussein turned to the marshes and instituted a major hydrological campaign to drain the waters from the wetlands. Partow documents, “After approximately nine months of round-the-clock shifts, the Iraqi government officially inaugurated the opening of Saddam River on 7 December 1992” (UNEP and Hassan Partow 2001:24). The government forced marsh residents from their homes when they systematically drained the marsh (Human Rights Watch 2003c:8). Saddam Hussein strategically named drainage canals “Saddam River,” “Mother of the Battles River” (the Iraqi government referred to the entire 1991 Gulf War as the Mother of the Battles war and deemed themselves the victors), and “Fidelity to the Leader River,” among other such names. It was a massive campaign of territorial retribution. Reports of burning marsh vegetation and running villagers out of their homes circulated communities of Iraqi exiles in London along with amateur video shot by friends and family members to document the unmitigated violence targeting the marshes. In January 2003 Human Rights Watch described Saddam Hussein’s campaign as “a crime against humanity” and called for an international tribunal to punish those responsible (Human Rights Watch 2003a).

The radical sense of loss from the 1991 Intifadah motivated Iraqi exiles in London like Sahib al-Hakim, whose family comprised the Shi’a Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq and maintained a strong presence in the south and in Iran, to advocate for the marsh as

⁵⁷ Ibid.

an act of commemoration honoring their families and religious leaders who perished as they fled the systematic brutality of the Iraqi army squashing the Intifadah. At his



Figure 27: Sahib al-Hakim holds bullets from the Intifadah found in the marshes

London home he maintained a personal museum in honor of those who perished during the Intifadah and subsequently in the marsh. He collected bullets from the Intifadah, photographs of the executed, endless reams of documents on the Intifadah, amateur video on the burning and forced evacuation of marsh villages. al-Hakim published two tomes from the collected photographs of marsh martyrs; one featuring executed religious clerics and the other members of marsh families who perished. His personal museum made explicit what others in exile believed, that redemption of their personal tragedy and the loss of their loved ones could finally be possible with the resurrection of the Iraqi marshes as a vibrant ecosystem.



Figure 28: Sahib al-Hakim's home archive

Marsh Outings

Before the 1991 Intifadah, before exile in London, L.A., Detroit, or New York, Iraqi children visited the marshes with their parents during weekend outings. For elite Iraqis with the opportunity to vacation in country, the marshes were a special place. Samia Muhammad, a social service director for Iraqi exiles in London, remembered her father insisted on taking her and her brother to the marsh. Life in Iraq became increasingly more dangerous for her mother, who Samia identified as an outspoken critic of the government and a “women’s rights advocate.” In 1980 when she was about 17, the family left Iraq for Moscow and later London. Samia recalled her childhood visit to the marsh with great fondness, as if through her recollection she were transported to that moment:

Yeah. And uh [breathing in] just so enjoyable, my God! Uh, it was uh, I remember, it was uh somewhere in [pause] June and uh it wasn't very hot and uh

the water was very pleasant and cold and uh we had all this uh beautiful uh, uh, uh—[softly] god, it's so difficult to... *qasaq*, uh what's it called in English? Uh like, uh, bamboo coming from the water and you go between this bamboo and uh you see under the water lots of fish and lots of um snakefish and uh-birds! Birds are wonderful! We had so many different birds and I remember the man who were taking us were s- um, saying "look at these birds between these things" and "look at that." And we saw all these houses which they built on the, on the water. People were living in these houses and they are going up and down with the water. [breathing in] Ummm. Oh, he took us to see Adam tree in Basra, he took us to the Qurna and uh all the way back we saw Nasiriyya, Amara. It was strange feeling, I always ask my daddy "Why, why you are taking us to?" He were saying "You have to see these, um, these places it's your country and it's eh you have to *feel* the beauty. Maybe one day you wouldn't be able to see all of this." Like he, he, he has been feeling this.

Samia's memories were a full sensory experience, even when she told me of the journey through the marsh her narration registered bodily—breathing in, sighing, shrieking with delight. Samia painted a picture of the marshes for me, but she also was aware that her words would potentially reach a broader public since I was recording the interview to use in my dissertation. She aimed to elaborate the world of the marsh by speaking in aesthetic detail about elements like the bamboo (*qasaq* which literally translates as reeds) that her canoe passed through as she traversed the marsh, the fish and snakes she discovered under the water, the birds she observed flying overhead, and homes she saw built on reed islands that bobbed to the rhythm of the water. Her account was compelling and evocative of Thesiger's own writing. Like Thesiger, Samia aimed to draw me, as her listener, and anyone else who might hear her speech, into the marshes to board the canoe and savor the moment. Early on Samia established this relation between her listener, which was initially me, and her experience of the marsh, "Uh like, uh, bamboo coming from the water and you go between this bamboo and uh you see under the water lots of fish and lots of um snakefish and uh birds!" The "you" in this sentence is inclusive: it references Samia's own experience of the marsh, but it also directed her listener to that remembered moment and figuratively steered me (and you) over water and through reeds.

In her narrative, Samia guided her audience across a broad geographical area in southern Iraq. She moved her listener out of the marsh and through her memorial path, brought her audience on a tour of major southern sites and cities: “Oh, he took us to see Adam tree in Basra, he took us to the Qurna and all the way back we saw Nasiriyya, Amara.” By invoking proper place names, Samia recreated a travel route that could easily be traced on a map. Each of these cities functions as a geographic anchor. Sketching the route on the map makes it possible to identify that her trip began in Baghdad traveled down the Euphrates through the marshes into Basra and continued to the far south to Qurna and back through Nasiriyya crossing over to Amara and then following the Tigris back up to Baghdad. All these years later, it is quite possible that Samia did not recall the precise itinerary, rather what is significant here was how she chose to identify her journey. Her exploration of southern geography served as her testimony of her present love for, respect for, and knowledge of Iraqi land. Through this claim, Samia positioned herself as a custodian of the Iraqi nation.

Samia made the case that returning Iraqi exiles had the unique ability to restore and redeem Iraq because they had not bought into Saddam Hussein’s Ba’athist platform. Where Samia described Iraqi exiles like herself as having lived during a time where poetry and imagination were thriving in Iraq, she believed that Saddam Hussein had created a mechanized society where fidelity to the leader was the only authorized expression of emotion. She spoke about Iraqis who remained in country as those who did not know how to feel.

Well [breathing out] you see he were taking [sigh] generation after generation to prisons and killing them and all these mass graves, uhh, which we are finding now in Iraq. He destroyed every single simple person whoever wanted a good for their countries. Why did he destroy them because they wasn’t happy with the way he, for example, destroyed the palm trees, the millions of palm trees he burned them down. The river he changed the way it goes, he uh dried up our lands, he changed a lot. It’s not only the nature, and it’s the way he changed our people. Children, as soon as they born they see Saddam’s pictures everywhere. They go to school, they have to sing for Saddam, they have to ah- applaud Saddam, they have to do this to Saddam. Saddam, Saddam everywhere. And

they don't see except Saddam anybody else, they don't feel about anything. What do they know about, about the existence of other world, of uh happiness, of uh peace, of nature, of uh, uh they, they know only existence of Ba'ath Party and Saddam Hussein Party and brutality. They don't feel brutality anymore some of them they did not feel the brutality because they lived in this brutality and they thought this is normal and this is the way he changed people's mind and he poisoned them. And if people in the war happened when, when a father will bring his son and say uh "my son run away from the Gulf war or from the Iranian war and you do whatever you do." And they killed his son in front of him. They give him uh like hundreds of dollars or dinars to make him happy. Isn't that absurd for a human being to be so brutal with his child, his own son because he uh he's going to feel like a hero for Saddam, he's serving Saddam. He's changed.

By her account, Saddam attained an almost supernatural position; he was powerful enough to alter even the course of the rivers, a feat defying nature's geographic organization. Her own symbols of childhood, elements of the marsh landscape and surrounding environment, have been replaced with pictures of Saddam everywhere as if they have been overwritten by the mechanically reproduced image. These new technologically rendered symbols were incompatible with nature, Samia asserted, but had become ever-present from the moment a child was born. An entirely different lexicon had come to index childhood, one dominated and controlled by Saddam such that nothing outside of his image, outside of his world of violence and brutality, was permitted to creep in. In this new environment, Samia describes education as the process of learning to feel allegiance only for one person, Saddam. The new pedagogy was nothing like her own affective education. Notably, it did not include the cultivation of respect and appreciation for Iraq's land, for the nation apart from the leader. In contrast to her illustration of her own childhood, Samia's description of childhood in Iraq post-1980s did not stimulate the senses. The visual symbols were wholly different; whereas birds, fish, and flowers functioned symbolically to convey a time of innocence and possibility in her own memory, in her description of childhood under Saddam Hussein's leadership only posters of Saddam decorated the landscape, standing as symbols of single-minded allegiance to the leader.

This new terrain was a stark visual world. While Samia's youth was rich with the sounds of birds singing, according to her the children of the 80s and 90s listened only to the sound of their applause and the tune of their song for Saddam. The 1980 childhood she elaborates is one of her own imagining. She imagined also a radical shift in how childhood was embodied; while Samia played with her friends making flower necklaces and running in gardens, she described the experience of youth for this later generation exclusively as a period of indoctrination. A key component of democratizing Iraq, Samia asserted, will be the re-education of Iraqis who never left the country. Exiles, she identified, must return to impart the lessons and values learned during their youth on Iraqis who grew up under Saddam. Samia implied that without the marsh, both literal and metaphorical, Iraqis would not be equipped to restore and revive the Iraqi nation. It was up to the Iraqi exiles to lead the way.

In exile, artists and intellectuals like political activists and children who once visited the area also memorialized the marshes in their writings. As an Iraqi poet Ali al-Hasani participated actively in events at the Khoei Foundation and took part in weekly meetings Mohamed Makiya, a former and famed architect and the father of Kanan Makiya, convened at the Kufa Gallery. The Khoei Foundation, and particularly the Kufa Gallery, provided a forum where Iraqis who came of age in country during the cultural renaissance of the 1950s and 1960s could go to reminisce. Makiya himself held a special fondness for the marshes and in 2005 took part in an architectural competition the Iraqi government held to build a museum in the marshes proper. Outside of this established group of Iraqi exiles in London who recalled the marsh with wistful



Figure 29: Ali al-Hasani and Mohamed Makiya at London's Kufa Gallery



Figure 30: Abu Huda in his office at the al-Khoei Foundation

sentimentality, filmmakers like Qasim Hawal, Iraqi artists, and Iraqi novelists throughout Europe invoked the marshes in their artistic engagement with Iraq.⁵⁸

One artist, Rashid Salim, even took part in international adventurer Thor Heyerdahl's 1978 expedition to the marshes on a boat built in the image of a marsh craft (Heyerdahl 1981). The journey ended in Djibouti where they burned their boat in protest of the wars throughout the Middle East region. In the early 1990s, British filmmaker Michael Wood's documentary on the destruction of the marshes post-Intifadah made its rounds throughout UK communities of concerned humanitarians (Wood and Dobbs 1993). In 2003 as Iraqi exiles from this community who had remembered the marshes nostalgically began to return to Iraq for the first time in decades, they were devastated by what they found. An adult child of a prominent member of the community told me that her parents, like others of their generation, were not optimistic about Iraq's future because while she felt that conditions in the country would improve over the next twenty years, they did not have the time to wait, "for them," she said, "it had to be now."⁵⁹ As exiles positioned themselves to make broad political changes in the country, marsh advocates pursued restoration to address the deep wounds of the past and build an Iraq for the future that would model liberal governance.

Advocacy for marsh restoration was a project that took shape in the west that found articulation in the experience of exile and the conflicting cyclone of emotions that spun from regret to relief. Iraqi exiles found the marsh via the writings of Thesiger and his pupils and recalled its special qualities through their own memories of childhood outings to the wetlands. The idea of the marsh in 2003 as a Sumerian enclave grew internationally prominent, directly from claims made by earlier writers, like Thesiger, Field, and Young among others. In exile, Iraqis were not able to navigate the marsh, but

⁵⁸ Syrian novelist Haydar Haydar's *Walimah li-A'shab al-Bahr (Banquet for Seaweed)* is one of the most well known novels about the marsh.

⁵⁹ Personal Conversation. October 21, 2005. London, United Kingdom.

marsh iconography moved through the landscape of exile by appearing in office posters, films, novels, and even political campaigns. Azzam's ultimate goal was to build a peace park in the marshes where international visitors could stay and experience Iraqi civilization much like they would the ruins of Rome.⁶⁰ Some Iraqis departed from Azzam and his *Future of Iraq* colleagues, questioning the way the region became significant. Sinan Antoun, for example, asked why this place in particular would be highlighted as *the* place to go on return visits to Iraq when it had been all but forgotten during the time that exiles hid in the marsh?⁶¹ What was it about the marsh, he questioned, that served the interests of a returning community of Iraqis and their international colleagues? It was the aesthetics the marsh provided—a restored ecosystem with a deep heritage of civilization—that drew investors into the project and which opened Iraq to international investment and policy infrastructure once again.

The Stamp



Figure 31: Heritage collection stamps

The marshes emerged as a political object at instrumental moments in Iraq's political history. By examining chronotope at three moments in the cultural production of

⁶⁰ Azzam Alwash. October 30, 2004. Personal Interview. Harvard University. Boston, MA.

⁶¹ Sinan Antoun. December 9, 2004. Personal Conversation. New York, NY.

the marsh, it becomes possible to track how recognition of the marsh was historically contingent. Internationally recognized marsh chronotope developed in postcolonial Iraq through the movement of explorers through the wetlands. It is the movement of both Thesiger and Field that forms the basis of their writing and established their authorship. Their racialization of marsh residents as “Marsh Arabs” was an exercise of biopower in aesthetic form. Whereas Field’s approach to the marsh elaborated the wetland as a collection of “Marsh Arab” specimens, Thesiger’s writings created a space of the marsh as an ecological treasure in need of protection. Each of these works specified a politics of life in relation to the marsh wherein marsh residents registered as elements of a landscape while foreign explorers claimed the ability to speak authoritatively.

Aside from the movement of explorers through the marsh, this chapter addresses movement of another kind: the movement of actors through periods of historical time. Sheikh Falih links the narratives of both Field and Thesiger. Ali al-Hasani, as a member of the al-Hasani family, joins Salim’s experience conducting ethnographic fieldwork in Chibayish in 1953 with marsh advocacy in post-2003 Iraqi reconstruction. Rashid Salim links the twenty-first century marsh advocacy with activist Heyerdahl’s 1970s global expedition. The connections were not necessarily known to any of the actors involved. This kind of historical recursivity points to the ways in which the history of the marshes cannot be recreated chronologically, but situationally as different marsh chronotopes become important at strategic moments for political purposes.

Iraqi exiles returned to the marsh through the Opposition Movement in Exile and re-visited a remembered landscape by reading Young and Thesiger, books readily available in London. These books offered a view of the marsh as a zone of heritage and evidence of Iraqi civilization; it was an image Iraqi exiles aimed to recreate in the marsh. Exiles could not physically return to the marsh, but brought the marshes into office spaces, homes, and community organizations in posters and photographs. In 2006 in

Geneva, Hassan Partow called me over to his desk to show me stamps on a package from Iraq. From the “heritage collection” the stamps depicted marsh residents in a canoe moving reeds through the marsh. The stamps confirmed in miniature what Iraqi exiles had been advocating: that the marshes were a key part of Iraqi heritage. In the reconstruction era the marsh had become instructive iconography for a new moral polity.

Chapter Two: Conference



Figure 32: August 2006 Photo Exhibit at Wild Jordan Center

Wild Jordan

On August 15, 2006 the Canada-Iraq Marshlands Initiative debuted an exhibit of marsh photographs at Amman's Wild Jordan Center. The center was the Amman hub for the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature, Jordan's leading conservation organization with ties to the kingdom. The Center itself was the business unit for the Royal Society and was created to build socio-economic development programs, including ecotourism opportunities, in all of the Society's reserves. The Canadian government-sponsored exhibit was the first ensemble of photographic works on the Iraqi marshes post-2003 and was intended to circulate between the urban hotspots of international environmental advocacy. The opening gala highlighted the network of

investment, NGO programming, and governmental partnership on the restoration project. *Nature Iraq*, whose ornithologist took the photos with the support of Canadian funds, invited Khaled Irani the Jordan Minister of Environment, Narmin Othman Iraq Minister of Environment, the Canadian Ambassador to Jordan, and a Representative of the Italian Embassy, each of whom attended. Each stood for the various positions in a global field of marsh investment.

The esteemed guests toured the gallery for a photo op, while the city of Amman strained to accommodate, to varying degrees, thousands of Iraqi refugees and a number of displaced foreign nationals evacuated from Lebanon during the summer Israeli war. In August 2006, Amman was bursting with refugees and expatriates, along with the humanitarian and relief infrastructure rapidly assembled to both serve their interests and manage programs in Iraq from the safety of Jordan. Amman might not have been the battlefield on which the war was fought, but the capital city acutely felt the effects of war. Urban Jordanians confronted sharp rises in the cost of living due to the end of Iraqi oil subsidies, bemoaned the ubiquity of Iraqis around town and particularly at the family hotspot—Mecca Mall—and whispered about US military training grounds on bases outside the city, the residence of Saddam’s daughters in Jordan, and the transformation of the Four Seasons lobby bar into an afternoon lounge for *New York Times* reporters en route in and out of Baghdad and displaced elite Iraqi men sipping coffee in three piece suits. If Amman was the gateway to Baghdad, the Four Seasons was the lobby of war.

That August night press photographers hovered over the ministers to capture the plum shot of Iraqi-Jordanian collaboration as Irani and Othman took in environmental splendor. Ecology served as the perfect backdrop to project their symbolic message of regional peace and cooperation.

Spare and stark, the white room offered a blank canvas. Images hung from twine at eye level in a single line, like windows on all four walls opening onto a world.

Aesthetically, as works in themselves, there was nothing particularly remarkable about the photos: the image resolution was too low for them to be published as a book, the composition a bit naïve, the exposures imperfect. The photographs were instead realist projections. In portraits marsh residents stared, dirty and tattered, eyes piercing through the camera directly to the viewer. Their gaze invited intervention. Other images panned the landscape, birds alighting, reed houses on individual islands speckling open water. These marsh vistas promised the delight of exploration, adventure, and discovery.

The photographer was missing from the opening. He had been dismissed from the organization some time before the grand Amman debut for failing to follow security protocol during marsh field visits. In fact, none of the Iraqi scientific team working in the marshes attended that August reception. In their absence guests peered into the photographs, looking without the demand of visiting the marsh. Even before this night, the marshes had become a collection of artifacts circulating the global epicenters of Iraqi reconstruction.

The first two chapters of the dissertation demonstrated how the journey of the marshes from field to photograph is an epic of post-sovereignty Iraq, from the post-Mandate period of British exploration in Iraq, to the post-1958 Revolution and the community of Iraqi youth who sought refuge deep in the heart of the wetlands, to the 1991 Intifadah and the draining of the marsh, to the post-2003 reconstruction era. In each of these political periods, as they had before, ruling polities transformed the marsh to express their aspirations, desires, and dreams for Iraq. Charting the course of Iraq's political history through the marshes from the mid-twentieth century to 2007, it becomes possible to identify how the marshes became a virtual presence, abstracted from the physical space that once defined them to become a virtually mediated international community. Internationals working on the project met not in the marsh, but at conferences in Montreal, London, Geneva, Paris, Amman, Boston, Rome, and a number

of other cities around the globe. The field of investors working on the marsh cohered internationally through technologies that enabled them to preserve distance with Iraq, and their safety during wartime, while continuing to develop policies for the area.

After the exhibit *Nature Iraq* Jordan staff tucked the frames back into the massive wooden crates. Disassembled, individual images lost much of their persuasive force. Almost a year later in the spring of 2007, the Blue Fig restaurant, popular hangout of Jordan's entrepreneurial young professionals, exhibited the works anew. Just like *Wild Jordan*, several traffic circles across the city, the restaurant attracted a mix of upper-crust Jordanian professionals and royals in addition to a regular crowd of expatriates working for NGOs, the UN, or embassies in the neighborhood. Static print photos of the Iraqi marshes lined walls for the jet-setting urban elite.

Conservation

Like the early years of the twentieth century when Ottoman and British empires fought for control of Iraq by virtue of commercial contracts on Mesopotamian waters, foreign intervention in Iraq post-2003 struggled to define a new national image. The marshes would again be a central component of their campaign. Where once the marshes posed a threat to Mesopotamian governance, now the marsh environment was seen as an essential sign that Iraq had been liberated. As with early conservation movements, nature was valued for its *intrinsic* worth and not for its utility (Oates 1999:45). Paraphrasing Oates, West writes that "conservation 'fell in love with development'"(2006:33). In the post-World War II policy landscape, the notion of progress inherent to the development rationale became closely tied to the environment. As the bureaucracy of conservation and development grew out of a common international infrastructure, both aimed at social transformation through economic reform, "nature became valuable because it was the raw material for growth, and growth

came to be articulated as ‘development’” (West 2006:33). Unlike early twentieth century environmental reform, where under Willcocks’ plan (1912) the marshes were seen as the aquatic resource needed for agricultural prosperity, the raw material of nature under the development-conservation paradigm was about the conceptual capital it would provide.

The Iraq marshes were a fountain of wealth for those directing national reconstruction because the ecological value of the landscape could be strategically invoked to attract foreign investment. Funders awarded monies to the conservation of the marshes and the creation of a national park; the area would not be mined for its individual assets, but was prized for its holistic worth. As nonprofits like *Nature Iraq* sought additional monies and expertise to support the rehabilitation of the marshes, the adjudication of international treaties and conventions was absolutely essential. Supranational organizations like the UN and IUCN (the *International Union for the Conservation of Nature*) and international NGOs like *Birdlife International* had the ability to designate the marshes as an area worthy of international attention and global protection. As we will see in greater detail in Chapter Seven, treaties like the Ramsar Convention for the protection of wetlands and the UNESCO World Heritage sites were necessary pursuits in order to legitimize the project of marshland restoration to international investors. At the same time, the funding from these same investors supported the research in the marshes necessary to demonstrate that the area met the ecological criteria required by these treaties. The result was the production of a cycle of ecological value, in which 1) government donors gave money to conserve the environment; 2) *Nature Iraq* pursued conservation by conducting biological surveys of the marsh ecosystem; 3) *Nature Iraq* petitioned to adjudicate international treaties for the protection of wetland habitats like the Ramsar Convention on wetlands, and cultural sites like UNESCO World Heritage status, in order to maintain and attract additional funding; 4) global agencies conferred special status on this environment as a result; and 5)

investors benefitted from the notoriety as the marshes became an area of *global* concern.

Embedded within foreign governmental response to Iraq is a principle of rights, one that legitimizes the intervention of foreign agencies and donors in the project of environmental recuperation. Blom Hansen and Stepputat argue that the rise of the human rights sector within the development industry is centrally linked to the state. They assert that the logic depends on the imagination of the state as the guarantor of these rights and that, “If that imagination is ineffective, the discourse of rights is inconsequential” (2001:18). In the case of post-2003 Iraq, the state was widely seen as ineffective, torn asunder by the factions of warring militias embedded within agencies, sagging under the weight of corruption and unable to govern, to the extent that the year’s budget could not be spent even as households learned to cope without regular electricity or safe water.

Most Iraqis and governments talked about the state as a broken polity. Residents and foreign aid organizations looked not to the state as a guarantor of rights, but to supranational organizations in partnership with local NGOs. In the absence of an effective state, the global humanitarian community identified itself as a guarantor of rights directing popular imagination not to the state but toward a global infrastructure. Memory was the creative force that attracted investors to the Iraqi marsh project. It was through decades-long Iraqi exile, childhood memories of towering reeds, hand-poled canoes, and bobbing reed homes on individual islands, that the Iraqi marshes became a tangible place for foreign investors. It was through stories about the marsh that the constellation of actors working on marsh restoration cohered.

In the early twenty-first century, the marshes remained an area of concern but their value was distinctly defined. International treaties instituted a new vision of the marsh, one that originated in the writings of marsh explorers and Iraqi visitors, bolstered

by the system of rights enacted by international treaties and conservation movements. For example under the Ramsar Convention, of which Hawizeh marsh became a member in October 2007, the wetland would be protected from harm internationally. Yet this protection could not be visibly observed from the ground; it existed in the domain of international protocols and treaties the purpose of which was not to change the physicality of the ground but to codify the marsh in global environmental protective conventions. In these treaties, ecology was valued for its intrinsic worth. Marsh restoration points to the ways that ecological value was not so much about organic life itself, but was about the creation of the marsh virtually.

Marsh virtuality that drew upon samples from the marsh ecosystem, in the form of water samples and bird photographs, in order to fashion an object that demonstrated a connection with the ground but which was itself concretized in *images*. It was a visual picture assembled around photographs, maps, and memories. As investors planned restoration at these international conferences, they abstracted the marsh from ground and they generated a vision marketable for global business. They created a virtual marsh.

Conference

Since investors in the Iraqi marsh project did not go to Iraq and were separated by oceans, the international conference afforded the opportunity to highlight their work to a broader public at the same time that it provided a much-needed space for multiple actors to meet. Despite the fact the three ministries initially involved in marsh restoration were all located in Baghdad—the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Water Resources, and the Ministry of Municipalities and Public Works—they met for the first time at a meeting convened by *Eden Again* and the Italian government in Venice in October 2004. The circumstances of this first meeting demonstrate that the project of

Iraqi marsh restoration took shape outside of Iraq. Though local residents did breach the dams and dikes constructed by Saddam Hussein, and local scientists were employed by *Nature Iraq* to undertake the requested research in the marshes, a collaboration of returning Iraqi exiles, foreign governmental representatives, and Italian engineers led the initiative. Vital to understanding marsh restoration is that the project was shaped not in one geographic locale, but among a set of locations, a scattered collection of cities throughout Europe, the United States, and the Middle East. The project was cohesively defined in an ever-solidifying community of Iraqi exiles and politicians invested in Iraqi reconstruction.

The marsh project was one crafted within a vortex of speed and mobility from the spaces defined by international airports, foreign visas, frequent flier programs, jet lag, and the laptops and universal access smart phones of the globally fluent who were supported by international commerce. It was a project of cyberspace, a technological commons generated through email, Skype, Google documents, and conference calls. From within this cybernetic interface, the conference was a moment of tangibility and the only instance where marsh advocates appeared in the flesh. The conference made it possible for this transnational polity to rapidly assemble and disassemble in a pulse of momentary cohesiveness and easy dispersal. The permanence of the project lay not in any one location, but in the agility of advocates to circumnavigate the globe to respond to meeting requests immediately and with dexterity. Ironically, after a brief period of access ended for most investors in 2004, and for Azzam in 2005, the radical mobility of the Iraqi marsh project included stops everywhere but the wetlands. Rather than make the trip to the marsh, investors slogged through one panel after another. The most important business was conducted at night over hours of dinner with many rounds of scotch.

Ramsar Conference on Wetlands – Valencia, Spain 2002

Early conferences Azzam and others attended even before the war indicates how these international meeting spaces were strategic and valued places with the potential to catalyze the marsh project. During the proceedings of the *Future of Iraq Project*, Azzam and his wife Suzie flew to Valencia, Spain in November 2002 to attend another key strategic conference and lobby for the marshes. Although they did not have the official delegate status that they would need to formally participate in the Ramsar meetings, they did make a presentation to the meeting on biodiversity that took place outside of and alongside the official roster of presentations.

During their efforts to get noticed, Azzam and Suzie met Dennis Heatherington, a Canadian government employee, who mentored them through the process and quickly became an advocate of their work. Dennis, who had connections with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), later lobbied his government to support Azzam and Suzie's work on marsh restoration, identifying their initiative as *the* group over all other Iraqi marsh related projects, such as the AMAR Charitable Foundation, to undertake the mantle of restoration. At the same time Azzam and Suzie began expanding their potential community of investors at the Ramsar Convention proceedings, this same conference placed strain on their relationship with the US Department of State. Azzam recalled that the US State Department tried to prevent his travel to Valencia.⁶² Azzam and Suzie went anyway with the encouragement of the Iraq Foundation.

Azzam remembered that they stayed up all through the night on the plane writing their presentation for Ramsar and rehearsing the brief message they would stress; they had a sound bite second to make their point. His message was "drying is reversible,

⁶² Azzam Alwash. March 13, 2007. Personal Interview. Amman, Jordan.

restoration is possible, all that's needed is political will."⁶³ Azzam tried to take this all the way to the Ramsar floor by seeking out delegates to the conference. He slipped notes to Hassan Partow at his hotel, but they kept missing each other. He met a Greek delegate who told them that they were crazy for making the case because there was no way Azzam and Suzie could even get into the country let alone the wetlands. They sought out Iranian delegates and searched for the official Iraqi team. Azzam remembered that in the middle of all the action under pressure and out of sheer frustration he broke down at a bar.

Despite their peripheral participation, Azzam and Suzie's dedication and effort earned them the attention they so needed to make their case internationally. Azzam remembered that it was Rashid who finally helped them; he was the formal Iraqi delegate to the Convention meetings. Rashid was one of the engineers who initially developed the plans to drain the marshes under Saddam Hussein's directive. Years later Azzam would return the favor to lobby on behalf of Rashid during legal proceedings taken against him for his "crime" in draining the marsh, making the case that legal charges be dropped and that Rashid could be used as a witness for the prosecution. Rashid eventually fled to Syria and Azzam would hire him to consult on the restoration project.

Thus the connections made at these conferences were lasting, one never knew where a former contact would again pop into one's life, and extending oneself to those in need often yielded beneficial results in unexpected ways well into the future. Azzam and Suzie never were able to give their presentation at the official Ramsar convention hall, but it didn't matter. They gained the international acclaim, attention, and appeal that they needed to expand their work beyond the US and in so doing guaranteed its continued life well after American funding dried up.

⁶³ Ibid.

Azzam remembered that ultimately “The presentation was really entertaining.” He told me, “It was great! That was the beginning of the advertising and when things were coming together. You want a copy of that presentation? I have it at home. We used satellite pictures and pictures from Gavin Young. We basically scavenged. The hydraulic information was all information my Dad gave to us.”⁶⁴ At Ramsar that was the key, and what was in the official presentation did not much matter; what mattered was their ability to advertise, to *sell* their work to a global audience.

The fact that none of Azzam and Suzie’s lobbying efforts was part of the official conference agenda indicates that the business of the conference itself is not the crucial element to the project’s success. Rather these informal and impromptu meetings at bars, over dinners, and in the meeting halls that were the unauthorized spaces of conference business together were the place where investors channeled global power into nodes of political action. The very act of planning environmental rehabilitation was simultaneously the effort through which international investors began shaping the direction of Iraqi governance in a post-Saddam state.

As the 2002 Ramsar Convention meetings demonstrate, the conference was more than a place of business, it was the space within which political relationships between marsh advocates were forged and confirmed. As project investors met increasingly more at these global roundups, their repeated contact and commitment established and continually reinforced a network. This network was a collaboration between Iraqi exiles, foreign government donors, the private engineering firms they were by contract stipulated to hire, the United Nations, and other international nongovernmental ecological organizations.

In short, the conference gave rise to a multi-dimensional political body that had roots in no country in particular but the financial resources to be anywhere at any

⁶⁴ Ibid.

moment. With this power of movement, the partnership established a globalized matrix that individual actors drew upon to create change in Iraq. In a twist of fate, the change advocates pursued was also what they had condemned in the former regime: the geographic modification of thousands of kilometers of southern Iraqi territory.

Despite the pronouncements of the US and other foreign governments that their involvement in marsh restoration would rectify a “genocide” against marsh residents, people who once lived in the marshes expressed skepticism about their return. One resident told CBC News, “We lived that life and it’s gone now. We have a new life. We’re used to working as farmers now, and we can’t leave it” (Evans April 14, 2004). Others expressed concern that lands which were once marsh but were now viable agricultural fields would be re-flooded in the re-inundation of the marsh. Critical though he was of investing in agriculture in the former marsh environs, Azzam did recognize that the marshes would never be what they once were and that restoring the marsh would involve assisting marsh villages in securing internet access and a better system of roads. However, Azzam largely insisted that his organization had a *scientific* mandate and that delivering social services to the marshes lay outside the scope of his work. In the speedy global cosmopolitanism of international conferencing, local concerns of marsh residents did not register. Without capital, passports, visas, and easy access to airports, marsh residents were not part of this international conglomeration and, with rare exception, did not attend these meetings.

Future of Iraq Project – Washington, DC 2002-2003

The significance of the conference as one of the most vital technologies of the 2003 Iraq war is underscored by the fact that *The Future of Iraq Project* was the first public step the Bush Administration took toward the war. Annelise Riles describes the conference as a crucial location around which a global network of humanitarians and

governments assembled. She asserts that conferences must be understood as an “effect of a certain aesthetic of information” and suggests that conferences remained low status events because of the “non-binding” nature of agreements and resolutions drafted therein (Riles 2000:2, 8). Riles asserts that the ethnographic problem posed by globalization is that “the global does not exist in the first place, at least as it is imagined as a sphere or place of social action open to study rather than as an aspect of late modern informational aesthetics” (2000:20).

Though the aesthetic dimensions of international politics are an overwhelming part of the way that business is orchestrated, from the acronyms to the documents that structure a language and thus an ethos of international environmentalism, to treat the conference as an informational aesthetic is to gloss over its instrumentality. The fact that conference recommendations were non-binding is precisely the point and adds to the power of the conference. The strength of the conference cannot be measured by its practical effects in implementing policy, but instead as a platform for reinforcing transnational partnerships. The conference was the place where power in global affairs was mobilized, harnessed, defined, negotiated, and instrumentalized.

During the 2003 war, *The Future of Iraq Project*, the December 2002 London Conference, and the private meetings President Bush held with members of the Iraqi Opposition Movement including Kanan Makiya, Ahmed Chalabi, and Ayad Allawi were meant as public events that would provide the sense of collaboration between the US government and its Iraqi allies. It didn't matter if the documents at these conferences were ever implemented, what mattered was the performance of business at the conference itself. Ferguson argues “Today, Zambia (like most other African nations) continues to be ruled in significant part by transnational organizations that are not in themselves governments but work together with powerful First World states within a global system of nation-states that Frederick Cooper has characterized as

‘internationalized imperialism’” (2006:100). Transnational relations of power, he asserts, are no longer routed through the state, but rather link directly with local projects (Ferguson 2006:106, 111). The marsh restoration project fits this paradigm of international investors working around, or in some cases advising, the state in order to apply global treaties and conventions to the governance of the marsh ecosystem. The result was the hyperlocalization of global governmental ideals and priorities. At conferences global investors acted to produce such local results, confirming the power of the network to bypass the state.

International investors believed the Iraqi state, as Ferguson suggests, would hinder good and effective governance (2006:96). One US Advisor to an Iraqi minister in the Coalition Provisional Authority told me upon condition of anonymity that he and other advisors were encouraged by CPA senior administration to spend all of the current and future year’s national budget before the transition to Prime Minister Allawi’s interim government in June 2004. They believed the Iraqi government was so unprepared for leadership, he recalls, that they would be incapable of governing. The former advisor told me that in the final days before leaving the country, he frantically hustled to commit funds within his ministry.⁶⁵ The experience of this advisor confirms what Ferguson suggests, that the state was not seen as a resource for good governance, but as an impediment to its implementation. Ferguson writes “The central effect of new forms of transnational governmentality, if my argument is correct, is not so much to make states weak (or strong) as to reconfigure the way that states are able to spatialize their authority and stake claims to superior generality and universality” (2006:112). I would add that beyond raising questions about the authority of the state, this dynamic *authorizes* the political power of international bodies—from experts to governments to humanitarians—to collectivize and act in local areas of strategic interest.

⁶⁵ Personal Interview. October 29, 2004. Harvard University. Boston, MA.

While current scholars, including Riles (2000), Tsing (2005), and Ferguson (2006), discuss the transnational network as emergent, colonial history suggests otherwise. Scholars of the British Empire in India, for example, point to the ways in which nongovernmental organizations and charities facilitated foreign political rule by creating and legitimating a rationale for intervention to assist the “downtrodden” (Burton 1994). Additionally, Engseng Ho (2006) carefully documents how transcultural exchanges in the Hamdrami diaspora of the Indian Ocean produced a cosmopolitanism that thrived over the past 500 years. He demonstrates how Hamdrami interaction with the empire defied typical beliefs about the roles of colonizer and colonized and instead produced a robust cosmopolitanism through which Hamdrami peoples influenced the empire.

Beyond that which the written historical archive has preserved, archaeologists studying cylinder seals of ancient empires (seals bearing the insignia of the ruling polity or aristocracy used on bottles or other vessels) show that seals from Sumeria that are found today in Western Central Asia or the Indus Valley are material evidence of multi-regional commerce. The seals indicate that the Iraqi marshes, home to Sumeria, had been tied through commerce to Asia, Aegea, the Caucasus, and the Indus Valley for centuries. I posit that while transnational networks have been historical phenomena, the character of these relationships is continually altered by technological developments of the era in which they arise. What has changed is not the fact that these relationships exist, but the ways in which they are mediated and mobilized. In post-2003 Iraq, unlike any other period before it, where political parties sought to remake a ruling body through intervention in the marsh, relationships of foreign investors to Iraq happened through technologies that *enabled distance*, making it possible for advocates to work on the marsh without ever experiencing it physically.

Beginning with the Ottoman era and continuing today, save for the fifty year period where after the Ba’ath Revolution the marshes were largely closed to foreign

visitors and certainly to foreign political regulation, transnational networks governing the marsh did not originate from within its grounds, but outside of it. The major exception to this general political trend was the conversion of marsh residents to Shi'ism in the waning years of the Ottoman Empire at the turn of the twentieth century. As marsh residents converted, they found membership in a growing network of Shi'ites worldwide and this affiliation became important in the late nineteenth century as it did again in the late twentieth century when ruling marsh families were expelled first under Ottoman and later under Ba'ath political rule. Fleeing marsh residents found refuge in Iran. Therein lies the essential conflict in post-2003 Iraq; marsh advocates pursued restoration in alignment with Allawi and his secularist government, while marsh residents and politicians found kinship with Shi'a leaders such as Muqtada al-Sadr and the Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani. Shi'ite leadership in Iraq was incredibly diverse and groups had different philosophies of governance and distinctive visions for Iraq's future. Yet while Sadr early on rejected Iranian influence in Iraqi government (a belief that may have changed over the years) his direct, combative style vilified him in international communities where Sistani remained a respected figure nationally and globally. Differences between such competing global networks arising out of and in relation to the Iraqi marshes, namely between Shi'a and exile groups aligned with the Bush Administration, illustrates the ways in which the Iraqi marsh restoration project fit within the larger battle over not only Iraqi statehood, but also Iraq's political character and global alignment.



Figure 33: London Iraqi Environment Conference, November 2005

Post-2003 conferences abounded in the global community of investors working in Iraq much like coming out parties for a new host of players and their distinctive political ideology. In London Iraqi scholars and exiles hosted a range of cultural events from conferences like the London Academic Conference on the Iraqi Environment to weekly meetings at the Kufa Gallery where Kanan Makiya's father, Muhammad Makiya provided a forum for his friends to remember the country they left. Prominent Iraqi exiles, like Hassan Partow, became celebrities on the conference circuit. Scoring one of this honorable crew established the legitimacy of the conference as an international event.

Iraqi exiles in London organized themselves to effect political change in Iraq based on the model foreign nationals, from NGOs to governments, established in order to work in Iraq while formulating ground plans outside the country. When competing polities wanted to establish their dominion over environmental work in Iraq, they organized conferences. In spring and fall 2007, UNESCO-Iraq (based in Amman) did just that, convening a conference about the Iraqi environment and the marshes and

excluding *Nature Iraq* from the meetings despite the fact that the UNESCO principal on the project knew Azzam well and had worked with them previously in Amman. In the early days after April 2003, conferences were the place where advocates raised excitement and enthusiasm for Iraq's potential and where foreign nationals made decisions about moving money and people around Iraq like the raw materials for reconstruction architecture. Some conferences were cancelled at the last minute, like one in Japan convened by the United Nations Environmental Programme in August 2005. Others consolidated political power around the marsh in the hands of an elite few.

While I have said that in the battle to control the future of Iraq, the international conference was the meeting ground for those working outside of Iraq to effect change within, it is important to note the slipperiness of the categories "outside" and "inside." The words themselves are constantly in flux, built upon an orientation of a subject to a referent, an orientation that changes as the subject moves. Nonetheless, Iraqi exiles returning to Baghdad after the fall of Saddam Hussein were largely recognized by Iraqis as foreign, as part of the reconstruction apparatus that began abroad and that the CPA and other international organizations entering the country after April 2003 sought to institute. From within the space, internationals redefined Iraqi sovereignty and confirmed their authority to over-write the laws of the state. Actions to supersede state authority were not unlawful, nor were they immediately obvious. Instead, they took the form of foreign bodies, from private agencies to governments and organizations, that provided *mentorship* of fledgling Iraqi ministries or sought out international ecological treaties as a way of conserving the wetlands despite the political uncertainty of the moment. Agamben writes, "the power of law is defined as being in accordance with nature (*kata physin*) and essentially nonviolent" (1998:34). Referencing Schmitt, Agamben identifies the sovereign as the power with the ability to define the state of exception, the polity endowed with the ability to suspend law (1998:15-29).

In the marsh restoration project, the convergence of nature and law are immediate. Those seeking restoration position themselves as advocates for good governance in Iraq including everything from elections to the support of a legal infrastructure, national and international, to regulate political projects within the country. They identify their work as characteristically nonviolent. At the same time, however, by seeking international support and instruments of protection to conserve the marshes, this collaboration of marsh advocates establishes its unique ability to guarantee the political aspiration. It is in the space of the conference that the sovereignty of the global network is confirmed.

The fact that recommendations formulated during these global meetings may never be implemented highlights one major point: the work of the conference is not about creating change on the ground in Iraq even though this is its stated purpose. Annelise Riles argues that a network is self-perpetuating, that they are systems that create themselves (2000:173). She writes, "By the 'Network,' I mean to refer to a set of institutions, knowledge practices, and artifacts thereof that internally generate the effects of their own reality by reflecting on themselves" (Riles 2000:3). Networks, she asserts, do not refer to a reality outside themselves (Riles 2000:22). Instead, they become real because in a Baudrillardian sense they recognize themselves as real (Riles 2000:27). In analyzing networks, Riles' focus is on investigating the ways in which information becomes an anthropological subject (2000:16). Finding inspiration in Munn, Riles is interested in the way that artifacts are at once maps and designs, both pathways and representations (2000:1). Though the network is self-referential, I argue that by focusing on the aesthetics of documents and information circulating within it Riles formulates an argument about its own mystique, about the unreality of its reality. By focusing on the Iraqi marsh, it is possible to identify both how, as Riles suggests, the network is self-

referential and self-propagating, and how it does have a material effect that registers on bodies, governmental and human, outside of itself.

In the formulation of the network, the conference produces three critical results. First, it fosters collaboration at all levels of society, from the nongovernmental to the governmental to the corporate. Second, the conference generates funding for the projects it officially recommends in conference documents. Third, the conference produces the conditions necessary for the continued existence of the network and also justifies intervention in places like Iraq, that is to say in “weak” states. Combined, these three major contributions of the conference to the network affirm that what is vital is not necessarily the results on the ground in Iraq, or another country at issue, but the generation of international business around the node of marsh restoration. Marsh advocates and investors, for example, argued at conferences that building marsh schools and health clinics lay outside the scope of their work. Instead, they recommended a project within their mandate—the creation of a coordinating body in southern Iraq that would manage the work of local NGOs to ensure that there would not be a re-doubling of efforts. Directing funding in this way, investors suggested, would “build the capacity” of local organizations to govern since they would be mentored by, in this case, Canada’s International Development Agency. Thus to assess the network and its effects it is essential to return to the ethnographic, to return not to an ethnography of information as an anthropological subject, but to the human subjects directly implicated in the projects the collaboration of global investors undertake. One more note about the concept of a “network”: the word itself implies a field of straight, interconnected lines that specify relationships between and among numerous actors. In other words, the concept denotes a structure of relationships between separate organizations. However, in Iraq this was not always the case. Often relationships between nongovernmental organizations, private businesses, and governments were not structurally separate, but

nestled one within another making them at once effective and hard to differentiate. By returning to the ethnographic moment of the conference, I demonstrate how the character of these relationships was instrumental in gaining command at a distance over the ground in Iraq.

To research the marsh project, I attended numerous conferences the world over with stops in Montreal, Boston, London, Amman, and a trip canceled at the very last minute to Tokyo. I focus here on four conferences in particular in order to highlight specific moments in the history of the marsh project and the ways in which the conference catalyzed growth of the initiative overall. The Geneva conference in May 2003 represented a breakthrough moment for marsh advocates for it was the place where major project investors committed to restoration. A few months after the close of these meetings, Iraqi exiles, US Aid, and a team of American scientists conducted their first research trip to the Iraqi marshes. The Harvard Conference in October 2004 was the moment where all those who had ever worked in the marsh or who were working on restoration met collectively for the first time. Over the weekend, marsh advocates formed partnerships that solidified as a powerful conglomerate in the years to come.

In August 2005 the International Congress of Ecology conference in Montreal provided the forum for *Nature Iraq* in partnership with the Canada-Iraq Marsh Initiative funded by the Canadian International Development Agency to present the findings of their research in the marshes. Established in 1967, the International Congress of Ecology is the Ecology/ Environmental Section of the International Union of the Biological Sciences. Its mandate is to assist the development of ecological sciences and encourage their practical application to issues of global concern. This conference provided *Nature Iraq* and its Canadian investors the chance to make the case that their work in the marshes was critical for *science*, that their findings would advance the science of wetland ecology.

Finally, the Canadian International Development Agency Conference in Amman in September 2006 provided a critical perspective on the relationship of Aid workers and the Sheikhs and politicians from the Iraqi marsh. For the three-day meetings, the Canadian government flew nearly one hundred representatives from the marshes to Amman in order to develop a new project that they would propose to the government for funding. It was that rare instance where foreign marsh advocates met directly with Iraqi leadership from the marsh area. By examining snapshots of each of these four conferences it is possible to identify the tangible effects conferences had in confirming the power of global investors, their imprint on the development of Iraqi environmental policy, and the implications for Iraqis living in the marsh region.

UNEP Conference – Geneva, Switzerland May 2003

About two months after the Blue Ribbon Committee Press Conference in late May 2003, Pekka Haavisto convened a conference in Geneva, Switzerland of all potential investors in the Iraqi marsh project. Building on the breathless enthusiasm of Iraqi exiles, governments, and NGOs eager to remodel Iraq as an economically open society, this conference assembled a group of potential investors including Azzam who was then affiliated with the Iraq Foundation, Hassan Partow at UNEP, representatives of US Aid, Italian engineering firms, the World Wildlife Fund, IUCN (the International Union for Conservation of Nature), the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), a Dutch hydrological firm, an ornithological expert with knowledge of the area drawn from personal experience and a consulting appointment with an oil company working on the Iranian side of the marshes, and Baroness Nicholson who was a member of the EU Parliament where she pushed for a legal case criminalizing Saddam Hussein's marsh draining campaign and the mass killings following the 1991 Intifadah as a "genocide"

and who had been running the AMAR Charitable Foundation to build health clinics in the marshes since the early 1990s.

This conference was meant as an opportunity for marsh restoration leadership to meet and plan their next strategic move. Much like the initial Blue Ribbon Commission, leadership identified the conference as a vital first step in formulating their work in Iraq. That the conference occupied such an important place in the formulation of foreign intervention in the marshes represented a shift from earlier foreign-led interventions in the region directed by the Ottomans and the British who both used the apparatus of empire and state in the form of property reform to harness territory to polity. In 2003, foreign intervention in the Iraqi marshes was not directed by any one identifiable state or empire but a partnership among nations, businesses, and nongovernmental organizations. Creating a politically and economically open society, thus, was seen as an initiative that required this kind of international collaboration.

This emphasis on global partnership in relation to the marsh project echoed the United Nations Security Council mandate that the United States establish a “Coalition of the Willing” to enter Iraq and depose the Ba’ath government. Whatever happened in practice, the appearance of true collaboration was essential for the United Nations in sanctioning active intervention because it enabled internationals to make the case that their involvement in Iraq was not imperialistic, but rather a *humanitarian* concern shared among a broad and diverse group of nations, a concern that was in the strategic interest of humankind in general and a matter for aid workers who were duty-bound to engage as citizens of the earth. The marsh project fit this rationale nicely because it was quite literally a project to redeem earthly delights as a modern day ecological marvel. To establish this cohort of concerned international environmentalists, the conference was essential for it provided that first common meeting ground. It is significant that these meeting spaces materialized outside of Iraq: prior to entering the country, investors

needed to formulate a strategy for their engagement in a place well beyond the marsh. In Geneva, marsh advocates planned their journey to the marsh.

Azzam recalled that he, his wife Suzie, and one of their consultants flew to Geneva for the meetings with barely a budget to attend. The meetings, Suzie said, were meant to coordinate, to provide a forum for each interested party to brainstorm. Azzam remembered, "Hassan Partow showed initial pictures of re-flooding." He adds that one of the Italian engineers Azzam consulted also presented his research, "Nicola was there and he showed the flooding scenarios. Look at how close! As off as our model was, it's a very good truthing to the model. As crude as it was, nature is behaving as we predicted. Yay, engineering!"⁶⁶ At the meeting, he told me, participants reviewed two competing hydrological models for restoration: one from the US Army Corps of Engineers and another from the Dutch company. Although the Netherlands has one of the most sophisticated hydrological infrastructures in order to protect their shore and their model was more elaborate, the Dutch government would only make the technology available for a year and then the Iraqi government would have to buy in at 200,000 per year. Attendees vigorously debated which model to use, Azzam said, but in the end the Netherlands were excluded from the final plan.

In Geneva, actors involved in the meetings ultimately decided who would participate in restoration from that point forward. Financial considerations played a role in their determination, but so did the relative strength of states and organizations and their position in the Iraq war. For example, US Aid under the direction of Andrew Natsios made their plans to enter Iraq with a team of scientists and Iraqi exiles. At the same time, the future appearance of the marsh was hotly contested. Azzam wanted to set aside the marsh for conservation and the national park, whereas the US Aid contingent and FAO argued that boosting the agricultural commerce of former marsh fields turned

⁶⁶ Azzam Alwash. March 1, 2007. Personal Interview. Amman, Jordan.

agrarian since draining would make the most economic sense for the nation. Bird experts took the conversation beyond the nation-state, pointing to the significance of the wetlands for migratory birds and the global interest in preserving the landscape. During all of the debate, the UN Environmental Programme provided a baseline assessment of the marsh as it stood in 2003 by presenting images they rendered through their initial remote sensing analysis. The meeting, Azzam and Suzie recalled, was only intended as a place for anyone interested in marsh restoration to register their concerns. It was a “coordination” meeting, they said, one that would gather all interested parties who would carve out a path forward.⁶⁷

Following the meeting, US Aid with a team of US professors who had wetland expertise and Azzam as the head of *Eden Again* made their first trip to the Iraqi marshes in June 2003. These first steps in the marsh were overwhelming for Azzam who had not been to the marsh for 25 years and found dry clumps of salty mud where reeds and water had been. He remembered that, “Between July and August, I had to figure out what I was going to do. Should I hire a project manager and run this from afar? After about a month and a half of sleepless nights and soul searching with my wife...I decided to quit my job and move to Iraq.”⁶⁸ By August 2003 he was living in Baghdad full time. Like many of those who began working in Iraq shortly after the fall of Saddam’s statue, Azzam was full of hope and anticipation and he was motivated by a sense of extreme loss and grave injustice. Hassan Partow had also begun working in Baghdad in order to assist in establishing the first Iraqi Ministry for Environment, a Ministry that the UN Environmental Programme had worked to establish under his leadership.

As Hassan and Azzam separately navigated Bagdad’s city streets, they caught glimpses of the reconstruction architecture. Azzam recalled seeing IUCN cars in the city,

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Azzam Alwash. October 30, 2004. Personal Interview. Harvard University. Boston, MA.

but years later this seemed surprising to him given the organization's opposition to the war. Had they ever been there? Lost in the chaos of those early days and the barrage of constant information, it was hard for Azzam to be sure. As waves of actors rushed to the capital and the CPA eliminated former governmental structures, a generalized confusion set in. The lack of organization and minimal oversight coupled with multimillion dollar investments in reconstruction and the influx of foreign organizations created in Iraq a frontier culture where just about anything was possible. Azzam suggested to some of his Basra employees that they might follow the lead of other marsh residents and break some of the dams and dikes in the marshes and see what happened. In December 2005, his staff did just that.⁶⁹ In an era of massive confusion, foreign investors had the unique opportunity to remake Iraq from the ground up. In the marsh, advocates reformulated foreign and state political relationships via environmental conservation.

In this flurry of activity, US Aid began their study of the marshes. The project was ultimately not sustained beyond an initial year period. In a fundamental disagreement over whether the marshes would be suitable for an agricultural industry or for the commerce resulting from international tourism, Azzam and US Aid formally split. Instead, Azzam found partnership with the Italian government. It was at the Geneva meeting that Nicola approached Azzam and said "I think I found money for you."⁷⁰ Azzam and Suzie both remembered thinking "isn't that cute" because they did not believe Nicola, who was in his late 20s, would be able to do much for them. Instead, Nicola's contacts with the Italian Ministry of Environment and Territory paid off and the Italian government granted *Eden Again* a 1.2 million dollar grant for the first year of their work, a grant that turned into a thirty million dollar bilateral grant for the next three years providing the support for *Eden Again* to grow into the Iraqi registered nonprofit *Nature Iraq* and confirming Italy's

⁶⁹ Azzam Alwash. March 11, 2007. Personal Interview. Amman, Jordan.

⁷⁰ Azzam Alwash. March 1, 2007. Personal Interview. Amman, Jordan.

commitment to southern Iraq. As a cohort of marsh investors emerged, Paul Bremer disbanded the Iraqi army and began to govern Iraq by Executive Order. The rush of development and aid workers to Baghdad as Bremer consolidated sovereign rule in Iraq by executive fiat quickly and dramatically confirmed the power of foreign rule in the country. As foreign investors saw marsh restoration as emblematic of liberation, Iraqis began to recognize the marsh project as part of the occupation.



Figure 34: John Wilson poses at US Aid in front of Iraqi marsh poster

Harvard Conference – Boston, MA October 2004

Between the Geneva conference in May 2003 and the next major assemblage of marsh investors in October 2004 in Boston, conditions in Iraq changed dramatically. Exiles and investors were no longer caught up in a breathless race to remake Iraq but were instead confronted by growing resistance to foreign intervention, violence that was directed at aid workers but that affected Iraqis even more seriously. Not one year after

Geneva, the Multinational Forces seized Fallujah after insurgents famously executed four US Blackwater contractors. After rampant looting, larger portions of Baghdad museums and historical sites lay in ruins, relics defaced or stolen. Bremer's Orders disbanding the army and dismissing massive numbers of ordinary Iraqis from their posts in his widespread de-Ba'athification campaign created one of the largest unemployment problems Iraq had ever faced. Failing to secure caches of weapons, the US government and its coalition partners created the very conditions whereby numbers of deposed and unemployed Iraqis turned toward militia as a way of fighting foreign occupation and as a means to secure their livelihood in a moment when nothing—from electricity to water to food—was guaranteed and death appeared a relative certainty. Nonetheless, Iraqi marsh restoration moved forward and investors were called to assemble once again to plan their next steps.

When investors met for the October 2004 Harvard conference “Mesopotamian Marshes and Modern Development: Practical Approaches for Sustaining Restored Ecological and Cultural Landscapes in Iraq,” the days of the CPA were over and Bremer was long gone. Organizations like US Aid and the US Army Corps of Engineers that were initially involved in marsh restoration in 2003 attended the Harvard conference, but their participation appeared as a kind of memorial to what might have been, to that optimism Iraqi exiles and their governmental supporters had rushed to Iraq to pursue and that was all but abandoned. In February 2004, Azzam testified before Congress about the destruction of the Iraqi marshes in one of his last high profile US government related activities. As the war grew more violent, the marsh rationale of redeeming a paradise lost failed to convince an American public that the government pursued war as a form of social justice. As former American-based donors fell away, other global affiliations grew stronger, because while the marsh rationale was ineffective as an American war justification, it fit into global movements for ecological conservation and

international concern for climate change. In April 2004, Azzam made a presentation to the United Nations Sustainable Development Conference in New York City that garnered even more international interest and attracted reporters from *National Geographic* who expressed interest in running a feature article on the Iraqi marshes.

By June 2004, the Canadian government began their participation in marsh restoration and their partnership with Azzam by convening a conference of about forty Iraqi University professors in Amman, Jordan. Members of this group would become part of a team that would routinely enter the marsh to evaluate its ecological vitality by counting numbers and types of birds in the wetland habitat. At the same time, beginning in February 2004, Italian funds sponsored the work of a different team of *Eden Again* scientists to monitor and assess the hydrological values of specific points in the Abu Zirig marsh. In Venice, several months later in October 2004, concerned Iraqi ministries formally sanctioned the Italian funded project by signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the Italian Ministry of Environment and Territory and *Eden Again/Nature Iraq*. In the midst of the growing malaise about Iraq and any secure future the country might have, the Iraqi marsh restoration project was a breath of hope. At the Harvard Conference the marshes sparked renewal of a seemingly impossible aspiration, telescoping vision toward the promise of that yet unrealized state. Believing in the marsh was a matter of faith, one that required a cosmic leap foreign investors and Iraqi officials wanted to make and hoped that through their patience and persistence they could bring into reality.

Azzam's enthusiasm, confidence, and charisma encouraged in marsh advocates this kind of faith in Iraq's revitalization and fostered in them the desire to renew their commitment to the future by taking their expertise and dollars and channeling them into the marsh. It wasn't only Azzam who made an effective case for the immediacy of the marsh restoration project; each of the conference presentations was a call to action. Neil

Harvey, the Harvard faculty organizer of the event, opened the conference by referencing Henry David Thoreau: “Redeeming a swamp...comes pretty near to making a world.”⁷¹ If the community of investors in the marsh restoration project were interested in influencing the country, the implication was that they could do so by dedicating themselves to turning around the Iraqi marsh. Neil suggested that his devotion to the conference and to the promotion of Iraqi marsh restoration was a result of his British upbringing, the fact that a relative had fought in World War I, and his youthful curiosity in books by intrepid British officers like John Bagot Glubb who wrote *Arabian Adventures* (1978), British officer Stuart Hedgecock and his wife Elizabeth who wrote *The Marsh Arab* under the name Fulanain (1927), and more recently of expeditions by Gavin Maxwell (1957) and Thor Heyerdahl (1981) who visited the marshes in the 1970s. Neil spoke about the marshes as the “Cradle of Civilization,” “the land of Ur,” and the setting for *Gilgamesh* (Mitchell 2006). Among his audience were representatives from the US Army Corps of Engineers, US Aid, the University of Waterloo (CIDA’s partner on the marsh project) and the Canadian government, Hassan Partow from UNEP, university professors from US Ecology and Biology Departments, Khalid Irani who was the Director of Jordan’s Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature, Baroness Nicholson from the AMAR Charitable Foundation, Nik Wheeler who was the photographer for Gavin Young’s *Return to the Marshes* (1977), *Eden Again*’s Italian engineering team, and a number of private businesses interested in being considered for some of the potential contracts in hydrological or engineering expertise that restoring the marshes would require.

At Harvard speakers polished their image of the Iraqi marshes with poetry. Neil introduced one conference participant, Haidar Al-Hasani, by saying that accidentally and

⁷¹ Neil Harvey. October 28, 2004. Conference Presentation. Harvard University. Boston, MA. The passage in Thoreau is from *Early Spring in Massachusetts* (1894:254).

fortuitously the conference organizers learned of Haidar only at the New York City pre-conference discussion sponsored by the Carnegie Institute, NYU, and the al-Khoei Foundation that they attended earlier in the week. It was as if, like early British explorers extracting botanical samples from the wetlands, they had made a “discovery.” Haidar, as mentioned previously, was originally from the marshes where his father was a prominent Sheikh, but as an artist and intellectual he had been living in London for many years. Despite his notoriety within the community of Iraqi exiles in London, Haidar was not yet known in the United States, had not played a role in the planning of marsh restoration, and had likely not been involved in the *Future of Iraq Project*. His involvement in the project was ultimately limited to the Harvard conference, but in Boston his memories of the marsh served an important purpose; they helped experts and contractors visualize the space of the marshes at a point when they could no longer travel to the place.

Moreover Haidar’s marsh memories acted as testimony of the fact that their actions were of vital concern to the residents of the marsh. Haidar spoke:

I am feeling happiness because I see what you do about the place of my childhood. The water comes to the marshes and Saddam Hussein goes to prison. It is a big deal for me. Thank you very much. They [marsh residents] are not opposed to foreigners and to ecotourism, but how can this be beneficial? The people of the marshes show great hospitality. They are the “Venice of Iraq.” I received an e-mail and was happy to learn that the marsh had water, birds, and fish. Last night, my brother called me on his mobile from the village at the heart of the marshes and he remarked that now in the marshes there are not only fish but also internet, mobile, and other technology. The people of the marshes not only want material benefits, the marshes are part of their spirit. Romantic dialogue is born between the reeds and the water. The people of the marshes believe that the return of the water is the return of their spirituality. I would also like to give examples of how the people of the marshes are related to the environment.⁷²

Haidar concluded his talk by adding that even though he didn’t live there anymore, he could never forget the marshes. In light of the dominant rhetoric about the marsh in international circulation, what was most striking about Haidar’s remarks was not his fondness and nostalgia for the place, but the fact that mobile phones, email, internet,

⁷² Haidar al-Hasani. October 28, 2004. Conference Presentation. Amman, Jordan.

and other technologies are already typical elements of contemporary marsh life. In Iraqi exile narratives the marshes have not yet gone electric. Also striking is his questioning of whether and how ecotourism in the marsh could be beneficial to residents. Marsh investors at the conference, however, emphasized other elements of his speech encapsulated in comments like “romantic dialogue is born between reeds and water” and “the return of the water is the return of their spirituality.” These marsh metaphors mesmerized and cultivated for internationals a sense that their work in the area was selfless and honorable.

Haidar’s comments at the conference were intriguing for project investors, but the charisma and eloquence of Azzam’s presentation was unparalleled. He opened his talk by calling investors into the marsh: “If you lived in and around the marshes you would see the photos that resembled those in Gavin Young’s book.”⁷³ He recounted that he visited the marshes with his dad, a district engineer who would travel throughout the marshes to resolve water disputes. Azzam announced that reeds were “the life of the culture” for “without reeds this culture would not exist.” “Most of the work,” he stated, “is done by women while men sit in the mudhif. The skills needed for this culture to survive still exist. When I go inside one of these mudhifs the feeling is the same as in the best chapels. Inside mudhif suddenly you are at peace.”⁷⁴ Whereas Haidar’s discussion of the marsh based upon the experience of his relatives emphasized the way marsh residents live in the area now, Azzam’s comments took their shape from the writings of Gavin Young and others who stressed the cultural significance of the area. Their insistence that the marsh was a “cultural” space invited marsh investors to treat the area as an artifact, an element of heritage.

⁷³ Azzam Alwash. October 28, 2004. Conference Presentation. Harvard University. Boston, MA.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

Shyrock writes about the relationship of heritage and international investment in Jordan as an intermingling of “tradition” which circulates in commoditized, mass mediated forms encapsulating native hospitality, such as Arabic coffee pot souvenirs, and:

its necessary counterpart, ‘tactical modernism,’ in which metropolitan institutions—parliaments, political parties, trade unions, NGOs, and information technologies—are put to work on behalf of the social forms they render “traditional”: ruling families, tribal constituencies, informal networks of patronage, and a political economy in which grand displays of hospitality are a reliable measure of...power (2004:57).

The marshes of Iraq represent this kind of heritage zone where first at conferences they are “traditionalized,” as ancient pasts and civilizational glories are unearthed from desiccated grounds and mobilized in narrative to circulate within the cosmopolitan fields of NGOs, governments, and global commerce. The marshes became a story investors could buy.

Of heritage zones, Shyrock adds that “The impressive amounts of capital and imagination invested in them suggest that they play an indispensable role in signaling (and somehow maintaining) points of articulation between Arab regimes, global markets, and metropolitan political systems” (2004:44). They appeal to Jordanians, he suggests, because they attract much needed resources from elsewhere. In post-2003 Iraq, Iraqi ministries described the marsh project in exactly those terms; the project was compelling to them because of the foreign resources and attention it attracted to Iraq, attention that pulled Iraq out of the media mire of embezzlement, explosions, and beheadings. By placing Iraq within its heritage of grand civilization, the marsh initiative redeemed a nation bogged down in death and destruction. As Shyrock astutely notes about the implications of a mass marketed hospitality in Jordan, this act of historical reclamation raises important questions about Iraqi sovereignty. Marsh residents do not direct the dialogue about the marshes as a paradise found; their voices do not register in

international circles. As foreign funds determined the structure and nature of the project even Iraqi ministries had limited influence over how the project would take shape. Instead foreign investors capitalized on their relationships with Iraqi *exiles*, with people who shared a similar ethos and agenda, who were aligned with American political ideals in Iraq, and who could by virtue of their personal heritage allow them to make the case that the initiative was Iraqi directed.

As investors encouraged thinking about the marsh as a relic of civilizations lost, civic minded and commercial programs were identified as potential impingements on this environmental-cum-cultural renaissance. Projects proposed by US Aid and the AMAR Charitable Foundation were either seen as misguided, as in US Aid's recommendations to stimulate agrarian commerce in the wetlands, or as outside the scope of the restoration initiative, as in the case of AMAR which had been focused on opening and maintaining health clinics throughout the marshes. When the US Aid Representative Simon Pierce presented at the conference, he opened his comments with the statement, "Every time we do this we should include the Iraqis, we had hoped that Iraqis who are working on this project should be included in the conference. We had hoped to get them visas, but couldn't."⁷⁵ Simon described the work of US Aid as part of their long-term commitment to building the infrastructure of civil society and government institutions in support of democratic elections. The 50 plus member staff working on marsh restoration through US Aid, split evenly between DC and Baghdad, were biased toward agriculture, he openly stated. He saw their mandate as working to support the expressed desires of Iraqi ministers who preferred to think not of restoration but development and emphasized that their approach would be to seek out long-term development approaches. He told conference participants that the "message tonight is that we need to figure out how we take all those examples [of restoration] and use the science as a basis for decision

⁷⁵ Simon Pierce. October 28, 2004. Conference Presentation. Harvard University. Boston, MA.

making.”⁷⁶ Simon believed that agriculture was a vital element of stabilizing southern Iraq and he made the case by citing that agriculture supported 25% of the population in Iraq and represented the largest GNP outside of oil. One challenge, he admitted, was that wheat production yields were only about a third of what they were elsewhere in the region, potentially because salinity was a big problem with lots of salt accumulation in fields that were once marsh. Nonetheless, Simon advocated the US Aid approach with an immediate focus on job creation by building “Iraqi capacity,” creating a market-led society, promoting food security, and improving the natural resource base. The US Aid formula was meant to be universally prescriptive. However, the approach, despite its rhetoric of collaborative planning, sustainable development, and integrated economic development and ecosystem management did not appeal to Azzam who viewed their approach as institutionally prescriptive and locally problematic. Where Azzam emphasized the cultural value of the marsh, US Aid emphasized products of production and units of profit the marsh could use to carve out their position in a globally competitive market.

Though AMAR did not share US Aid’s utilitarian approach to work in the marsh, the organization emphasized the needs of marsh residents over and above marsh ecology. Though AMAR was widely recognized for its work to meet the medical needs of marsh communities, its focus on the direct provision of social services was seen as outside the scope of marsh restoration, which was deemed a scientific and engineering campaign. Where AMAR concentrated on meeting quality of life needs of marsh residents, marsh advocates prioritized environment.

In a period where ecological rehabilitation was of prime global concern, and members of the politically endowed G-8 nations pursued war in Iraq, environment and war converged in a sublime instance of fortuity where the Iraqi marsh restoration project

⁷⁶ Ibid.

unified a formerly unrelated, fragmented set of concerns into a constellation of strategic interests. Iraqi marsh restoration enabled investors to buy into the reconstruction frontier with its promise of unbridled growth and unfettered development under the rubric of environmental justice at a time when climate change and species extinction were of prime international concern. Following the Harvard conference, the Italian government sanctified Azzam's vision as the official platform for marsh restoration by endowing his organization with multimillions. Their support enabled Azzam to formally separate from the American-based Iraq Foundation to become *Nature Iraq*, an Iraqi-registered nonprofit. Despite this separation, *Nature Iraq* maintained a semblance of its partnership with the powerful *Iraq Foundation*, as its Director Rend Rahim and her husband Basil Mehdi Rahim sat on the five person Board of Directors at *Nature Iraq* along with Haithem Al-Haissani, Suzie Alwash, and Azzam Alwash. The Italian government grant did more than ensure that *Nature Iraq's* vision would become the prime model for marsh restoration, it secured Italy's strategic interest in southern Iraq by mandating that 80% of the Italian funds be spent in Italy.⁷⁷ To fulfill the obligations of the grant, Azzam hired Italian engineering firms to build a hydrological model for marsh restoration that would provide the details of the infrastructure of new dams and dikes now necessary to ensure the continued existence and flourishing of the marsh. Since these Italian contractors could not be a constant presence in the marsh itself, they in turn subcontracted with *Nature Iraq* who hired Iraqi faculty at the University of Baghdad and the University of Basra to go to the marshes on a routine basis where they would collect water quality samples, chart land, and count birds. In other words, these Iraqi scientists would gather the data necessary to support Italian expertise and the science of marsh restoration.

At the close of the Harvard conference, Neil welcomed a special guest; Latif Rashid, the Minister of Water Resources in Iraq, flew in to deliver special comments to

⁷⁷ Azzam Alwash. October 30, 2004. Personal Interview. Harvard University. Boston, MA.

the conference. Minister Rashid stated directly, “We believe that the drying of the marshes was a crime, and I believe it was a crime against humanity” because so many Iraqis had to flee the area and ended up in refugee camps.⁷⁸ He expressed his gratitude that “so many people began to look into restoring the marshes—Japan, Canada, Italy—we believe that we have to produce, multi-disciplinary approach.”⁷⁹ In that effort, he emphasized, coordination and cooperation would be critical and that his Ministry had newly established the *Center for the Restoration of the Marshlands* as a means of encouraging the process. Minister Rashid addressed the conference by stating, “I’m not keen on the language of *restoring* the marsh area” and that he preferred instead to refer to the process “as the *development* of the region.”⁸⁰ By making this distinction, Minister Rashid was clearly trying to refuse the narrative of civilizational recuperation in favor of more output oriented growth sector projects that would increase the productivity of the marsh for global commerce and, in theory, thereby increase the quality of life for marsh residents. Minister Rashid implored upon conference attendees to visit the area despite the rising violence in the country. He said, “some areas you can’t go in, but the large part of the area is normal and safe. I see Iraq in a transitional period, a difficult period, but still a transitional period. In this period, there are two faces: one face wants to destroy the democracy (a minority but it is damaging) and the second face is the large majority who wants to keep the freedom and works to establish a parliamentary system with an open and free market.”⁸¹ Minister Rashid’s call for investors to visit the marsh indicates first that there is an appreciable difference between memories of the marsh and present day circumstances and second his clear preference for the marshes to be known through *direct experience* and not through the stories about the marsh circulating in Iraqi exile

⁷⁸ Latif Rashid. October 30, 2004. Conference Presentation. Harvard University. Boston, MA.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

communities, a community to which Minister Rashid belonged until he moved back to Baghdad from London post-2003.

Though Minister Rashid was highly esteemed, his ability to define the terms of international engagement with the marsh was rather limited. Instead, foreign investment supported *Eden Again's* leadership of the restoration initiative where scientific studies of the marsh, hydrological master plans, and models for a national park were the key organizational activities. After the 2004 investors meeting in Venice where Azzam signed an MOU with the Italian Ministry of Environment and Territory, Italian funds supported continued studies of Abu Zirig and preliminary planning for the national park and the adjudication of the Ramsar Convention.

The Canadian government funding supported a separate major organizational initiative—birding. In November 2004, CIDA sponsored the first training of Iraqi University students in the biological sciences to travel to Damascus for training on basic ornithology and field methods for birding campaigns. By April 2005, the program had grown so much and was such a recognized presence in relation to the Iraqi marshes that the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) in Japan sought out Azzam for assistance with their ten million dollar project to install several water purification units throughout the marsh environs. In New York City Azzam and Chizuru Aoki, Iraq Project Coordinator at UNEP's International Environmental Technology Centre in Shiga, Japan met to discuss the ways that *Nature Iraq* could be helpful. As a continued presence in the marsh, where foreign organizations could not go, *Nature Iraq* assisted UNEP Japan during the installment of these units. Where once Azzam had sought out, unsuccessfully, the UN to lobby Ramsar on his behalf at the Valencia meetings in 2002, his credibility and influence had so rapidly expanded that in 2005 it was the UN that sought out Azzam to assist their ground missions in the marsh environs. It was Azzam's ability to recruit

and deploy Iraqi scientists to the marsh that solidified his power among global investors, for these foreign advocates could not access the marsh in any other way.

International Ecology Conference – Montreal 2005

By August 2005, the conference had become a key technology for the development of a distanced approach to foreign-led initiatives in Iraq. Marsh advocates, save for that brief period in 2003 during the early days of the CPA, had not visited the wetlands. With two primary investors, the Italian and Canadian governments, whose funds supported *Nature Iraq* as a scientific organization, the organization and its Canadian sponsors looked to the International Ecology Conference in Montreal as the perfect moment to demonstrate to a global community of scholars that Iraqi marsh restoration was scientifically unique and that their research in Iraq would make groundbreaking contributions to wetland science. With Canadian funds, *Nature Iraq* and US Aid sent about fifteen university professors to Montreal to attend the conference and present their original research. The conference was massive, a small temporary city sheltered within the sprawling conference facility in downtown Montreal. Thousands of academics, nongovernmental organizations, governmental bodies like the US Army Corps of Engineers, and private companies with environmental expertise and ecological purpose descended on urban French-Canada for a full roster of cutting-edge programming.

On the day of their presentation, Tuesday, August 9, 2005, Azzam and Dennis debated the order of presentations. Should the presentation on birds come first or last? Dennis suggested that the work *Nature Iraq* had been doing with birding would be most relatable for their audience and should bookend the other presentations in order to cultivate interest and affiliation in their audience for the marsh project. In the end, they decided to use the photos of birds in that PowerPoint presentation to close their panel,

leaving the audience with beautiful photos of delicate creatures to signify the immediate need for marsh restoration. It was birds that had the power to make that case scientifically, for avifauna was a universal international barometer for climate change and ecological vitality. One US Academic, George Williams, with an appointment at an illustrious American university and expertise in ecology opened the panel. His presentation used NASA Landsat satellite images to outline the current hydrology of the marshland region and to make the case that despite the dams in Turkey there would be enough water to restore the marshes.

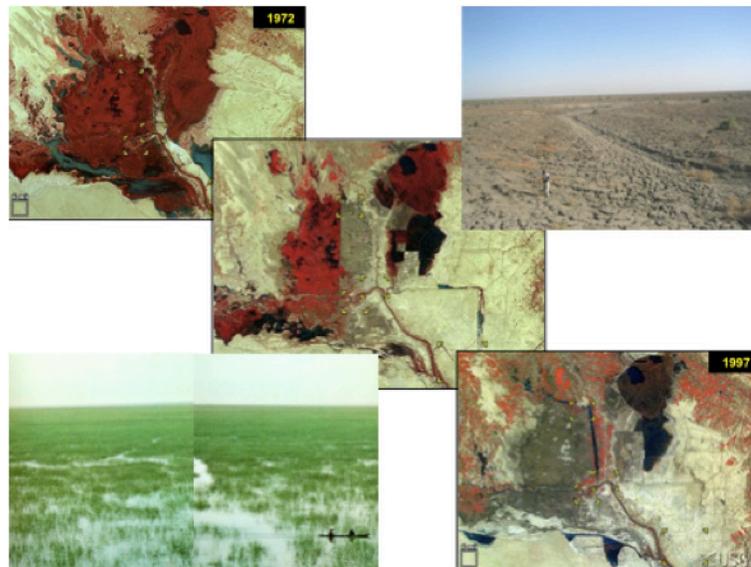


Figure 35: George's remote sensing slide

In making his argument, George used images from the Geneva UN Environmental Programme's remote sensing assessment of the area. He noted personal connections marsh advocates had with the ecosystem, such as Jefferson Peabody who was US Aid's contracted implementing partner at Development Alternatives, Inc. and whose father had been to the Iraqi marshes on an ecotourism trip in 1978. Overall, however, George stressed numerical models of the marsh, water allocation budgets, and hydrological projections in a rationalizing scientific calculus favoring a full ecological commitment beyond the release of waters into the marshland basin. George evaluated potential

conflicts between agriculture and wetland rehabilitation systematically, making the case that one did not preclude the other. His conclusion was that marsh restoration was not only internationally supported, it was scientifically important. Panel organizers placed Iraqi scientists between these two international bookends and their PowerPoint presentations were the individual case studies that confirmed the conclusions George and Dennis emphasized in their own. Iraqi scientists pointed to everything from the recent rise of sandstorms throughout Iraq as a consequence of draining, hydrological implications for southern Iraq, and the loss of aquarian, avian, and terrestrial life in the marshes proper and the impact that de-speciation had on regional and global interlocking ecological systems.



Figure 36: *Nature Iraq* at INTECOL

Earlier that same day *Nature Iraq* held a press conference to publicize their participation at the INTECOL conference and gain additional attention for their scientific research in the marshes. Azzam entered the room enrobed in a gossamer fabric trimmed in hand loomed threads spun from gold. Greeting the audience, he informed the

crowd that his robe was a garment suitable for Iraqi marsh sheikhs; it was royal dress. A former employee Beverly Reagan said as he passed, “Azzam looks like a king. The king of the marshes.”⁸² But just like Thesiger’s *tarada*, Azzam’s robe only amplified his outsider status. The robe was a gift from the marshes, but it did not belong to Azzam, for no matter how he worked in the marsh he was not of the marsh. Instead the robe awkwardly marked his intense desire to act with the authority of marsh royalty, as an insider, but only underscored his inability to do so.

On stage in backdrop Azzam placed a slide with three remote sensing satellite images of the Iraqi marshes, one from 1972 when the marshes were full, another from 1990 just before the time of draining, and the last from 1997 well after Saddam Hussein’s campaign had dramatically drained the region. He immediately thanked Dennis for funding the project and “believing in it from the beginning” and his team of Iraqi scientists who conducted research in the marshes. He noted that it was his hope to turn over *Nature Iraq* completely to his crew of Iraqi scientists within a couple of years. Azzam then said, “Is it oil or marshes? I say both. There’s no better joy than living your dream...The marshes are back guys, our job is to shepherd them...to keep them.”⁸³

At the INTECOL conference, Azzam, in his marsh robes, emerged as the clear leader of the restoration project. When I interviewed him about his continued involvement in the project, he said that he wanted to be a “maestro.”⁸⁴ When I asked what he meant, Azzam replied, “violins here, strings there.”⁸⁵ Eventually, Azzam told me that his ideal position would be the Senior Advisor to the Minister for Environment in Iraq. In this position, he wouldn’t be politically fettered, hemmed in by station or protocol,

⁸² Beverly Reagan. August 9, 2005. INTECOL Conference. Montreal, Canada.

⁸³ Azzam Alwash. August 9, 2005. *Nature Iraq* Press Conference. INTECOL Conference. Montreal, Canada.

⁸⁴ Azzam Alwash. August 11, 2005. Personal Interview. INTECOL Conference. Montreal, Canada.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

but free to operate under his discretion and also endowed with the power needed to coordinate the separate movements into a collective oeuvre. Azzam told me that while his first focus was on the restoration of the marshes, his current vision involved the environment of Iraq as a whole and the regional politics involving Turkey, Iran, Syria and Kuwait that would inevitably constrain its bloom. Conducting meant acting as the public face for the marsh project, courting investors, meeting with oil companies and directing their attention to projects in the marsh intended to win local support needed to make oil extraction feasible. As the maestro of the marshes, Azzam would move the project forward, he hoped, toward ever-opening circles of international interest and support. At the pinnacle of hope, Azzam envisioned his dreams actualized. It would be his grand achievement.

When I visited the Department of State on April 6, 2006, almost three years after Saddam's statue fell in Firdos Square and eight months after my last encounter with *Nature Iraq* during the Intecol conference, a Foreign Affairs Officer on the Future of Iraq Project was moving the classified white polypropylene three ring binders onto a dolly and into the archives. From across her desk she looked at me, unlatched the rings, removed a list of names she couldn't share, closed the binder, wrote "declassified" across the file, and handed it to me. That was it. All the meetings, all the travel, all the expenses, all the deliberation had been reduced to a collection of seventeen plastic files destined for the archival bowels of Foggy Bottom.

US involvement with the group of Iraqi exiles it initially courted had without doubt fundamentally changed. Iraqis working on the marsh project had moved the initiative into an international arena, drawing solid support from Canadian and Italian investors, among others. They continued to draw upon their contacts in the US Administration in Baghdad's Green Zone but had established their own independent connections to Iraqi ministries and international environmental organizations.

The Kempinski Conference – Amman 2006

As fewer and fewer foreign nationals visited Iraq, investors looked to meeting places in the Middle East to meet with their Iraqi counterparts. The conference was a strategy for breaching this distance and also for maintaining it. In a remarkable effort, the Canadian International Development Agency went beyond convention and flew about one hundred marsh leaders, including representatives of Iraqi Governorates in the marshes, local NGOs, and tribal shaikhs, to Amman in September 2006, hosting them at the luxury Kempinski hotel. Even as foreign marsh investors went to great and uncharacteristic lengths to consult with marsh leadership, the voices of these Iraqi representatives were not granted equal weight in the determination of final recommendations for future Canadian investments in the marshes.

The expense of the meeting was significant; one CIDA employee estimated that the cost was about a quarter of a million USD when per diems of each guest, hotel expenses, meals, conference fees, and travel costs were calculated.⁸⁶ The objective of the conference was to brainstorm potential projects that CIDA would consider funding in the marshes. Funding for these projects was contingent on the plan that the assembled group would devise. To assist in the planning, remote sensing images rendered by the United Nations Environmental Programme in Geneva were prominently displayed around the large conference room.

During official sessions, CIDA employees and their conference facilitators conducted a number of collaborative exercises designed to get Iraqi participants to imagine a viable project that they could potentially implement. Participants overwhelmingly suggested a variety of direct service projects, from building schools to

⁸⁶ Dennis Heatherington. September 16, 2006. Personal Interview. INTECOL Conference. Montreal, Canada.

addressing public works. However the Canadian government did not want to fund such projects, which were seen as beyond the scope of their mandate, projects that were already being implemented by the Iraqi government and the multinational forces. Instead of what the Canadian team viewed as short term, quick fix, proposals, CIDA prioritized development projects that would improve a system of integrated services in the region over time. In the final days of the conference, CIDA coached Iraqi participants directly, facilitating brainstorming exercises. A more enticing project would be to create an NGO to increase the coordination among all organizations working on the marshes. That would be their official proposal to the Canadian government.

Increased coordination was a good idea theoretically, Iraqi representatives agreed, but the creation of this NGO was problematic in practice. It seemed redundant since a coordinating body of marshland donor agencies already existed. Furthermore, the effectiveness of this NGO was questionable. Iraqi attendees pointed out that similar organizations already existed, like the Iraqi Ministry of Civil Society that was formed to coordinate the efforts of NGOs working in Iraq, and were widely criticized for their ineffectuality in integrating development projects into a comprehensive scheme. On the last conference day one sheikh stood, his robes marking distinctiveness in a sea of suits, and expressed what others had been whispering in smaller groups, "We will be embarrassed to go back to the marshes and say that this is what we have come up with."⁸⁷ As marsh residents watched their sheikhs and government leaders fly off to foreign countries and heard of their visits to luxury hotels, they struggled to find work, access to health care, and quality education for their children. Development for them meant internet access and electricity, not the rehabilitation of the marshes as an ecological park and national wonder.

⁸⁷ Sheikh al-Hasani. September 19, 2006. Personal Statement. CIDA Conference. Amman, Jordan.

The CIDA conference illustrates how marsh investors had the ability to influence the outcome of projects implemented in the marsh in ways that marsh residents did not. Marsh residents added credibility to their formulations, enabling internationals to make the case that local people had been consulted. The Canadian conference in Amman so clearly indicates how in the years between 2003 and 2006, political dominion over the marsh had been consolidated within an international community of investors. In the field of marsh power, the conference provided the forum for the development and rise of a defined global cohort of marsh advocates.

Chapter Three: A Holographic Image

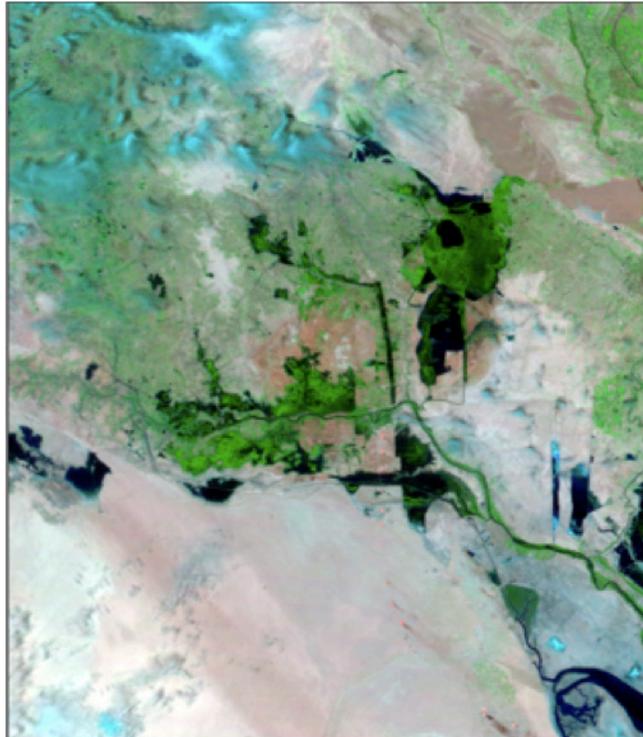


Figure 37: UNEP remote sensing map of the Iraqi marshes, 2006

Geneva

On the first day of the training course, Pierre Beaumont, head scientist at the UN remote sensing project, instructed his class that the important thing in remote sensing is that “you sense without contact.” From May 29, 2006 through June 9, 2006, at the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) in Geneva, UN scientists trained Iraqi scientists employed at the Iraq Ministry of Water Resources and *Nature Iraq* in remote sensing technologies, a science that would enable them to make landcover maps of the Iraqi marshes using satellite images provided by NASA. During a period in Iraq of intensifying conflict that primarily affected Iraqi civilians, Zeinab Thamir, Fatima Qasim,

and Lena Mahdi sat day in and out in a whitewashed Swiss conference room to master in two weeks what Geneva scientists studied over years of master's level education. These three young Iraqi professionals were all university graduates in their twenties with B.A.s in the biological sciences. They were eager to achieve fluency in remote sensing because they hoped that in doing so they would become professionally mobile in an embryonic, but already thriving field, of international reconstruction.

Hassan Partow, Programme Officer at UNEP's Post Conflict Branch in Geneva, oversaw the marsh program; it was an endeavor that grew out of his publication *The Mesopotamian Marshlands: Demise of an Ecosystem* (2001). In the first years of the twenty-first century, it was Hassan's report featuring remote sensing maps that confirmed for global humanitarians and environmentalists what had been circulating as rumor among Iraqi exiles: by 2003, after Saddam Hussein's drainage campaign, the wetlands were almost totally dry. The maps were used both as a call for marsh revival and, under the parameters of international law governing environment, a condemnation of Saddam Hussein's government for what the US government and members of EU Parliament identified as a "genocide" against marsh residents.⁸⁸ The maps were also used during conferences and investor meetings as a representative image of the marshes that project stakeholders could reference when making business or policy decisions concerning the wetlands.

The UN remote sensing maps therefore produced an image of the marsh that was instrumental for foreign investment. The UN Environmental Programme prepared remote sensing maps each week and posted them on the *Iraqi Marshland Observation System* webpage, the programmatic center for the organization's marsh restoration activity. These maps, which demarcated classes of landcover—including water,

⁸⁸ As mentioned in the Introduction, one of the seven crimes for which Saddam Hussein was officially charged was the destruction of the marshes and the "genocide" against the "Marsh Arabs" who lived there.

vegetation, and soil—provided a picture of marsh revival on a gradual, week-to-week basis. In so doing, it provided foreign investors with the ability to track marsh regeneration from afar in just about real time. As products created by the UN from NASA satellite images, by experts whose work was unquestionably reliable, the maps were endowed with immediate credibility.

Remote technologies, like the remote sensing, supported a structure of reconstruction wherein project administrators worked from afar, did not go to the marsh, and employed Iraqi scientists to carry out field research or execute policy in Iraq. The terms of government and supragovernmental contracts for marsh restoration specified that project administration and project expertise would largely be foreign. Given the escalating conflict in Iraq, these foreign experts turned to remote sensing and other technologies of mediation to implement marsh restoration from afar. Foreign administrators hired Iraqi scientists, like the remote sensing training candidates, to carry out field research in the marsh or implement policy changes in national Iraqi governance. The economic structure ensured that Iraqis who were hired for marsh restoration were those at risk.

This wasn't only a problem for Iraqis, it was problematic for UN administrators and scientists working on projects like remote sensing who worried that the effects of this scientific intervention would somehow compromise their Iraqi counterparts. They were unable, however, to figure out how their efforts would negatively impact Iraqis. As they directed their attentions at refining and teaching the fundamentals of remote sensing, scientists were not able to identify the most direct effects of their work. Remote technologies may have increased the visibility of particular ecological elements of the marsh, but it did so by implementing a management structure for reconstruction that elevated foreign experts and administrators to positions of leadership over their Iraqi counterparts.

Tutorials, workshops, and trainings were paramount in reconstruction Iraq; most of which were organized and held outside of the country in unexpected and seemingly unrelated places, like the one on remote sensing held in Geneva. These workshops fulfilled the UN Security Council mandates of re-integrating Iraqis into global economic and political infrastructures. They also re-introduced foreign expertise to Iraq as reconstruction leadership, as was the case with the remote sensing project. The vision of the marshes that the remote sensing maps created was an important component of this political transition because it connected foreign investors and project administrators with the marsh not only by making its image virtually accessible, but also by training Iraqis to work within a changing political landscape that they participated in but did not define.

Logistics

The business of Iraqi reconstruction connected countries in sometimes surprising ways. The government of Japan funded the UN Environmental Programme remote sensing project with an eleven million dollar grant administered by the Iraq Trust Fund.⁸⁹ The grant was meant to benefit Iraq and Japan alike. Most of the grant was stipulated to UNEP Japan with about one million directed to UNEP Geneva. The provisions of the grant therefore instituted a system whereby most of the funding would provide

⁸⁹ At the request of donors at the Iraq Donors Meeting held in New York on June 24, 2003 the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) and the World Bank designed The Iraq Trust Fund, known officially as *the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq*, (IRFFI or the Facility). The Trust Fund was a pool funded by donor countries to meet the fiduciary requirements of the UNDG and World Bank reconstruction and development assistance to Iraq. Since the pool was a blind fund administered by the UN and World Bank, countries that were not immediately involved in the US-led Coalition and which did not support the war, felt more comfortable to contribute (see <http://www.uniraq.org/donors/irffi.asp>). Japan, however, was a member of the Coalition of the Willing. Some donors, as Japan in this case, earmarked funds they contributed to the Trust for special projects. The grant supported the first year of UNEP Geneva's remote sensing program from January 2005 to January 2006 and the Geneva office of UNEP in which the project was housed, gave money to sustain the last six months of the remote sensing project from January through June 2006 (Pierre Beaumont. May 22, 2006. Personal conversation. Geneva, Switzerland).

immediate professional and economic opportunity for Japanese scientists and administrators at the UN. This arrangement was typical of other international grants on the Iraq marsh project. The government of Italy, which was *Nature Iraq's* largest funder, established the terms of their bilateral grant to the NGO in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that required 80% of project funds be spent in Italy. In the case of UN remote sensing, the structure of aid immediately integrated Iraq with networks of environmentalists in Japan and Switzerland.

In addition to funding, the educational programming international environmentalists and humanitarians designed to teach Iraqis to conduct fieldwork and implement governmental change deepened international ties. The remote sensing training in Geneva was one instance of a larger phenomenon in which internationals managed reconstruction by flying Iraqis all over the globe. Foreign experts *trained* Iraqi scientists in the latest conservation methods, like the science of remote sensing, citing Iraqi techniques as woefully out of date. In pursuit of Iraqi marsh restoration, Italians flew Iraqi ministerial representatives and *Nature Iraq* scientists to Italy for a series of national park trainings that involved visits to the Delta Po. The Delta Po was an Italian wetland restored as a protected area and an ecotourism destination that would serve as a model for Iraqi marsh restoration. Jordanian and Italian experts conducted trainings at the Azraq oasis in northern Jordan around the concept of a national park and the business of running a park for tourism. British bird experts led workshops in Syria on ornithological technique and the ways in which avian populations could establish an ecosystem as a “key biodiversity area” worthy of international protection under the Ramsar Convention (for wetlands) and the UNESCO World Heritage Convention. And in the spring of 2006, the government of Japan brought Iraqi scientists to Geneva to master the principles of remote sensing. The one area these experts did not conduct trainings was the marsh itself. Instead, foreign investment in the marsh created a powerful network linking

Europe, Canada, Japan, the United States, and neighboring countries of the Middle East to Iraq. Through environment, Iraq was reintegrated into global systems of finance and expertise.

These international arrangements did not always make the best business sense. In Geneva, UNEP administrators expressed that the division of funds created difficulty because their Japan office was not equipped for the challenge. At the end of the grant, UNEP Geneva would transfer the project to Iraqi scientists at the Ministry of Water Resources and *Nature Iraq* who would run the program indefinitely. The transfer was the single act that marked the project “sustainable,” branding it beneficial for Iraq and not an exercise of foreign whimsy (see Ferguson 1994).

Though the grant supported this two-week training seminar and one or two earlier training sessions, following the protocol of the Iraqi government that spread opportunities for international travel among all its staff rather than prioritize project continuity, Iraqi participants had no previous training on remote sensing and the final course did not afford enough time for them to master remote sensing technology.⁹⁰ Normally the UN Geneva staff would train their foreign colleagues slowly until they grew comfortable with the analysis. The lack of training served to underscore what UN scientists hinted at but would not say directly: it suggested that the Japanese government prioritized their country’s humanitarian presence in southern Iraq irrespective of project success perhaps as a means to establish connections there that would lead to later private sector business opportunities for Japan. In addition to the limited time, the funding structure created conditions of work that made meaningful

⁹⁰ Though outside the scope of this chapter it would be interesting to examine this decision by the Iraqi government concerning the training courses. Many international organizations complained that they felt Iraqi trainees treated the workshops as “vacations” in exotic places. I often wondered if this indicated that the government did not find these courses to be valuable exercises for their staff, but was willing to entertain the requests of international organizations. Given the limitations of trainings, there would have been a credible basis for this potential evaluation.

collaboration between Iraqi scientists and foreign experts difficult. The terms of the grants determined that foreign experts would manage and educate Iraqi colleagues through training programs; it was a structure that positioned foreign experts to lead and direct Iraqi colleagues, privileging foreign knowledge over and above Iraqi knowledge.

As internationals invested in technologies of mediation, they developed a circumscribed relationship with Iraq. As scientists brought a picture of the marsh into being through remote sensing, the experience of the marsh for local residents went almost completely unnoticed and unaccounted for in marsh restoration planning. Most project participants from foreign administration to Baghdad field researchers did not establish substantive relationships with Iraqis living in the marsh area. The lack of local involvement in the project presented a serious concern for UN scientists who worried openly whether the restoration of the marshes would create problems for local marsh residents. Iraqi scientists worked in the marsh, conducted surveys of marsh villages, and sampled marsh soil and water; though marsh Sheikhs and government officers may have been invited to conferences and stakeholder meetings, they were not significantly involved in the decision making process that defined the course of restoration. For UN scientists in Geneva, the project raised questions about who would ultimately benefit from restoration.

Nevertheless, by 2006 the remote sensing maps were used by marsh advocates to convince humanitarians and governments that marsh restoration was a worthy investment. To do so they had to prove that the wetlands, which had been reflooded when residents broke dams and dikes post-April 2003, were not simply full of water but was becoming a healthy ecosystem. As the only organization to send scientific teams into the marshes, *Nature Iraq* attempted to document ecological rejuvenation, but it was the UN's unmatched credibility that made remote sensing images international facts.

Humanitarian Operations

After the August 2003 bombing of UN Iraq Headquarters that killed Envoy Sergio Vieira de Mello and after the kidnapping and execution of Margaret Hassan (Director of CARE International in Iraq) in the fall of 2004, the United Nations and international NGOs pulled most of their foreign staff out of Iraq, relocating them mainly to Amman. Humanitarian withdrawal followed the same path as the streaming exodus of refugees who left Iraq for Jordan or Syria or who sought refuge in the country's north. By October 2003 *The New York Times* reported that the UN had reduced its staff in Baghdad from 600 at its peak in August to 35. In Amman senior UN administration directed 4,233 Iraqi staff to deliver basic services, from food offered through the World Food Programme to water provided by UNICEF (Fisher and Becker October 12, 2003). It was a new humanitarian paradigm for post-conflict reconstruction that foreign national staff of the UN and international organizations felt largely uncomfortable working within. They preferred working in country, on the ground.

Under UN Security Council protocol, foreign national staff in Iraq were only able to move outside of the UN compound with a military escort. The requirement meant that in Iraq international organizations only ever engaged Iraqis through the infrastructure of war. For Iraqi civilians, but also for internationals, this blurred the distinction between humanitarian and military operations, creating a fuzzy logic complicated by the fact that Multinational Forces-Iraq (MNF-I) also carried out humanitarian and emergency relief projects of their own by mandate (see United Nations Security Council August 10, 2007; United Nations Security Council December 22, 2008; United Nations Security Council May 22, 2003; United Nations Security Council November 28, 2006). UN humanitarians came to be seen as an element of occupation, aid workers were targeted, and it became dangerous for them to leave their compounds in Iraq.

The UN and international NGOs were essentially locked in their offices and they employed Iraqis for their mobility. In the case of the Iraqi marsh project *Nature Iraq* scientists, all of whom were Iraqi nationals, were the only project staff sent to the marshes to collect the samples and survey the territory the UN wanted documented. To collect the information project administrators sent teams of Iraqi scientists into the marshes, into the comparative “red zone”. The red zone was the governmental term used to describe all of Iraq outside of the US fortified Green Zone. Far from roads and well into the thick maze of fifteen-foot reeds, in the marshes *Nature Iraq* scientists navigated territory that was a haven for smugglers and militia groups moving between Iraq and Iran across one of the country’s largest untapped oil reserves. In relation to the Green Zone, the southern Iraqi marshes were deep in the red. It was as much an ideological barrier as it was a physical one.

Landcover Maps

Monday, June 5, 2006. Lena was really struggling, completely quiet, without signs of her typical conviviality. “Where are the others?” I asked. “They went to lunch with Hassan around 2:30,” she replied, saying that she stayed behind to finish her work. It was a holiday and all the other UN staff was off enjoying a long weekend, but Lena, Zeinab, and Fatima were hard at work with Hassan to produce individual maps according to the protocol of remote sensing analysis. Lena told me that they had been working since early in the morning, since about 9 a.m. Though she was finally at the end the exercise, she had a long way to go. Fatigued and frustrated, she stumbled ahead toward the most difficult analytic exercise: classifying image pixels into segmented objects of similar spectral values. First she had to make a feature space plot. One touch of a key and pixels would be splashed vividly across a plot in bright differentials of color. Lena was determined to get it right. But her deliberation made it no easier to decipher

and mark discrete differences between classes of landcover using spectral wavelengths. Minor differences between dark, light, and wet soil were hard to calculate. Lena classified wet soil as dark. She knew it was wrong, but “how do I know what they meant when they determined these classes?”⁹¹ She found class divisions arbitrary and obscure; labels separating one category of terrain from another were not intuitive.

The next day, seeking clarification from Sylvie, Lena posed the question she had the day before: how do you determine the limits of these classes? She replied, “well it’s up to you to determine what the range of dark, wet, and light soil is.”⁹² To Lena, this was beside the point, and she stressed that the divisions themselves didn’t make sense. Deciphering the class “water” or distinguishing “dense hydrophytes” from “sparse hydrophytes” posed no problem, she said. Lena emphasized that it was the division of soil into these three particular classes that just didn’t make sense.

On the day of the landcover mapping exercise, Iraqi candidates worked diligently to get it right, but the emotional stress of this course began to show itself outwardly. During a break in processing the images, Lena sat with me for a brief interview. I asked a few basic questions about the number and frequency of her visits to the marshes, what she did when she arrived, how she collected water samples, and how she analyzed her results. Toward the end of our discussion, I asked her if her salary outweighed the danger of working on the marsh project. Lena did not directly respond, but replied, “you know things are not as they were before. I have a father, but it is not enough. My salary supports my family...food, clothes, everything.”⁹³ As she uttered these few sentences, Lena’s speech slowed. It was obvious that she was having difficulty talking. After wrapping up our interview, I went to the conference room and Lena headed to the

⁹¹ Lena Mahdi. June 5, 2006. Personal Conversation. Geneva, Switzerland.

⁹² Sylvie Burckhardt. June 6, 2006. Personal Conversation. Geneva, Switzerland.

⁹³ Lena Mahdi. June 5, 2006. Personal Conversation. Geneva, Switzerland.

bathroom. A few minutes later, she emerged, her eyes red and swollen, to join her colleagues who were leaving for the day. Sheltering her face, Lena looked to the floor.

The pressure to master a complicated science in the course of a few weeks placed considerable stress on Iraqi scientists throughout the training. Sitting in the grass by the lake days before the weekend, books open and notes splayed out in front, Fatima said to me “this is really bad, there’s no way we’re going to learn like this.”⁹⁴ On a separate occasion, Sylvie too expressed her frustration to me, “it’s impossible!”⁹⁵ The final days of training proceeded in this way, Sylvie and Pierre struggled to fit all their lessons into a few remaining days of business and Zeinab, Fatima, and Lena attempted to keep pace. As they ran the training tutorials, Zeinab and Lena hid their internet browsers behind mapping exercises. They moved between work and checking the news. In the middle of an exercise, Zeinab turned to me and said: “Did you hear the news, 50 Iraqis were taken from their work by people dressed in police uniforms?”⁹⁶ The dynamics of the Geneva classroom point to remote sensing of a different kind, one in which Iraqis used the media to track the effects of the war at home and calculate the possible risks to their families. Whereas the war was entirely inescapable for Iraqis, it was comparatively unfathomable for the UN crew.

In the same way that it was not feasible for Sylvie to teach remote sensing methodology in a limited time period, it was next to impossible for her to cultivate new friendships with her students. Over dinner with the UN staff, Fatima confessed “I don’t have the courage like I did when I first arrived to go around and experience all these things in Geneva.”⁹⁷ She told me that she missed her family, was worried about them, and just wanted to make it through the week and go home. For Geneva scientists

⁹⁴ Fatima Qasim. June 3, 2006. Personal Conversation. Geneva, Switzerland.

⁹⁵ Sylvie Burckhardt. June 6, 2006. Personal Conversation. Geneva, Switzerland.

⁹⁶ Zeinab Thamir. June 6, 2006. Personal Conversation. Geneva, Switzerland.

⁹⁷ Fatima Qasim. June 6, 2006. Personal Conversation. Geneva, Switzerland.

cramming remote sensing tutorials may have posed challenges, but for Iraqis the Geneva classroom was torturous. At home, they would have a network of support to draw upon as bombs shook the city and loved ones perished. In Geneva, Zeinab, Lena, and Fatima had only each other. Without immediate access to phones or real-time information about bombings in the city, they agonized over the fate of their families still in Iraq.

At lunch during the final days of training, Fatima sat across from me at the table by the window; she sighed, exhausted and stressed, and said, “Now we have the feeling of being ruled. It’s not like we can eat when we want, sleep when we want, study when we want. No, we are told what we have to do. But, it’s ok we are used to it.”⁹⁸ Fatima indicated what it meant to be ruled was not only about living under military occupation, but about the reality the entire infrastructure of reconstruction enacted and forced people to live within. In this way, the effects of the war were not contained within the borders of Iraq, but felt acutely in the communities of international investiture that mobilized policy and resources on Iraq from afar.

UN scientists in Geneva recognized the near impossibility of training their Iraqi colleagues to master remote sensing during the two weeks but were unsure how to create alternatives. Pierre often raised these concerns with Sylvie and suggested that they try their best to teach something and also to provide Iraqis with a bit of a respite during their time in Switzerland. During the last few days of the training, they decided they would create certificates for their Iraqi students officiating their completion of the course with the hopes that they would find the document professionally useful. It was the best they felt they could do. While much of this pressure was a direct result of the inadequate time allotted to the training course, it is significant that anxieties piqued as UN leadership taught lessons about visualizing the marshes in *abstract* ways. Asking

⁹⁸ Fatima Qasim. June 7, 2006. Personal Conversation. Geneva, Switzerland.

scientists to assimilate a scientific technique involving mathematical theory, challenging software programs, and a solid grasp of an analytic field that took form in the hazy atmosphere between ground and deep space was unreasonable. Everyone from Sylvie to Zeinab expressed the impossibility of adequately completing this task within nine full days of coursework. As the UN struggled to teach remote sensing well and Iraqis struggled to learn as much as they could in a limited time, their attentions were focused on the putting the infrastructure in place to ensure that the program of technological mediation endured. Even though UN scientists expressed concern for the ways in which their work could potentially be used (against their wishes) to the detriment of Iraqis in the marsh, neither the UN nor the Iraqi scientists identified the ways in which their efforts in Geneva contributed to this structure of remote management. Technological mediation meant that not only were the needs and desires of marsh residents largely unknown, but also that Iraqi scientists and their Geneva teachers were working to support an infrastructure wherein true collegiality would be next to impossible. It was a system that preserved the right of foreign organizations and governments to administer Iraq at a distance as Iraqis carried out an agenda they set. The training course in Geneva was but one example out of hundreds of workshops, conferences, and trainings all designed to fulfill the UN Security Council mandate of reintegrating Iraq into global economic and political structures. In the case of remote sensing, mapping played a strategic role in making the marshes accessible to these foreign institutions and governments.

Mapping

Anthropologists and scholars of the Middle East have long written about the ways in which maps rationalize forms of political rule, concretizing ideologies in a geographic lexicon. Said argued famously in *Orientalism* that the Orient was less a place than a topos, a set of references (1979:177). Later in an essay for an edited volume, Said

described geography as the methodology of imperialism (1995). His analysis of geography, knowledge, and power as three essential elements of imperialism (Said 1979:211-216) are foundational to later work on mapping (Anderson 1991:171; Harvey 1990:240-259; Mignolo 1995; Mitchell 2002:86; Mueggler 2001:199-249; Pandolfo 1997:15-82; Raffles 2002; Slyomovics 1998:96-99; Swedenburg 2003:48-49). Each of these works treats cartography as a science that did much more than mirror territory. These scholars demonstrate how a map is a tool that enables polities to harness and direct political power. Maps, they suggest, are crucial to the process by which a nation becomes, standing as metonyms for modernity and enfolding registers of affect from loss to pride to loyalty within their frame (see Callahan:141-144; Ramaswamy 2004:211 and 219-220).

In contemporary Iraq mapping had again become instrumental to the creation of a new polity. As it had during the eras of the Ottoman and British rule in Mesopotamia (Ainsworth 1888; Chesney 1868), technological innovation exposed new territory for exploration, this time revealing amorphous elements of planetary environs from atmosphere to solar energy to the expanse of deep space as a frontier, one that was fashioned digitally in the Geneva lab. This time scientists defined marsh geography by analyzing and specifying its parameters virtually.

The pursuit of technology that would allow experts to access terrain despite distance led scientists toward a mediated marsh, one that became increasingly familiar, at the same time the geographic marsh in Iraq became ever more difficult to navigate. In essence, the inaccessibility of the southern Iraqi marsh for humanitarians and foreign scientists and the penetration of the technologically mediated marsh were mutually constitutive: one produced the other. What Geneva scientists knew of the Iraqi marshes they learned from media reports, televised documentaries, humanitarian gossip, and the memories of Iraqi exiles who had visited the marshes more than twenty years ago as

children. To those working on the marshes outside of Iraq, the maps became recognizable in ways that the living wetlands could not be. UN experts readily admitted their limits of perception, but daily activity served to make the digital marsh more comprehensible. Marsh maps scientists produced from remote sensing analysis depicted another kind of reality. In Geneva, the marshes became a holographic image.

Technological Phenomenon

Reconstruction-era Iraq experienced a major boom in technological innovation. In the early years of reconstruction, organizations from the US Army Corps of Engineers to the Iraqi Ministry of Health conducted trainings on Geographic Information System (GIS) technologies for their staff. Operating remotely from abroad, Iraqi peripheries, or fortified compounds in country, the UN and NGOs depended on remote sensing technologies to direct Iraqi staff into lands they did not visit. Though contemporary marsh advocates had been working since 2003 on marsh restoration, a process that began when local residents broke dams and dikes (Wong February 21, 2004), it was remote sensing that gave advocates a comprehensive picture.

However, remote sensing technology created a different view of the marsh, one removed from violence. Through remote sensing, UN scientists created a sort of holographic marsh image in the form of the map. A hologram is typically defined as a three dimensional image produced by interference splitting a coherent beam of radiation. Scientists made remote sensing maps by reading electromagnetic radiation, i.e., solar energy reflected from the surface of the earth and intercepted by NASA satellites. The resulting map appeared to be a two-dimensional object charting space and time along longitudinal and latitudinal axes. However these maps were produced from the emission of light refracted from the earth's surface and as such traced a third dimension—wavelength, or the distance between the ground and the satellite. Thus while the maps

appeared as two-dimensional texts, it was this third dimension that made them unique. As a text, the map was diagnostic of the spectral values of reflected light encoded in the satellite photograph. This immediate reference to the ground acted as a partial anchor, establishing a digitally encoded relationship with the Iraqi ground it depicted.

Etymologically the word *hologram*, popularized in 1949 along with the technology, derives from the word *holograph* that in Greek means “writing of the whole.” At the UN, laboratory analysis was a form of authorship through which scientists wrote into being a distinct marsh cosmography. Key here was that in Geneva aesthetic properties like color were not perceived but calculated.⁹⁹ Taussig argues that color *enlivens* (see also Helmreich 2007; 2009:7-8). When scientists in Geneva added color to the map—blue for water, green for vegetation, and brown for soil—they enhanced the realism of the image. As marsh advocates followed the regeneration of the wetland online, the vibrant colors emphasized the revival of marsh vegetation and the re-inundation of the ecosystem with water. At stake in this inquiry however was not whether the holograph was or was not “real,” but how it became globally instrumental. The remotely sensed map was not the hyperreal of Baudrillard (1983; 1994; 1995), a reality devoid of attachment to signs, anchors territorial or otherwise. It was precisely because such references were *partially* maintained, through the analyses of spectral values and sporadic marsh visits, that advocates valued the maps; the reference enabled them to make the argument that the marshes were in the process of regeneration and therefore a wetland worthy of international protection and investment.

Hassan Partow described remote sensing technologies as an Iraq war phenomenon.¹⁰⁰ By virtue of GPS, UN and NGO administrators sent Iraqi employees to pinpointed locations for everything from taking water quality samples to delivering

⁹⁹ Thus I take a different entry point into the anthropology of color than recent work on the cultural specificity of color systems (see MacLaury, et al. 2007).

¹⁰⁰ Hassan Partow. May 24, 2006. Personal Conversation. Geneva, Switzerland.

emergency relief packages for internally displaced people (Fisher and Becker October 12, 2003). When international organizations evacuated Iraq early in the war, technological innovation was vital for their distanced involvement. Iraq became a lab in which humanitarians undertook the experiment of remote sensing as management technique in high-risk conflict zones. Under the pressure of war, Iraq became the laboratory where adaptations of remote sensing were refined for future projects. Its influence is obvious today as unmanned military drones continue to pinpoint bomb targets in Pakistan (see Mayer October 26, 2009) and when, following attacks on UN Kabul compounds, the UN relocated staff to Dubai (see BBC News November 5, 2009; CBS News October 28, 2009). In 2007 the UAE constructed the “International Humanitarian City” to encourage international humanitarian organizations to centralize Middle East and South Asia operations in Dubai. Though employees moved back to Afghanistan in February 2010 (Constantine February 24, 2010), the UN relied on technological mediation to protect foreign national staff. The wartime use of remote sensing highlights how countries of the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean, the Middle East and South Asia, constitute an emergent landscape in the expansion of a political frontier, one that is digitally mediated.

Remote Sensing

Remote sensing is the science of documenting the surface of the earth by using space satellites that can record a comprehensive picture of the earth’s surface. Using these images, scientists adeptly track geographic and climate change. The UN, the World Bank, and NASA are among the organizations using this technology to expose the planetary effects of global warming. Televised weather broadcasts make remote sensing images common to the general public.

The early history of the technology was closely tied to the development of the photograph in 1839 and its applications to topographic analysis the following year. By 1858 balloons were being used to carry cameras for territorial surveillance. In the 1880s balloons were replaced by kites and, in the early 1900s, by pigeons (Elachi and Van Zyl 2006:4). In Ottoman Arabia, including Mesopotamia, British officers trained a legion of carrier pigeons for aerial surveillance and the covert transmission of messages between outposts in their effort to wrest governmental control from Constantinople (Day 1892; Tweedie 1882). World War I constituted a major leap in the advancement of aerial photography (Campbell 2002:8). In Iraq the British established their prominence over former Ottoman territory by use of air power (Dodge 2003). Grounded, Ottomans watched as British officers gained command over a new frontier—the air (see Bhimull 2007).

Although aerial surveillance both for military purposes and environmental protection continued, it was the technological demands of World War II that sparked innovation in aerial surveillance, when scientists explored the full range of the electromagnetic spectrum from visible to the invisible microwave and infrared wavelengths of light. Whereas military scientists developed remote sensing under the duress of rapid response to war, environmental scientists refined the technology in periods of peace. In 1956 Robert Colwell pioneered the application of remote sensing to environment when he used color infrared films, developed during WWII, to identify problems and diseases of small-grain cereal crops (Campbell 2002:9). At the same time NASA sent Armstrong to take his first lunar steps, they established a research program in remote sensing and in 1972 launched the first satellite into orbit to observe the earth's landmass. As NASA sent satellites into orbit, remote sensing became an essential monitor; from photographing large swaths of the earth's surface to capturing fine details of reed stands in a particular marsh (Campbell 2002:10).

Yet only a few years before in 1968 Vietnam, US Operation Igloo White planted a blanket of sensors—in ecological forms like twigs, leaves, and animal droppings—along Laotian Ho Chi Minh trail. Upon detecting human motion, a Thai surveillance center that controlled the sensors sent planes to bomb targets (Edwards 1996:3-6, 142). In post-2003 Iraq, humanitarians and environmentalists adapted the technology not to enable war but to facilitate reconstruction. Marsh advocates similarly capitalized on the remote sensing to carry out their environmentalist mandate with a limited presence in the marsh and in marsh communities.

Spectral Signature

Remote sensing was a complicated science that involved the evaluation of solar reflectance off the surface of the earth and analyzing the distinctive spectral signature of different types of landcover. It worked like this: remote sensing sensors on satellites read topographic detail of the ground from spectral wavelengths emitted by the earth's

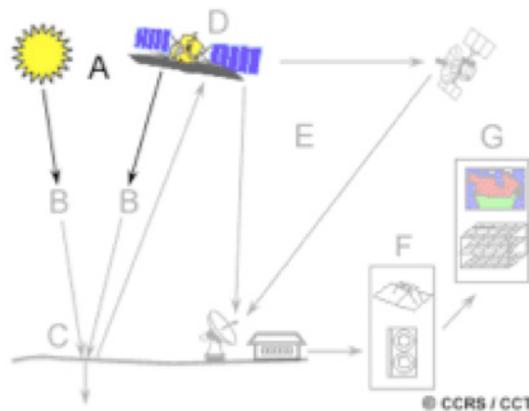


Figure 38: Solar reflection and satellite capture in remote sensing¹⁰¹

surface. The sun illuminated the ground, known as the target, and the satellite recorded spectral wavelengths as they were reflected by distinct categories of groundcover. Soil,

¹⁰¹ (A) Energy Source or Illumination (B) Radiation and Atmosphere (C) Target (D) Recording of Energy by the Sensor (E) Transmission, Reception, and Processing (F) Interpretation and Analysis (G) Application (Canada Centre for Remote Sensing:5-7)

water, and vegetation absorbed and reflected solar energy differently resulting in their own spectral signatures. Tree leaves, for example, are observed as green because the plant's chlorophyll absorbs red and blue spectral wavelengths, but reflects green (Canada Centre for Remote Sensing:17). Spectral wavelengths emitted from groundcover travel up through the atmosphere, through the clouds, and into space. Satellite sensors captured their signal and transmitted the data back to NASA as photographs, but these photographs were unlike other digital images. They did more than capture the likeness of their subject; they recorded each spectral wavelength in bands and stored this information in the resulting image. Back in the lab, scientists were able to use computer software to read solar reflectance values and interpret wavelength bands. They classified spectral values into categories of vegetation, water, or soil, and, in cross-referencing these readings with an index of healthy wetland flora, were able to discern whether reed stands were dying or thriving. Without setting foot in the marsh, Geneva scientists evaluated the ecosystem.

Ground Truthing

Remote sensing analysis is a dual process. Typically the first step involves lab scientists analyzing spectral data from satellites to track ecological change. The second step is ground truthing, verifying or dismissing these lab hypotheses by physically visiting selective points throughout the fieldsite. Due to the conditions of war, the UN remote sensing project was atypical: there was no consistent "ground truthing."

Nature Iraq, which conducted its own monthly visits to the marsh to conduct hydraulic assessments of the ecosystem and to photograph birds, did assist the UN project by taking photographs of areas that the program specifically requested. Sustained engagement with people living in the marsh was not part of their project mandate, *Nature Iraq* officials were quick to state. Given the violence of war, even for

Nature Iraq scientists, areas of the marsh remained entirely off limits. Some points the UN requested simply could not be verified. Scientists in Geneva reluctantly compensated for these limitations by publishing maps based almost exclusively on satellite diagnostics and lab based computer analysis. Without ground truthing, scientists expressed that they felt as if they were working with a major handicap; they could not experience the ground, they could only assess it from the vantage of space.

Pixels

On the first day of remote sensing training, Pierre instructed, turn to page twenty of the *Fundamentals of Remote Sensing*. “Look at the characteristics of images,” he said. Our eyes jumped to the page:

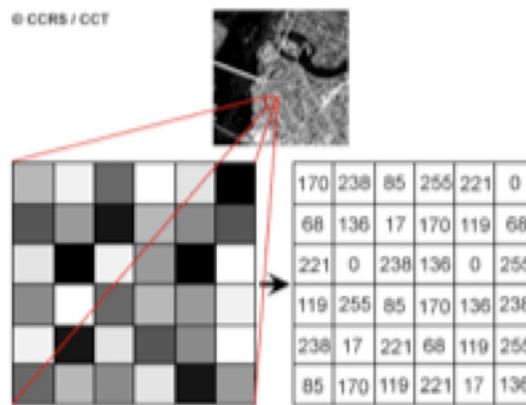


Figure 39: Conversion from photograph to pixels¹⁰²

The diagram illustrates the conversion from photograph to pixels. The photograph was displayed digitally by subdividing the image into small equal-sized and shaped areas, called pixels, and representing the brightness of each area with a numeric value, a digital number. The new image was actually a digital reproduction of the original photograph.

¹⁰² (Canada Centre for Remote Sensing:20)

In the classroom, Pierre gathered all of us around to look at remote sensing images of the marsh. “Look at them,” he said. “Aren’t they beautiful! When you understand these images, reading a landscape is just like reading a novel. It’s like a text.”¹⁰³ For UN scientists who spent their days analyzing and categorizing pixels on individual satellite images and dividing them into classes of landcover, the maps did indeed appear to be texts. Earlier in the week, Pierre told me “We’ve just been spectators here [in Geneva]. It’s like watching a bathtub fill up with water.”¹⁰⁴ At the same time that they talked about their work as limited, Sylvie and Pierre told me that they thought their work was valuable. When analyzing pixels, they often expressed excitement when they were able to determine that a greater percentage of vegetation was regenerating in the marsh than they had originally anticipated or more of the marshes had been reflooded.¹⁰⁵

A pixel is shorthand for *picture element*, the smallest unit of a digital image. In Geneva, scientists analyzed remote sensing images largely by separating groups of pixels into distinct categories corresponding to ecological features of the marsh. To conduct remote sensing of the marsh, Sylvie worked day after day analyzing pixels in the 250-meter resolution MODIS satellite images NASA provided daily at precisely 10 am. In her Geneva office, Sylvie divided groups of pixels into classes: vegetation, non-vegetation and more specific categories like hydrophytes, dense and sparse. The numeric values of spectral wavelengths encoded within pixels were readings used to determine whether reeds in the marsh were vibrant and green, or dying and dry.

Going from ground to image involved several mediations: the ground where different values of light were either absorbed, transmitted, or reflected; the atmosphere,

¹⁰³ Pierre Beaumont. May 22, 2006. Personal Conversation. Geneva, Switzerland.

¹⁰⁴ Pierre Beaumont. May 23, 2006. Personal Conversation. Geneva, Switzerland.

¹⁰⁵ The marshes were largely reflooded when local communities broke dams and dikes, allowing the waters to rush back into the wetland basin.

where dust or other suspended particles influenced the photographic image; the satellite sensor, which intercepted the wavelength transmissions; the photograph, which recorded the image; and the analyst who interpreted the data. Each mediation involved a particular device for analyzing spectral signals. Every pixel, therefore, represented an average in each of three dimensions: space, wavelength, and time (Schowengerdt 2007:16).

In this digital interface, calculations of composition, from color to dimension, rendered the marsh scientifically standardized, quantifiable and comparative. Scientists in Geneva were able to evaluate the marsh against itself, tracking changes in images from one week to the next or from one season to the next. Working digitally allowed them to analyze the Iraqi marshes in relationship to similar wetlands in other parts of the world. Pixels stored optical information about the marsh, but they were also tiny warehouses of code that stored information about spectral wavelengths reverberating off the surface of the earth, through the atmosphere, and into space. The code recorded this movement from space (sun) to earth (marsh) to space (satellite) within the digital number of each pixel.

As UN scientists adapted remote sensing technologies to permit them to work without verifying their results on the ground, they relied on their ability to discriminate between pixels on satellite images. Pierre told me that it was strange that they were doing this work on a project from a distance.¹⁰⁶ In fact, most of the scientists working on the project described the circumstances of their work as “strange” or “weird” or “odd.” Pierre elaborated what he meant by adding that he wasn’t accustomed to working on a project where going to the field was impossible. Given all the constraints on evaluating marsh restoration, he thought it would be understandable for a scientist to refuse the project. He agreed to work on the remote sensing project because of his position at the

¹⁰⁶ Pierre Beaumont. May 22, 2006. Personal Conversation. Geneva, Switzerland.

UN and because there was so much money and interest in marsh restoration. He and Sylvie felt it was their responsibility to do their best working within project limitations. Basic errors in analysis, such as misapplications of the index used to classify vegetation, would naturally arise. Normally these errors would be checked in the field by taking samples and visiting the area in question, they told me. Since this wasn't possible, UN scientists developed another way of verifying initial hypotheses: they used higher resolution images,¹⁰⁷ a more powerful technology that could offer a magnified view of the ground below from the vantage point of space.

Through the training, UN scientists taught their Iraqi colleagues how to process spectral information and translate it into color on the map. On the second day of the training course, Pierre kicked off the morning by reviewing differences between spectral and thematic classes. As he defined them, thematic classes included things like water, soil, city, road, field whereas spectral classes were readings of light be they blue, green, grey. "Thematic classes," Pierre stated "are things you put on a map... Colors are what you have to tag with a thematic class and then map. Color is Blue, Green, and Red, but MIR [medium infrared] and NIR [near infrared] are not color because you cannot see them with your eyes. They are spectral data." In converting spectral information to thematic information, one must work both with one's eyes and numerically with the computer. Pierre cautioned: "The analyst is the brain and the analyst has to be in charge, not the computer. It might not work if the analyst is not capable of being the master and not the slave of the computer."¹⁰⁸

Despite the care taken to verify lab diagnostics, the remote sensing marsh maps flattened out the living marsh into *textual* properties. Learning textual inscription was challenging for Iraqi scientists. Consider Lena's experience during the final days of the

¹⁰⁷ These higher resolution images recorded 15 meters of ground per pixel (15 meter resolution) compared to the standard 250-meter resolution images Sylvie used to make the weekly maps.

¹⁰⁸ Pierre Beaumont. May 30, 2006. UNEP Training Course. Geneva, Switzerland.

training course as she struggled to analyze spectral data encoded in pixels and define them as thematic classes on the landcover map. Lena's primary concern was the acute discriminations she needed to make in order to separate the broad category of soil into the subcategories of dark, light, and wet. Her question, "how do I know what they meant when they determined these classes?" expressed this frustration.¹⁰⁹ In two weeks the Iraqi scientists had learned the basic mechanics of remote sensing analysis but had not mastered the fluency needed to make these *subjective* decisions.

Sylvie described such analytic choices as dependent on the "feeling of the analyst" to make the best determination based partly on their scientific training and partly on instinct.¹¹⁰ Her expertise provided her with the background to make these choices, decisions that led to "activating" new classes of landcover like "very sparse vegetation," to describe patches of vegetation that were gradually appearing on the satellite images from one week to the next, and "deactivating" others like "xerophytes" (plants that need very little water), which when applied to the map showed up in areas Sylvie recognized as impossible for xerophytes to be. Her mastery of remote sensing analysis and botanical cartography enabled Sylvie to call on her scientific instincts to readily make these judgments. It was precisely this kind of nuance that made the UN remote sensing project effort successful even despite the limitations of their research.

It was also exactly the kind of mastery that both UN scientists and Iraqi scientists knew could not be achieved in two weeks. The realization placed Iraqi scientists under immediate duress, as these three individuals—Lena, Zeinab, and Fatima—would inherit the personal and professional responsibility for maintaining a project for which their knowledge was partial.

¹⁰⁹ Lena Mahdi. June 5, 2006. Personal Conversation. Geneva, Switzerland.

¹¹⁰ Sylvie Burckhardt. May 22, 2006. Personal Conversation. Geneva, Switzerland.

Interference

Remote sensing technology didn't offer flawless analysis. Since remote sensing analysis is a reading of the electromagnetic radiation of solar energy from the surface of the earth, atmospheric conditions like dust or clouds can obscure data. Rather than work with an inferior sample, the UN simply discarded such images. While dust and clouds were issues UN scientists could work around, there were others they could not. During the training Pierre noted that the internal structure of reeds could be difficult to determine during particular seasons: "For some reason part of the stands get a little yellowish at certain points in the season depending on the state of health. [We] cannot discriminate with MODIS [the satellite] if it's a question of density or if it's a question of health."¹¹¹ Fatima immediately raised her hand and offered, "So we must go to the field?"¹¹² Skipping the obvious fact that field visits were major orchestrations in wartime Iraq, Pierre cited a different and equally true reason. He explained that the size of the marshes made that prohibitive since several points in each of the three marshes would need to be verified by scientists on weekly field visits.

The most critical issue for the UN Environmental Programme, Pierre identified, was the lack of field data. From the first day of training he commented upon this missing information wistfully "We have to do without it for the moment and it's a pity," and added, "There's nothing we can do about it."¹¹³ On the last day of training, perhaps exhausted from the whirlwind speed of the course, Pierre discussed the issue directly: "it is in a way frustrating to have such little field information. It's not that I'm complaining. We understand the conditions of that. But if we had more information that would be great."¹¹⁴ At the same time, the fact that UN scientists in Geneva didn't have to account for the

¹¹¹ Pierre Beaumont. May 29, 2006. Personal Conversation. Geneva, Switzerland.

¹¹² Fatima Qasim. May 29, 2006. Personal Conversation. Geneva, Switzerland.

¹¹³ Pierre Beaumont. May 29, 2006. Personal Conversation. Geneva, Switzerland.

¹¹⁴ Pierre Beaumont. June 9, 2006. Personal Conversation. Geneva, Switzerland.

field in their analysis made things slightly easier. They didn't have to deal with the messiness of a marsh environment or human colleagues, they worked instead almost exclusively in the realm of the pixels.

Still the lack of a relationship with the field concerned Pierre and Sylvie the most. They could access the marsh, but they could not predict how their maps would be used, and they were deeply concerned about the effects their scientific analysis would have for Iraqis. "Would Iraqis be bussed back to the marshes?" Pierre asked, interested to know if their proof that the marshes were regenerating would be used to support a forced repatriation campaign of former marsh residents who were now living in Basra and Baghdad.¹¹⁵ Their concerns may not have been substantiated, but UN scientists' anxieties about the fact that their work was not benefitting the local community were founded. Project investors largely thought about the marsh ecosystem and the people who lived there as two separate projects and involved themselves extensively with the former. As they did so, their Iraqi colleagues had no choice but to face the war in Iraq.

Mediation

UN scientists in Geneva recognized the limitations of their scientific and personal knowledge of Iraq, but they did not experience the stress their Iraqi colleagues lived with during war. Lunch break, day two of the training course. Zeinab, Fatima, Lena and I sat at the long white lunch counters in the UN cafeteria speaking about Baghdad as UN employees scuttled by grabbing sandwiches and dashing back to their desks. Fatima and Lena were frank, "people are abducted all the time."¹¹⁶ It happened this way, Fatima related, someone would show up at the house and inform the family that they need to take the young man in for questioning. "He will never come back. Or maybe they will find

¹¹⁵ Pierre Beaumont. May 22, 2006. Personal Conversation. Geneva, Switzerland.

¹¹⁶ Fatima Qasim. May 30, 2006. Personal Conversation. Geneva, Switzerland.

him in the street later.” “Or maybe,” Fatima said, “they will find him in the trash.”¹¹⁷ Lena confirmed with a nod, “yes, they’re putting people in the trash now.”¹¹⁸ She added that neighborhoods in Baghdad were sectioned off, one from the other, and where the long, snaking, cement wall was not effective, people blockaded the streets to seal them from the violence. The nights were the worst, they all agreed. Mostly, they stayed inside. Zeinab said, “It’s really, really bad where I live. In the morning there are bodies lying in the street and nobody knows who took them or who killed them. It’s hard to know who is fighting who.”¹¹⁹ Lena added, “Bremer made a huge mistake in disbanding the Iraqi army.”¹²⁰ Fatima chimed in, “now the security situation is awful because members of the militia have infiltrated the police. They wear their uniforms and drive around in police vehicles. So you don’t know who is who.”¹²¹ Later, Lena and Fatima explained that they had to avoid coming too close to the American soldiers because they were afraid that they would shoot them with no cause or warning. They said “Americans are so scared and so naïve that it is a deadly combination for Iraqis. They don’t think of Iraqis as human.”¹²²

The technologies of war that created structural distance between soldiers and Iraqi citizens also facilitated the radical dehumanization of Iraqis. Whereas Pierre and Sylvie worried that their work would have disastrous consequences for marsh residents, Zeinab, Fatima, and Lena pointed to other material consequences of international engagement with Iraq. And whereas UN staff experienced the war indirectly, for Iraqi scientists the violence of war was inescapable.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Lena Mahdi. May 30, 2006. Personal Conversation. Geneva, Switzerland.

¹¹⁹ Zeinab Thamir. May 30, 2006. Personal Conversation. Geneva, Switzerland.

¹²⁰ Lena Mahdi. May 30, 2006. Personal Conversation. Geneva, Switzerland.

¹²¹ Fatima Qasim. May 30, 2006. Personal Conversation. Geneva, Switzerland.

¹²² Ibid.

Iraqis felt its effects acutely, even in Geneva. When the UN Environmental Programme required Iraqi scientists to master a demanding technological program while pushing aside the war, relegating them to the category of personal matters, they inadvertently acted in ways that denied the Iraqi reality these scientists lived day to day. In Iraq, people I interviewed recounted that it was sometimes comforting to go to work because they would get out, move on from the mundane holding pattern of household life during curfew, and be amongst colleagues with whom they could talk and joke. In Geneva, this kind of support structure was missing. Geneva scientists may not have wanted to pry into what they regarded as a colleague's personal matter, yet moving rapidly into training without some space and attention to the conditions of life in Iraq was difficult for Zeinab, Fatima, and Lena to do. As much as UN scientists expressed that politics was beyond their scope and that war was outside of their influence, asking this group of Iraqis to work without acknowledgement of the reality they lived in Iraq was a political act in and of itself.

The life and death stakes of the remote sensing project for Iraqis was inescapable in every day, every hour of working with this technology. Zeinab, Fatima, and Lena's discussion of the training course indicates that they felt as if they were present merely to serve the interests of the program. That like the pixels, the UN team recognized them as vessels to be filled with programmatic knowledge. At the same time, even despite their wishes to the contrary, the UN scientists seemed unaware of the way their actions affected their Iraqi colleagues. They wanted to create a fun and peaceful space where their Iraqi colleagues could get a respite from violent life in Baghdad. But Geneva scientists were overcome by their own anxieties, facing tremendous pressure to fulfill the mandate of their contract and to perform the impossible, to train their colleagues within two weeks. During the training, the world of the holograph that UN

Geneva scientists recognized and the Iraq that trainees inhabited were at fundamental odds, making a true partnership next to impossible.

Utility of the Map

When on June 9, 2006 the UN Environmental Programme handed over the remote sensing project to Iraqi leadership, they handed over responsibility for projecting the image of the Iraqi marshes to the world. For the maps were not ultimately intended for Iraqis, but as a vehicle to court foreign investors. The map provided the penultimate vision of the marsh for a host of marsh advocates who had never walked the wetland grounds. Compared to other humanitarian aid projects on public works, like water and electricity, the UN project to revive a dormant marsh ecosystem was unlike most reconstruction initiatives. Remote sensing supported building and instituting a dream, Iraqi marsh revitalization, during the heart of war. It was a project to rationalize and implement one imagined future at a time when people had taken up arms to fight in the south for control over political leadership of that very terrain. The UN remote sensing mandate did not concern the war on the ground—the project was scientific—but their efforts were no less involved in the outcome of the conflict.

After the program was transferred to Iraqi control, the Iraqi marshlands remote sensing project predictably faded away. By fall of 2006, I heard that of the three trainees only one remained in Baghdad and the others left the country. Ferguson identifies that when development projects fail they make structural changes nonetheless. He suggests that these very failures provide a rationale for continued intervention to bolster the development of a country or region, sparking a cycle of failure and renewed investment in development initiatives (Ferguson 1994:268). Even though the remote sensing project ended, the force of the 2006 maps remained and continued to structure international investment in Iraq. Even more significant, the structure of remote mediation as a tool for

managing conflict that was pioneered by humanitarians in Iraq endured and became the paradigm for foreign intervention in conflict zones throughout the Middle East and South Asia region.

Green Zone/ Red Zone

It wasn't only Iraqis who struggled with the consequences of remote management. Just like members of the UN Environmental Programme Post-Conflict Branch who expressed their dismay about the consequences their limited access to Iraq would have in their work, several UN employees at various offices stranded in Amman expressed frustration at the new form of distanced participation. For those UN employees stationed at a small, four-person office in Basra the experience was vastly different. One member of the legal team, Nicole, remembered feeling trapped on the military compound, unable to go "into the field" and, given the dangers of association for Iraqis, unable to serve Iraqis in their operational headquarters. Technically, they were in Iraq, but they lived a sequestered life; separated from Iraqis by cement blast walls intended to provide security but which, in effect, created a fortress of humanitarian operation in isolation. After surviving several mortar attacks only to watch her friend explode in his trailer, Nicole resigned her post. The UN support, she told me, "was absolutely minimal. It was pathetic." Recalling a conversation with a colleague who also left his post in Basra, Nicole remembered, "And he said you know when I left I suffered from severe depression because I was really worried about my life, I didn't really know why the whole of the UN, this brilliant organization, was keeping me in a place where I was assuming there is no way out of here, and nobody really cares." It was as though, she told me, their lives were dispensable.¹²³

¹²³ Nicole. August 23, 2007. Personal Interview. Amman, Jordan.

Luminescence

The remote sensing maps elaborated the Iraq marsh in ways that were consistent with the desires of global investors. It did so by creating zones of impenetrability, making invisible the destructive forces of war for those who lived in Iraq. The marsh may have operated in humanitarian circles as a holographic image, but it was no less real than the one on the ground. Rather, this marsh had its own specific pixelated terrain. Significantly, these forays for most humanitarians and project investors were almost entirely virtual.

The logistics of the remote sensing course set Iraqi scientists up to fail; that failure would be directly attributed to Iraq as confirmation of their fledgling scientific competence. This failure was significant not because the remote sensing project would likely peter out, but because it underwrote the rationale for further education and advising by foreign experts and governments. The failure of this remote sensing class was one among many in the phenomenon of training in reconstruction-era Iraq. Taken together, these failures confirmed the need for continued foreign administration and advising of Iraqi institutions be they scientific, governmental, or economic.

Chapter Four: Wartime Birding

The White House always complains that the liberal media never shows the *good* news coming out of Iraq. So tonight I'm gonna set things right with my new feature, "Lewis Black: Iraq Good News Explosion"....

And there's good news for Iraqi nature lovers. A newly formed conservation group called *Nature Iraq* has published the country's first ever bird guide. Yes, what a great place to go birding! Hey, Maliki, let's say we throw on some camouflage, grab some high-powered binoculars, and go lurk. What could go wrong?!

- Lewis Black, *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, March 26, 2007.

Birding

The publication of *Nature Iraq's* field guide to birding in Iraq (Nature Iraq and BirdLife International 2007) marked a turning point in the organization. The book piqued the interest of mainstream media from the BBC to The Daily Show. The publication of the bird book was tangible evidence of *Nature Iraq's* work in the Iraqi marshes and, as a public document, earned the organization greater visibility amidst other Iraqi exile-led efforts in reconstruction era Iraq. Iraqi scientists carried out the work necessary to bring the marsh into global visibility and to win *Nature Iraq* greater acclaim. This chapter explores the labor of creating marsh visibility through birds.

The chapter argues that *Nature Iraq's* ornithological work contributed to the organization's global success because it connected investors with animal life in the marsh that could be observed and verified outside of Iraq. As an instrument of ecological science, birds had the added allure of being beautiful, animate creatures that populated exotic, faraway destinations and pedestrian backyards alike. In general, bird-watching is a hobby that combines adventure with meticulous recording concentrated study. Leading teams of birders into the Iraqi marshes during a period of active, and even intensifying, conflict appealed to investors both because at its core it was an incredibly optimistic

project in an otherwise dismal period for Iraq and because birds could serve as the tangible evidence for the global significance of the Iraqi marsh ecosystem. As birds became a resource for organizational success, they also became an object for foreign investment in wartime Iraq.¹²⁴

In 2007 birds were used as a barometer for climate change, a prime concern for most international environmental organizations, including the United Nations and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. Since birds could only alight and reside in healthy ecosystems, they became an important technology for scientists and biodiversity advocates by which to track global ecological change. *Nature Iraq* tapped into already available policy and funding streams earmarked for the analysis and conservation of biodiversity when it launched its ornithological expeditions in partnership with the government of Canada.

This chapter makes three major points. First, though *Nature Iraq* started as an initiative closely tied into the apparatus of war and reconstruction in Iraq, its ornithological work connected the NGO to an international movement with lasting power for investors beyond the immediate war. Other Iraqi exile projects that were similarly developed during the course of pre-war US planning, like the *Future of Iraq Project*, did not have this staying power. As violence in Iraq intensified, projects were abandoned or permanently put on hold—as were Kanan Makiya’s plans to build a museum in Baghdad. By contrast, *Nature Iraq* thrived. The NGO went from being an organization solely concerned with the marsh, to an organization that addressed the comprehensive environment of Iraq as part of an overall regional ecology.

Second, *Nature Iraq* scientists were eager to participate in the project because , the initiative would connect them, as it did for the organization, to professional networks worldwide. Their work with the NGO afforded opportunities for international travel,

¹²⁴ For an analysis of “objects of development” see Mitchell (2002:209-243).

training, and professional development beyond that which would have been possible if they had worked exclusively as faculty at universities (which most did in addition). Iraqi scientists experienced birding distinctly—not as the fantasy investors funded, but as a practice that involved personal risk. For Iraqi scientists birding in Iraq involved calculating risk in the marsh and in Baghdad alike.

Third, and finally, Iraqi birding produced new forms of knowledge that facilitated foreign investment and thereby contributed to the reconstruction mandate of economic and political reform by liberalizing the Iraqi economy. Speaking of early philosophy Krzysztof Pomian writes that “for ancient authors, to *know* means to *see*” (1998:211). Similarly in reconstruction-era Iraq when stories abounded about corruption and embezzlement, and when verifying the ground results personally was not done by foreign project administration, the birds helped to establish a knowledge of the marsh that could be physically verified by migrating avifauna. Latour asserts that the lab is the only place where the invisible is made visible (1999 [1983, abridged 1998]:268). Through their ornithological work in the lab and field, *Nature Iraq* prepared a vision of the marsh in which foreign governments could invest. As animate creatures the birds enlivened the world of the marshes for investors who had never been and would not go to the wetlands. Connections between vision and knowledge were made in *Nature Iraq*'s Baghdad lab, but what was the vision that was produced via the birds?

Iraqi marsh birds, in part because they sought shelter in the marsh even despite a war that thousands had fled, established an image of the marsh as a wholly revived, thriving ecosystem. Their presence underwrote the Iraqi exile aspiration for a future of national integrity, one that in real time did not exist. Yet the realism of birding, with its ordering exercises of list making, photography, and classification (Lynch and Law 1999), supported the idea that this aspiration could be pursued in the present.

Charismatic Mega Fauna

Throughout their years of fieldwork Azzam directed his team of 120 field scientists at *Nature Iraq* to search the marshes for the smooth-coated otter. They were on the hunt for “charismatic mega fauna,” for a mascot with the power to command widespread popular appeal. *The Economist* notes that flagship species like “giant pandas, tigers, mountain gorillas, African elephants and blue whales, to name but a few—have recently become well-known brands that, when used in emotive advertising, bring in the conservation dollars” (January 7, 2008). The otter had a history in Iraq. While traveling with Wilfred Thesiger through the marsh Gavin Maxwell adopted an otter and brought it back to Scotland with him as a pet where the species was named for him. Maxwell later popularized the story of life with his pet otter in his book *Ring of Bright Water* (1960) and subsequent popular children’s movie by the same name. Finding the otter would allow *Nature Iraq* to tap into this pre-existing literature to market the organization’s efforts at marsh conservation as a new effort with historical ties and immediate impact on both wildlife and the ecosystem of which the otter was part.

The trouble was, despite all those efforts, no one found the smooth-coated beast. Azzam sighed deeply and told me he’d given up.¹²⁵ It’s probably extinct, he said. In lieu of the otter, he resigned himself to linking the organizational identity with birds. Usually charismatic mega fauna are cute and cuddly, but for *Nature Iraq*, he told me, it’s going to be ducks. “Its not ideal, but that’s what we’ve got,” he said.¹²⁶ When the organization prepared their website, Azzam promoted the organization in this very way.

¹²⁵ Azzam Alwash. February 12, 2007. Personal Interview. Airplane from Amman, Jordan to Sulaimaniya, Iraq.

¹²⁶ Ibid.



Figure 40: *Nature Iraq* website, September 2008

The first page image of *Nature Iraq*'s original website featured their ornithological commitment prominently. The image depicted *Nature Iraq* as a redemptive organization poised to make a lasting impact on Iraq's history. A large, aged tome embossed with the words "Nature Iraq" in English and again in Arabic underneath presented a map of Iraq as one of its pages. The map was filled with images of ecological rejuvenation in every area of the country. From the text, a bird took flight and soared into the horizon. Visually, the website crafted the story of *Nature Iraq*'s mandate: the promotion of Iraq's ecology as national heritage. The organization marketed their work with birds as a promotional device, but its investment in ornithology paid dividends even Azzam did not expect.

The Surge

Nature Iraq's ornithological missions to the marshes cannot be understood apart from the shadow landscape of the US military surge. After President Bush announced the "New Way Forward" on January 10, 2007, General David Petraeus was charged with stepping up ground troops in Iraq. At the same time that *Nature Iraq* conducted ornithological research in the marsh, over the next six months approximately 30,000 additional troops entered Iraq to secure the capital and to stabilize problematic outlying

areas, like Anbar. Yet the surge did not immediately create this promised stability. To the contrary, the first six months of 2007 were the deadliest for Iraqis of any year since the start of the war (Iraq Body Count 2007).¹²⁷

The war in Iraq attracted unprecedented attention to the country at a time of massive political reform. Bremer's complete removal of the former government from leadership positions through de-Ba'athification created a political vacuum in the country while his executive orders granted foreign governments and investors significant latitude. *Nature Iraq* benefitted from this insecurity because its mandate gave foreign investors a way to get into Iraq through a seemingly politically unmotivated project. The rush to reconstruction introduced a network of foreign political power, resources, and interest to the marsh project.

Ornithological exploration expressed freedom, as in the freedom of avian movement in migration, and an ethical commitment to the preservation of Iraqi wildlife that overlapped with basic neoliberal tenants of economic freedom and political morality. Birding became a visible expression of marsh conservation, but it was also an ethos and a philosophy that shared the political principles, as expressed in environmental terms, with the US vision of Iraqi governance that the surge was designed to protect.

There was some precedence for the popular appeal of birds in Iraq where families visited Baghdad's weekly bird and animal markets with regularity. At the same time that *Nature Iraq* advocated for the protection of bird habitats, in the US military one

¹²⁷ Such an examination is beyond the scope of this current paper, but it would be interesting to consider *Nature Iraq's* birding campaigns and the US military surge as two parallel processes occupying the same conceptual field. Mitchell's recent work describes circuits of connectedness wherein a chain of events connecting war, disease, and agriculture produced a malaria epidemic in 1940s Egypt (Mitchell 2002:33). To examine the epidemic as a series of connections, Mitchell writes, would involve attention to hydraulic, chemical, military, political, etiological, and mechanical processes and their interaction. It seems to me that in contemporary Iraq birding and militarism were one such circuit: the relationship between these two practices was not direct or even causal yet *Nature Iraq's* prestige was undeniably connected to the fact that they were working for ecological restoration during wartime.

soldier, an avid birder, wrote in a popular blog about his deployment as an ornithological quest. The first entry of “Birding Babylon” details his travel from Kuwait into the marshes. He writes, “The birding was fantastic. In fact I haven't had so many live birds in a day since being in Indonesia in 1990. There were birds everywhere, waterbirds and shorebirds in the pools, landbirds flying by or sitting on fences.”¹²⁸ Notably, the soldier wrote about his first encounters with Iraq in *ecological* terms much as colonial and postcolonial explorers in Iraq did before him. His mission there was described as a metaphysical journey through Iraq’s avian communities. His blog amplified the unexpected: not his experience of the violence of war, but the exhilaration of avian discovery and ecological exploration.

Birds and Biodiversity

Nature Iraq relied on birding to prove that the Iraqi marshes were a biodiverse area worthy of international protection under preservation treaties like the Ramsar Convention on wetlands and the UNESCO World Heritage Convention. Birds were internationally recognized as evidence of a healthy ecosystem. Areas which held significant numbers of one or more globally threatened species of birds were one of a set of sites that together held a collection of restricted-range species or habitat-restricted species, or had an exceptionally large number of migratory or congregatory avian species that were considered *Important Bird Areas* (BirdLife International).

Important Bird Areas were ways to identify notable sites for conservation because they established an ecologically rich niche, a space of biodiversity small enough that it could be conserved in its entirety and which was usually part of a larger protected network. As a strategy for marsh restoration, birds were absolutely crucial. If *Nature Iraq* was able to establish the marshes as an *Important Bird Area*, they would

¹²⁸ Birding Babylon blog: http://birdingbabylon.blogspot.com/2004_03_01_archive.html

easily be able to tap into a wealth of international resources including international NGO sponsorship and collaboration (like BirdLife International) and other policy and funding trajectories for conservation. They would also have an easier time successfully adjudicating international protective treaties like Ramsar and UNESCO with such scientific documentation of the wetlands' relative value. Conservationists, Tsing asserts, use the appeal of birdwatching to make the case for protected areas (2005:158). In Iraq conservationists could not capitalize on the appeal of birdwatching in the marshes at a time when exploratory travel and leisure in the marsh were at best uncommon due to the levels of violence and the risk of kidnapping for ransom.

Instead *Nature Iraq*, with funding primarily from the Canadian government, deployed teams of young Iraqi scientists into the marsh to count and classify birds. Men primarily in their late twenties and early thirties with degrees in the biological sciences from the Universities of Baghdad or Basra, these *Nature Iraq* teams consisted of a handful of staff scientists and one ornithologist who also served as the organization's photographer. Haraway writes that counting birds and monitoring populations was an important first step in the scientific development of animal sociology. The study of birds, including the counting of species, was instrumental to the development of a field biology of nonhuman primates. Haraway argues, "A census was not just a quantitative description, but was related to the problem of prediction, to the discovery of laws of population growth, decline, or stability in particular conditions." She adds, "The population was a biological body that could be in a state of health or pathology like any other organism" (Haraway 1989:88). Counting birds in the Iraqi marsh during the twenty-first century war did more than record avian population, the exercise established Iraqi marshland geography in avian relation to countries in Europe and Africa through migrating birds alighting in the marsh for a respite.

Lists are central to birdwatching (Lynch and Law 1999:321). Whereas counting specifies kinds of birds, lists arrange species and naturalize the order. Birding, Lynch and Law argue, is a process of creating texts by navigating through and participating in an ecological world. They assert that reading and writing are socially organized activities that have as much to do with interpreting an environment as preparing a paper in a library (Lynch and Law 1999:320). Their formulation echoes Mueggler's conceptualization of writing as bodily practice as much as intellectual exercise (Mueggler 2005) and suggests the importance of considering how physical activities like birding are embedded within practices of perception. Birding for *Nature Iraq* was an activity that focused on marsh avifauna for strategic reasons: the documentation would enable the organization to conserve the marsh.

On every expedition to the marshes, *Nature Iraq's* ornithologist photographed birds, sketched features, made notes of nesting patterns, and watched for any unexpected avian sightings. These images became part of the organization's official avian archive that was used internationally to promote their work in much the same way that typical charismatic mega fauna would have been used. Whereas *Nature Iraq* capitalized on Muhammad's artistry, for Muhammad, a self-proclaimed bird lover, this careful attention to habits and markings of plumes was an invigorating tonic, in some ways a relief from the violence of Baghdad and its own kind of refuge. For other *Nature Iraq* field scientists, birding was not so much about the love of birds as it was a smart professional choice. By working for the organization, they could substantially augment their university income and increase their professional opportunities for travel and education.

By increasing its international profile, *Nature Iraq* established its prominence among national ministries in Baghdad. Since the Ministry of Environment was a new ministry they shared a special relationship with *Nature Iraq*. One *Nature Iraq*

administrator suggested that while it was common knowledge that Azzam had great influence over Minister Othman, the Minister of Environment, he should not let it publicly show as he did on particular occasions. Beyond sharing projects and plans in common, the organizations shared a high-appointed staff member who was the second senior ranking employee at *Nature Iraq* and an advisor to the minister. Given the unprecedented international interest and funding available for the marsh project, national ministries in general looked to maintain a favorable relationship with the organization by acting upon an environmental agenda the NGO and its investors set. Minister Othman joked “we need human rights in Baghdad and bird rights in the marshes!”¹²⁹

As the organization gained notoriety through birding, ornithology became a competitive area of business. *Nature Iraq* administrative staff requested to attend a training the Canadian government sponsored in Syria for *Nature Iraq* scientists on ornithological methods. One Canadian administrator denied their request and only the organization’s scientific teams were permitted attendance. *Nature Iraq* representatives perceived this refusal as a means to establish proprietary bragging rights. This kind of infighting was an example of how valuable the birds had become. Organizations could rise and fall based on the level of their involvement in conservation initiatives in Iraq. Investors had proprietary interest in the vision of the marsh they worked to create. Despite this particular administrator’s efforts to claim ownership of his professional piece of marsh restoration, globally investors recognized *Nature Iraq* as the source of marsh authority.

Invasion

As *Nature Iraq* earned greater international visibility through their work with birds, the increased attention placed scientific staff in greater danger.

¹²⁹ Narmin Othman. February 16, 2007. Informal Comment. Sulaimaniya, Iraq.

Saturday, April 14, 2007. It was the height of the surge and the explosive chorus of bombings shook the capital to its core. Scientists at *Nature Iraq* navigated the city with purpose and precision; choosing the right streets was a matter of survival. A false step, Iraqis joked, and your family would find you the next morning, “in the trash with the rest of the garbage.”¹³⁰ Yet for Mohammad, Samir, Abbas, and other members of the *Nature Iraq* staff, the day began in its languid, mundane, typical Saturday way.¹³¹ Well before the swelter of summer, it was a pleasant 20°-Celsius when Mohammad, *Nature Iraq*’s ornithologist, made his way across town and into the office.¹³² Looking forward to checking e-mail and tending to birds he either poached from the marshes or purchased at the cherished Ghazil bird market in Baghdad, he pushed his way through a growing crowd of American forces and Iraqi police outside the *Nature Iraq* offices in the once glitzy Mansour neighborhood, the neighborhood where infamous US ally Ahmed Chalabi lived and some Embassies still maintained offices.

Mohammad was passionate about birds and visited these markets as a way of seeing and learning about species. He purchased these birds on occasion for himself and maintained them on the roof of the *Nature Iraq* office, though Mohammad’s birds had no relationship to *Nature Iraq*’s own conservation work.

Inside the converted house, cum NGO, Mohammad found his colleagues, recently back from the field, sorting through lab specimens, working over budgets, writing up reports—the humdrum business that offered some comfort of normality in its routine demands. Mohammad then headed upstairs to check on his birds. On the roof Mohammad heard commotion below, he turned and they were there: militia stormed *Nature Iraq*’s office.

¹³⁰ I heard this often from many Iraqis over the course of 2006 to 2007.

¹³¹ Friday and Saturday are the weekend days in Iraq and throughout the Middle East. Saturday in Iraq feels much like a Sunday does in the States.

¹³² Roughly equivalent to low 70° Fahrenheit.

Preoccupied with cleaning cages and feeding birds, Mohammad was startled back to reality when one of his colleagues suddenly appeared on the roof. Ashen faced, his colleague said “there are people downstairs.” Muhammad dismissed his colleague’s anxiety as unnecessary because the office had taken precautionary measures by hiring their own security in a neighborhood that was relatively safe. The operational headquarters were in Mansour where international embassies were located and authorities lived. But when Muhammad went downstairs he immediately knew something was wrong. He saw a man with a gun. “One of them shouted at me ‘what is this!’” he recounted. His colleagues were all gathering in one place. He told me:

They’re talking with us, why this is a... what is this an NGO. It’s a nasty NGO. What are you, what is it you’re doing? I told him I’m a field guy. How many days have you been here? I told him the time I arrived here and he’s asking us many things. He told us “you are not cooperating. I will take you all.” We asked him where would they take us, where? He told us, “I’ll take you to the Intelligence of the Interior Affairs Ministry.” And he’s just shouting at us and he says, “If we take you, maybe you’ll be there for a year, half a year. If you do anything we will know. Just cooperate with us.”

Muhammad remembered that they agreed to tell them anything they wanted to know. One of the officers asked about Dr. al Saghir and Dr. Mustafa, the two senior organizational leaders in Baghdad who immediately reported to Azzam. In Baghdad they were the most visible leadership of the organization. Muhammad recalled that they replied “they have traveled” because, it so happened, that neither were there. In fact, both men had recently resigned from their work with *Nature Iraq*. “Are you sure?” the men asked. Muhammad recalled: “they are shouting ‘don’t sit!’ ‘don’t go!’ ‘collect them!’” By walkie-talkie the men radioed patrols to come for *Nature Iraq* staff they gathered at the office.

Eventually, Muhammad told me, they calmed down. They began to search the office and they took the head of the organization’s security guards outside to talk with him. Muhammad finished his story:

We have a sort of shock because the situation in Baghdad is not good. If they want to take us they will take us. And our families will find our bodies in the trash. This is what

they do. This is the militia. We immediately know that this is the militia and we thank God that we have the chance to live.¹³³

Muhammad's story indicates that the visibility the organization had worked diligently to achieve was also a professional liability. During the early months in the surge, violence in Baghdad was acute. March 2007 was the last month in a one-year period (March 2006 – March 2007) that was by far the most violent (see Iraq Body Count March 18, 2007). In addition, April 2007 was the deadliest month for US forces in Iraq and a month in which Baghdad residents lived with gunfire, mortar attacks, suicide bombings, killings, and kidnappings (Raghavan May 1, 2007). The militia invasion of the Nature Iraq office must be understood in this wider context; such threats were relatively common at that time. Most scientific staff felt that the organization had been targeted because in Baghdad it was seen as a foreign entity, one among a host of international organizations newly working in the capital, and therefore part of the US occupation of Iraq.

I interviewed Abbas about the invasion subsequent to my conversation with Muhammad. Abbas, who was an office manager, provided a more intimate picture of the invasion. These strange men, they came in through the garage, he said. And when they entered the house they asked "where is your office?" Abbas took him to his office, a large room with three or four desks. Samir, he recalled, was sitting there "and I said okay, Samir, we're being searched so don't worry, don't be afraid." The men began to search the office for papers and, after finding a key in Abbas' desk, they opened desk drawers, found money, and began showing discovered materials to one in charge among them. When the militia asked about Dr. al Saghir and Dr. Mustafa, they told Abbas that they were "accused of funding corruption in Iraq." Abbas asked to see the letter from the Ministry of Internal Affairs authorizing the search. They didn't have it. Instead, they took his university ID and asked about his lecturer position there. Abbas

¹³³ Mohammad. April 27, 2007. Personal Interview. Sulaimaniya, Iraq.

recalled they said “Ok, Abbas. We are not coming for you. We are coming for Dr. al Saghir and Dr. Mustafa. But then you treated us badly. So we are going to come again.” Abbas told me that they threatened him with the terror of “killing and blood and innocent people.” On their way out they told him that anyone who funded “these people,” referring to the management of *Nature Iraq*, should be found and punished.¹³⁴

Abbas’ recollection of the invasion further clarified the motivation of the militia for invading the organization’s office. Their recounted speech indicates that the militia likely did view the organization as part of the foreign occupation of Iraq. Though the armed men identified themselves as representatives of the Ministry of Interior, this national ministry had been overtaken by Shiite militias that partnered with commando death squads in the Iraqi police and used the office as a means by which to carry out sectarian violence throughout Baghdad (Perito February 2007). Both Mohammad and Abbas knew immediately that the armed invaders were militia who were operating from within the Ministry because they had no business letter describing their motivation for the visit and while they carried guns with silencers which immediately marked them as militia, they were also able to pass through military checkpoints in the neighborhood which meant they had the official status necessary to clear these policed areas.

The militia stayed 30 minutes; there were four of them and Mohammad thinks that they were surprised to find fifteen staff members in the office. Fifteen was too many for four to execute even with the silencer, he says. After they left, a panicked office rushed to files, hastily prying hard drives out of computers, shoving personnel records into bags. They needed to get out. Scared, Abbas and others began formulating a plan of departure. He recalled, “Until this I did not realize. I was worried because this was the first time this happened to us. Although everything is dangerous in Baghdad, you are

¹³⁴ Abbas. April 27, 2007. Personal Interview. Sulaimaniya, Iraq.

going and you are coming, but nothing happens to you. Until something happens. And it happened.”¹³⁵

Adding to the terror of that day, these paramilitaries confiscated a staff list with names and addresses. Mohammad continued his story by telling me that he is “different from other people they found in the office.” Mohammad was Sunni, the *only* Sunni on staff. If the squad returned, he was convinced they would be coming for him.¹³⁶

Mohammad relied on his army training to plan the next move; he would strike out on his own. Newly released from the Republican Guard on March 1, 2003, merely 20 days before the Multinational Forces struck the capital, Mohammad was a slight man in his mid twenties with the well-toned physique and sharp mind of a soldier. Troubled and disgraced, he told me, he left the offices feeling like he was a bit of a coward and wondering if he should not have stayed in case the militants did return so that he could defend himself with honor.

Instead of going back, he wandered the streets, walking for hours, racking his brain: “Who should I call?” “What should I do?” He decided to call Azzam in Sulaimaniya. Concerned, Azzam acted swiftly, but ensuring his staff’s security would take two days. At that point, Mohammad recalled, instinct kicked in. He fell back on his army training. He went home. There he tore through his cache of photographs, which was large given that he was the *Nature Iraq* staff photographer tasked with taking photos of birds on expeditions and of staff during meetings. He destroyed pictures of him with Azzam and his family and with Elaine, the *Nature Iraq* American Administrator and a friend. He

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Much has been written about the civil war and ethnic violence that divides Sunnis, Shi’a, and Kurds. I emphasize here that while differences between Sunni and Shi’a often are played out in political terms by death squads or during elections, Sunni and Shi’a are not such starkly divided communities. For generations Sunni, Shi’a and Kurd in Baghdad married and had children (Batatu 2004). Families today are faced with tough choices of how to align themselves; concealing a mother’s Shi’a heritage may be a strategic decision for her Sunni children (Cave September 9, 2007).

gathered binoculars, CDs, and cameras and began doling them out to family members who lived nearby so as to distribute his cache of electronics. By doing so he believed he could shelter his family from harm. That way, if the militia looked for him at home, he said, “I would lose my life only.”¹³⁷

Before going underground, Mohammad took one final measure to secure his family’s safety. He saved a single copy of his photos on a flash drive. He took the drive out to his yard, climbed a tree, and hid it. In a bird’s nest.

Nature Iraq and Birding

The invasion of the *Nature Iraq* Baghdad office by armed militia out for vigilante justice under the guise of the Ministry of Interior Affairs is a moment where the violent reality of life during the surge reverberated in shockwaves throughout the organization. Fear and intimidation were constant in the lives of Iraqis working at *Nature Iraq*, but the organization had not been directly threatened like this before. Despite the invasion, the administration of *Nature Iraq* ran smoothly. Azzam found ways of working around the war, moving the office administration to Amman for some time and then to Sulaimaniya when that became possible.¹³⁸ The raid on the capital office didn’t slow operations down. After settling Mohammad, Abbas, and other members of the former Baghdad staff in Sulaimaniya, *Nature Iraq* championed marsh restoration and rallied greater international support, increasing their global profile through their commitment to biodiversity. Birds continued to be a central resource for their success.

It was a year after the Iraqi Parliament passed a bill that would permit the country to split into three autonomous regions, and *Nature Iraq* did not waste time in putting

¹³⁷ Mohammad. April 27, 2007. Personal Interview. Sulaimaniya, Iraq.

¹³⁸ In previous chapters I discuss how it became too dangerous for Azzam to work in Baghdad after he acted as Interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi’s campaign manager in his unsuccessful January 2005 race to keep his post.

forward their plans for marsh conservation (see Semple October 12, 2006). If Azzam and others were anxious about a possible Iraqi south secession, they didn't often show it. One would only catch glimmers of regret every now and then, late at night after rounds of scotch or vodka. Instead, Azzam and others at *Nature Iraq* were focused on convincing the Iraqi Ministry of Water Resources, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Ministry of Environment to apply for membership in the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. To do that they needed hard evidence from the marshes.

Soil and water samples, which the organization collected in the first year of its existence, substantiated the extent to which the marshes were coming back, but it was the presence of birds in the heart of these wetlands that attracted international resources and re-connected the organization to a global governmental infrastructure through environment. Numbers and kinds of birds helped establish the marshes as a stop on international flyways, a hub on migratory routes. Counting birds was important, but discovering a rare or endangered species was even better. If *Nature Iraq* could establish themselves as a viable authority on the status of birds in Iraq, they could forge strategic alliances with NGOs like BirdLife International, which held sway in the global conservation movement, or with supranational bodies like UNESCO or IUCN (The World Conservation Union). The common logic was, once one door opened, others would follow. Through their work on biodiversity, *Nature Iraq* unwittingly followed a mandate for business outlined by the United Nations: it slowly began to integrate Iraqi governance with global mechanisms of policy and economy.

With sponsorship from the Canadian government, *Nature Iraq* began birding campaigns a few years after they opened their doors in Baghdad in 2003. Azzam hired veteran Professor of Biology Hussein al Saghir to be his Chief Scientist and Project

Manager on the Canadian-funded projects in the marshes.¹³⁹ Hussein began by hiring numerous young scientists who had been or still were students from Baghdad University. Some were government employees who wanted to leave their jobs to work for *Nature Iraq*; others augmented their income from lectureships or government positions with an additional salary. The initial field team included about 20 staff members, largely all men plus a few women, and Azzam paid them about \$15 to \$20 USD a day. The typical salary for an entry level position elsewhere paid about \$100 to \$120 USD per month, so Azzam paid enough to provide incentive for his team to work for him. Early trips to the marshes focused on collecting soil and water samples and charting patterns of marsh hydrology. This was intensive work that required a relatively large staff of field scientists for a small organization and necessitated routine visits to the marshes.

In July 2003, even before he made the move to Baghdad, Azzam met Dennis Heatherington, a senior employee at Environment Canada, a CIDA partner organization. Dennis had connections to BirdLife International, Ramsar, and other key organizations in environmental conservation and he was eager to help Azzam. They kept in touch and about a year later, Dennis approached Azzam with seed money to start another project. It wouldn't be like *Nature Iraq's* first year when they concentrated on measuring hydrologic values of the marshes; CIDA was interested in doing a project that assessed biodiversity. A veteran of environmental conservation, Dennis knew that if *Nature Iraq* pursued projects documenting the region's biodiversity they would be able to access funds beyond the temporary reconstruction money and build the organization as a viable and lasting international institution. Azzam was immediately interested and knew that he had the infrastructure in place, based on a year of fieldtrips to the marshes, to launch another marsh initiative. In June 2004, CIDA granted Dennis and his colleague Albert

¹³⁹ CIDA is Canada's equivalent to US AID.

Larabee, who worked for a Canadian University and had separately approached CIDA with an idea about a project in the Iraq marshes, seed money to bring 45 Iraqi professors to Amman to develop a marsh project they would consider funding. Before the meeting, Azzam and Dennis met in Amman to plan the event. Dennis suggested they visit the BirdLife offices in the city and during their visit Rashid, a senior BirdLife employee in Amman, told them about Salim, a bird enthusiast in Iraq who had his own ornithological company. So Azzam invited Salim to the June meeting. Salim's passion for birds was absolutely contagious and inspired Dennis to act quickly to put a project together that would make him a key player: he proposed to document Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in Iraq as a means by which to assess the biodiversity of the marsh ecosystem. It was a project of vision on many fronts: *Nature Iraq* scouted birds as a way to increase organizational visibility and call attention to Iraq as a "biodiverse" area. The movement was as much about reintegrating Iraq into a global infrastructure through environmentalism as it was about finding birds. Birds charted the pathway toward international prominence among the UN and global conservation organizations, organizations that had their own ennobled status within the field of humanitarianism.

Fieldwork

Nature Iraq pursued birds according to a program outlined by BirdLife International and used commonly by ornithological experts of repute: they charted Important Bird Areas. Important Bird Areas indicated that a site might be a candidate for further distinction as a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA). Criteria for determining if an area qualifies as a KBA are two-fold: 1) if an area is *vulnerable*, that is if there is regular occurrence of a globally threatened species (according to the IUCN Red List) at the site or 2) if species at the site are *irreplaceable*, that is if the site holds a certain percentage of a species' global population at any stage of the species' lifecycle (International Union

for Conservation of Nature 2007:32). There is obvious slippage between IBAs and KBAs; if an area qualifies as an IBA, it typically also registers as a KBA. However, Key Biodiversity Areas signal the need to conserve an area not just because of the significance of its bird population, but also because of its ecological value. In the Iraq marshes and other places, IBAs, which could easily be established by birding, were used to make a case for conservation of the whole environment.

Therefore *Nature Iraq's* IBA project soon became its KBA initiative—its argument for conservation of the marshes given its remarkable biodiversity which scientists measured and quantified by documenting marsh avifauna. Their work officially started in October 2004 when CIDA contracted *Nature Iraq* to become the local partner for their KBA project that would be directed by Dennis and Albert but run through the Canadian University that employed Albert. The initial grant was for two years, from 2005 to 2007, and the budget for the project was \$3.5 million dollars Canadian, with \$600,000 per annum going to *Nature Iraq*, and the rest being managed by the University acting as the Canadian government affiliate. Wetlands are a natural habitat for birds, and the KBA fieldwork would focus initially on southern Iraq and the marshes. By November 2004, groups of *Nature Iraq* scientists were in Damascus learning bird survey techniques from Richard Porter, Middle East Advisor for BirdLife International and author of the acclaimed *Field Guide to Birds of the Middle East* (2004). As foreign experts taught Iraqis “proper” technique, they taught Iraqi scientists the principles of ornithology developed according to foreign expertise.

Nature Iraq used Porter's book to design the first KBA survey for southern Iraq; with this reference guide they identified 33 sites in the south from his list of IBAs and made plans to visit. Not all sites were viable, Azzam recalled; some had dried and did not return after the 2003 reflooding. Iraqi scientists, most of whom had never been to the marshes, learned southern geography through visits to these *important bird areas*; that

is, they learned to navigate the marshes by looking for avian communities. When I asked Azzam, “Who is Richard Porter?” He simply replied, “A godsend.” Porter organized the training for *Nature Iraq*’s first team of scientists in November 2004 and after that time has reviewed the team’s fieldnotes and continued to advise them on their work. Suzie Alwash described Porter as “*the* bird expert for the Middle East.” Much as before, when *Nature Iraq* expanded their KBA work to Kurdistan, Porter led another training course in Syria in the fall of 2006 for the eight Kurdish scientists who established their own ornithological research in northern Iraq in January 2007.

Nature Iraq relied on foreign experts to *impart* knowledge about birds to Iraqi scientists the organization sent into the marshes. They did not seek out local communities for their knowledge about birds or conservation. The organization often talked about their role in the marshes as educational: they would teach local residents how to become custodians of nature. The logic was a clear indication that *Nature Iraq* and marsh conservationists promoted a restoration program through which the marshes would be governed by foreign expertise. In light of these developments, their work could be seen as a project of reclaiming territory for international, as opposed to local, benefit.

Kidnapping

When boats suddenly appeared in the marshes with expensive, fancy equipment, marsh residents saw them as a resource for poaching. The injection of foreign capital into the marsh in ways that was not congruent with local priorities and did not have immediate benefit for these communities, was not uncontested in the marshes.

Kidnapping became a lucrative business.

In January 2005, the first *Nature Iraq* KBA survey team set out in the southern marshes. Salim and his company, which later Azzam learned were actually his brother and his cousin, worked with *Nature Iraq* to assemble a team that included two women

from the Ministry of Environment, Ali (*Nature Iraq*'s fish specialist), and two other *Nature Iraq* scientists, making a team of eight. It was a precarious time, violence began to escalate, and only months earlier, in November 2004, the US began its siege on Fallujah. From August 2003 Iraqi militia had been targeting aid workers and humanitarians who they saw as collaborators with the US led war, starting in August 2003 with the bombing of the UN compound that killed Sergio Vieira de Mello and continuing through November 2004 with the murder of CARE's Margaret Hassan. Going into the marshes in early 2005 as a team of outsiders for the purpose of scientific research was a risk Iraqi scientists decided to take to promote a vision they too invested in.

The thick reeds that towered above which made the marsh a good place to hide, also made it a good place to get lost or confused. People familiar with the area easily identified strange interlopers, and marsh scientists were vulnerable to attack when they were out birding because they worked in areas of open water making it difficult to flee. Optimal birding times, at dawn or just before sunset, meant that scientists worked in partial darkness. None of these conditions was ideal and, recognizing the potential peril for his staff, Azzam gave Salim money and told him to hire guards. Misjudging the situation, Salim did not pay for security and pocketed the extra cash. The first birding field team was kidnapped in the marshes.

The men who took them immediately released the two women, but they kept the rest of the team for ransom. Back in Baghdad, Azzam negotiated the payment and terms of release. In California, Suzie Alwash woke to a call from *National Geographic*; they had a lead on the story that they wanted to confirm because they had been planning their own marsh trip with *Nature Iraq*. Suzie scrambled to squash media attention fearing that Azzam would be swapped for the scientists in order to command a higher ransom. Though the organization facilitated media access to their work under normal

circumstances, this was an event they did not want to expose and Suzie successfully worked to suppress it from breaking. Part of the organization's success was managing its visibility, both at the level of project administration and at the level of field scientists. It was a delicate balance; if they miscalculated in the marsh or in the mainstream media, it could backfire. Fortunately, a few days after they were taken, Azzam secured his team's release by paying off the kidnappers. In the spring, *Nature Iraq* staff returned to do another KBA tour in the marshes. Azzam found it regrettable the women did not return, saying, "That was their loss, really."

Competing Visions

The language marsh advocates used to describe the wetlands contrasted with the language scientists or marsh residents used to narrate their own experiences there. At a conference Canada arranged in Amman in September 2006 at the posh Kempinski hotel, I interviewed Dennis. He told me that the marshes were potentially a unifying symbol for the country. "All Iraqis could understand that they were a symbol of reconstruction, of freedom," he said. Dennis believed that the Key Bird Area project showed that the wetlands were a national resource. The marshes, he said with flourish, were a magical place where people floated around on boats. Dennis added: "*good policy is built on good science.*" If *Nature Iraq* scientists were diligent about accuracy in the field, he implied, the policy-making world would naturally follow. As previously stated, part of Azzam's intention by sending teams of scientists to the marshes to photograph birds and monitor marsh fauna was to amass the raw data he needed to convince a global audience that the marshes were a worthy investment. In a radio interview about the marshes, Azzam declared, "This place does not only belong to Iraqis, it belongs to the world!" (BBC Radio 4 September 7, 2007). By sending teams of scientists to the marshes, Azzam sought to connect Iraq to a broader cosmopolitan world. Iraqis could

access this global forum in Iraq through few channels; the marshes were one such place. The interest of governments like Canada, international NGOs like BirdLife International, and supranational organizations like the United Nations concentrated in the marshes to launch new movements for conservation even at the most turbulent periods of war.

Though several Iraqi exiles did see the marshes as a symbol of reconstruction and Iraq's "liberation," those recently displaced from the marsh told a different story. Interviews I conducted in Jordan with people originally from the marsh area who fled Iraq after 2003 and resettled in Amman indicate that they were not so moved by the restoration of the marshes. They were more concerned that their families still in Iraq were okay and that they could find a way to get their children registered in Jordanian schools than they were invested in the marsh as a national symbol.

In Iraq where marsh advocates identified birds, some marsh residents saw monsters. In July 2007 conspiracy theories of the British army loosing savage badgers on communities in the marshes spread rapidly throughout Iraq and Iraqi refugee communities in Amman. Photos circulated on cell phones. There was some truth to the story since badgers had been native to the marshes, and as the wetlands returned so did the animals (Farrell July 31, 2007; Jamil July 12, 2007). Stories about British troops purposefully planting snake eggs in the mouths of the riverways and freeing rabid dogs accompanied the badger legend, but it was the outbreak of furry-clawed creatures that most heavily circulated through the rumor mill. Anxieties over marsh monsters, whether manufactured or embellishments of reality, were ways in which Iraqis expressed their growing discontentment with British troops in the area. For marsh advocates the birds were meant to signify Iraq's dawning age of freedom, but the rabid badgers clearly indicated that southern Iraqi residents did not feel this sense of freedom. Rather, stories

about the monsters indicate that residents felt as though the conditions of their lives were subject to an occupying power that they feared would do them in.

At *Nature Iraq* during moments of candor, field scientists also contradicted the poetry of the marsh narrative Dennis told in 2006. In spring 2006 during the Geneva training Zaid told me frankly that he thought the marshes were a terrible place. Others, like Ali, were less negative and said instead that it was not easy to work in the marshes; one had to be tough. Scientists told me that they chose to work for *Nature Iraq* for different reasons: some, like Mohammad followed their passion, and others were more strategic.

Field Guys

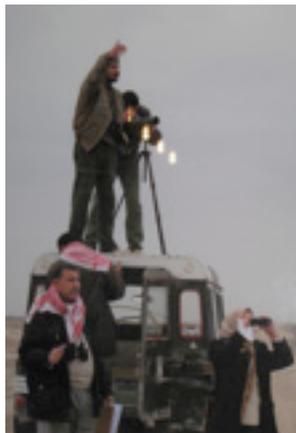


Figure 41: *Nature Iraq* bird team 2005



Figure 42: *Nature Iraq* hydrologic team 2006

After the invasion, it was not easy to go back to the office again, Abbas said. But one of the young women on the field team returned to process some lab work, he remembered, and “it shamed the rest of us into going back too.” If a woman in her early twenties could handle the risk, Abbas and others felt they needed to step up. In this way, *Nature Iraq* scientists pushed themselves to take on greater risk in order to keep working. Their dedication wasn’t about money: Azzam paid their salaries and asked them to work from home instead of coming into the office. Going into the office also

provided some semblance of normalcy in the midst of war. Working on a project to bolster life at a time when their lives were personally threatened provided a sense of accomplishment and immediate importance for some. Scientists told me that they worked for the organization because the work was challenging, enabled them to do work they loved in their field of study, afforded new relationships with foreigners, and provided opportunities for international travel. Working for *Nature Iraq* carried a certain amount of prestige and the promise of a better future; as scientists worked for organizational success, they also built their own professional status. For some, that was a way out of Iraq.

Ali started working for *Nature Iraq* in 2005. In his early 30s, he trained in the College of Biology at the University of Basra and worked mostly as a marine biologist save for a couple years in the early 2000s when he lived in Baghdad and worked as a tailor in order to support his wife and three young children. He returned to Basra in the fall of 2006 to continue his work with *Nature Iraq*, to do some work with the Iraqi Ministry of Environment, and to finish writing his PhD dissertation at the University of Basra on fish in the Iraqi marshes. Ali was part of the KBA team and a member of the first expedition. I met him in December 2006 at a training course on marsh conservation run by Jordan's Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN) in the Azraq oasis. I couldn't understand what motivated Ali to continue work on marsh restoration when there was so much immediate violence in Iraq. Here's a sample from our interview:

B: What's your opinion on restoring the marshes as an idea?

A: You know, the marshes of Iraq is locally important because it is important for birds, for fishes. I mean, original fishes, original birds. Because some fishes from the marshes...use the marshes as a space for reproduction. At the same time marshes of Iraq is traditional living way from 5,000 years...I will say that it's a global duty, not just our duty.

B: Why?

A: Because it's important for the world. For the ecosystem itself. You know birds are important, birds, fishes, and another species. It's important for all the world.

B: But those birds and fish, they lived when the marshes were dried.

A: Yes.

B: So why does it matter?

A: Some groups of fish were affected by the drying of marshes. Some birds were affected in a bad way; migration was affected in a bad way. And it negatively affected species of birds: like bats, flamingos, pelicans.

This seemed to echo exactly what Azzam, Italian contractors, and people at CIDA would say to justify marsh restoration in the midst of war. I wasn't sure if Ali really believed what he was saying. Incredulous, I asked, was it about the money? Ali replied that it was in part, but he also said:

Even when I was kidnapped I still worked there. One reason is sentimental. But also I could become famous – I'm young and the work on the marshes is universal so when I work on this sector I'll be famous... There are unique opportunities to work on the marshes because of the donors who are connected to the project, even in the Ministry. When I work on the marshes I have a good position in the Ministry and my work is important.¹⁴⁰

For Ali, his work in the marshes gave him something he could believe in. It was work he could be proud of and which was far more challenging and exciting, he told me, than work he could get at Iraqi universities. His comments indicated that working with the NGO was a choice, one that could translate into the promise of a better future. After our interview Ali turned to me and said, "You exposed me." His statement revealed that talk about the majesty of the marshes and the romance of birds was partially strategic; it promoted restoration globally.

Abbas, an office manager in Baghdad, was forthcoming and explicit about his motivation for working with *Nature Iraq*.¹⁴¹ When I interviewed him in the spring of 2007

¹⁴⁰ Ali. December 5, 2006. Personal Interview. Azraq, Jordan.

¹⁴¹ Dr. al Saghir drew a sharp line between field guys and office guys. Since almost all Iraqis who worked for *Nature Iraq* were scientists, this created problems. Field guys would go to the marshes to collect samples; office guys would analyze the results and write reports in Baghdad. There was a difference in pay grade between these two categories in which office staff earned a bit more than field staff. When Azzam reclaimed direct control of the organizational leadership in early 2007, Dr. al Saghir made plans to leave the organization and when he did in April 2007 Azzam

and asked why he wanted to work for *Nature Iraq*, Abbas replied, “The first thing is to have a chance to get better. To have a better career. And second is the income. To have an additional income. These are the major reasons for me.” Abbas, who earned an M.Sc. in Cell Biology at the University of Baghdad’s College of Education in 2001 and worked there as a lecturer, said he heard the organization was good in science and that *Nature Iraq* scientists had the ability to conduct research without problems. For him, it was a chance to improve his skills. Abbas could double his salary by working at *Nature Iraq* and the University.¹⁴² Given his skill in English and in managing projects, Dr. al Saghir promoted Abbas and increased his responsibilities to work directly with Iraqi national Ministries to coordinate efforts in the marshes. Abbas worked with the Ministries to remind them of their own responsibilities concerning the passage of national environmental legislation, a prerequisite for the adjudication of international treaties that had the potential to earn the NGO international acclaim and the prestigious grants that had the ability to catapult them into an even more elite arena of global policy. Abbas was excited to have such challenging work and to be involved in projects close to his field of academic specialization, though he did hope for a more direct role in *Nature Iraq*’s scientific research. For Abbas, the KBA project provided opportunities to accelerate his own professional career beyond what he could have expected as a lecturer at the University. It introduced him to a world of international travel and gave him a role in the formulation of national environmental policy, policy with connections to the global conservation movement of supranational organizations. It made him an international figure within a globally reputable organization.

began making plans to restructure personnel so that scientists would go to the field and write their own reports.

¹⁴² His University salary amounted to 460,000 Iraqi dinars per month whereas his beginning salary at *Nature Iraq* was 650,000 Iraqi dinars (which at the time of research was approximately \$500 USD).

The Birds

During the winter months these marshes are alive with wildfowl. I've seen ducks alighting on the rice field at sunset in numbers, which reminded me of swarms of locusts. I'd spellbound while seemingly endless schemes of geese passed overhead and the cold air ran without calling. There were ducks and coots and geese in immense numbers. Most every sort of bird: herons and cormorants, pelicans, ibis, spoonbills, eversets, even flamingos. And there are eagles, offsprays, and falcons.

-Wilfred Thesiger, early 1950s

I'm glad to report to you, by the way that as we speak that area is now back to the lush forest of reed beds 'til as far as the eye can see. We have now about 65% of the marshes flooded about 50% of the original marshes I would consider in a state of robust recovery. There has been an explosion of, of birds, especially from certain species. The Basra reed warbler is another certain species that we are observing in larger and larger numbers, that is actually a species that is specific to the marshes. [bird sounds] Just recently we got contacted by the BBC to see if we have bird sounds. So we sent Omar down to the marshes with his staff not only to take pictures of birds but also to take the time to record the birds. Obviously the work in the marshes is rather difficult. Our teams that are about 10 to 12 people go out with about 12 to 15 guards to try to, you know, protect them against kidnapping. It's not easy working in southern Iraq.

-Azzam Alwash, September 2007
(BBC Radio 4 September 7, 2007).



Figure 43: Sacred ibis¹⁴³



Figure 44: Basra reed warbler¹⁴⁴

Having established *Nature Iraq's* work on birds in the marshes was a strategy that enabled the organization to connect with global environmental organizations, I turn now to consider the place of birds themselves within the organization. Both Mohammad, now the chief *Nature Iraq* bird expert, and Salim, the first ornithologist before him, had tremendous passion for birds of all kinds. Mohammad describes his love of birds as one that stems back to childhood:

¹⁴³ *Threskiornis aethiopicus*. Photo courtesy of Nature Iraq/CIMI/[BirdLife](#)

¹⁴⁴ *Acrocephalus griseldis*. Photo courtesy: [www.hawar-islands.com/.../kuwait/Bas-Warbler.jpg](#).

But we have this, this hobby of loving birds. My, my grandfather is a simple man...But he feels that, he tells me that the house with birds, with the animals is always alive, people will always feel life in it because you will sit to have a tea and you'll listen to the birds and you'll see the horses walking and [makes a neighing noise] it's a very good feeling. Yes, this is...

And I decided to love birds, just love birds, that is my best thing. When I was young, I felt that I have these birds as my parents or my friends...I have this encyclopedia about them. I paint them. Sometimes I have no money to buy a bird's book. I save my money and go to buy the bird's book. The bird's book I have is huge and it's a treasure to me. Because I just love the birds...and then I went to the... every single Friday we have a flea market, as you know a flea market with birds, *every single day, every single Friday* I go.

Mohammad's birds and his love for birding cannot be separated from his nostalgia for childhood, for a time when his grandfather's animal fables introduced him to another world beyond Baghdad, a highly aesthetic naturalized world that countered the direct bombardment of Saddam Hussein's image saturating media and public space. Today Mohammad's passion for birds helped mobilize Iraqi exile dreams of a restored marsh and a secular state. His tender care for Basra reed warblers, sacred ibis, African darters, eagles, and falcons; his artistic eye for framing photographs; and his enthusiasm for leading KBA expeditions to the marshes despite the risks was necessary, vital, absolutely critical for Azzam, Dennis, and others in the global humanitarian network who needed to make other people care about the Iraq marshes as they did.

An organizational asset, Muhammad's passion for birds showed in his beautiful and sentimental photographs of avian life. Through his work, Muhammad primed the image of the marsh that became best known post-2003. While many people in the US and Europe did not feel enthusiastic about Iraq as a place, or about Arabs in general, it was easier to generate affection for animals in a threatened habitat. The birds may not have been charismatic mega fauna in a traditional sense, but they were delicate creatures that stood in for the marsh and assisted in creating the idea of the place as a sublime paradise.

In August 2005, a group of almost twenty Iraqi scientists traveled to Montreal, Canada to present their preliminary findings from fieldwork in the marshes to the

INTECOL conference.¹⁴⁵ On Tuesday evening, August 9th *Nature Iraq* scientists made their debut to a community of their peers. Concerned with drawing an audience, Dennis suggested that the panel start with a slideshow of birds from their KBA work.¹⁴⁶ The birds, Dennis said, would provide a nice way for audience members to connect with the presentation. He was right, during this presentation and in their work after for *Nature Iraq* the birds were an effective way to generate interest in the marsh and, by extension, the organization.

The Field of the Marshes



Figure 45: Mohammad, Gianni, and a captured bird in Sulaimaniya, February 2007

Nature Iraq's prestige grew internationally after publishing their *Field Guide* in 2007. Birds became a way to draw people who could not go to the marshes into the wetlands. In the above photo Mohammad stands on the right, with a bird he captured in the field in Kurdistan alighting on the arm of Gianni, one of the Italian contractors. Due to the violence of the south, Gianni did not visit the marshes. Mohammad attempted to

¹⁴⁵ The International Association for Ecology holds a major international conference for Ecologists every few years. A subgroup of INTECOL is the International Association on Wetland Ecology, another important organization for *Nature Iraq*.

¹⁴⁶ At that point only one full survey had been completed because the January 2005 expedition was cut short. Since then, two surveys a year, in summer and winter, have been conducted in the marshes and *Nature Iraq* expanded KBA research to Kurdistan in northern Iraq beginning in January 2007.

introduce him and others to the transformative power of naturalized places in Iraq through birds.

At the same time that Azzam and other marsh advocates found a resource in birds for promoting organizational visibility, they remained concerned about the dangers this visibility produced for Iraqi scientists at the heart of organizational operations. In 2007 Azzam addressed these concerns by relocating the NGO's headquarters to Kurdistan. He prodded Muhammad to work on his English, for Azzam hoped to send him to school in London for further training in ornithology even if it meant he personally paid a chunk of his tuition. Getting Muhammad out of Iraq would both ensure his personal safety, but it would also benefit the organization. *Nature Iraq* would have their own bird expert who was endowed with British training but who was native to Iraq. As contentious as the project was in Baghdad and the marsh, *Nature Iraq* cultivated international acclaim for their work through their ornithological campaigns. In this way, they introduced foreign expertise, policy, and monies into Iraq in ways that integrated Iraq and Iraqis within an infrastructure of foreign economy and political power. The vision of the marsh their work produced is an aesthetic signature of this powerful transformation.

By early 2007, based on their success with early birding expeditions in the south, *Nature Iraq* expanded their research on Key Biodiversity Areas to northern Iraqi Kurdistan. To qualify for funding from the most prestigious international organizations *Nature Iraq* had to prove that their work was not just regionally focused, but also nationally grounded. They sought to expand their mandate by launching more KBA research teams in the north. On October 17, 2007 Hawizeh Marsh became a wetland protected by the Ramsar Convention. A little less than a year later, on September 5, 2008 in Nairobi, Kenya, UNEP announced a plan to make the Iraq marshes a UNESCO World Heritage Site by 2010.

Chapter Five: The National Park



Figure 46: Italian PowerPoint slide of Chibayish in national park, February 2007

Conservation

This chapter focuses on the efforts of *Nature Iraq* and their Italian partners to create a national park in the marshes. *Nature Iraq* ornithological projects were one element of this larger initiative to fashion in the marshes a national park. Since birds established the marshes as a place of biodiversity they enabled marsh advocates to make the case for conservation internationally. The NGO and their investors identified conservation as a tool that would enable them to secure the future of the marshes in 2027 during the precarious present of 2007. Marsh advocates pursued conservation by

adjudicating international treaties, like the Ramsar Convention on wetlands and the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, as a means by which to globally protect the wetlands even in the midst of an uncertain national future for the southern Iraqi region. I argue that in conserving marsh ecology as a national park, marsh advocates helped actualize the reconstruction mandate of liberalizing the Iraqi economy.¹⁴⁷ Anthropologists have recently argued that international projects to protect “nature” are in and of themselves key forms of governance and globalization (see Hayden 2003:83; West, et al. 2006:265).

I assert that the marshes were a fantasy place of towering 15-foot reeds, swimming serpents, and endemic birds that tapped into language investors and politicians used to talk about Iraq and the future they wished to build there. Environmentalism was an altruistic project that enabled investors to rationalize foreign intervention as a “feel good story.” Building the national park immediately connected project investors, primarily the governments of Italy and Canada, with the Iraqi scientists, ministries, and local municipalities they needed to make the fantasy of the park a reality. This chapter demonstrates how environment in Iraq was closely related to reforms in Iraqi governance that international institutions, like the World Bank, the UN, and foreign governments, attempted to implement post-2003.

Much like the remote sensing trainings, meetings to plan the park between Italian contractors, *Nature Iraq*, and Iraqi ministries were instructive; they were meant to teach Iraqi ministries how to participate in environmental business at a global level by guiding

¹⁴⁷ UN Security Council Resolutions that sanctioned the operations of multinational forces in Iraq and governed the presence of UN organizations in Iraq at the same time outlined an international mandate to more fully integrate Iraq into international instruments of economy and policy. UN Security Council Resolution 1723, for example, formally recognizes the International Compact with Iraq, the Iraqi Government’s partnership “with the international community...to build a strong framework for Iraq’s continued political, security and economic transformation and integration into the regional and global economy, and *welcoming* the important role that the United Nations is playing by jointly chairing the Compact with the Government of Iraq” at the same time that it extends authorization for the Multinational Forces-Iraq and humanitarian organizations to operate in Iraq.

Iraqi political leadership through the process of adjudicating international treaties, by partnering Iraqi scientists and political leaders with foreign experts, and by flying these Iraqi project participants all over the globe to plan the national park. The park might have been identified as “national,” *for* the Iraqi nation, but its planning indicated that the initiative was largely global. The global architecture and realization of the national park was further highlighted by the fact that in the marsh, the project registered no major physical results. In fact, Shaikhs who attended international conferences on marsh restoration spoke publicly about the frustration marsh communities felt about the great amount of money allocated to the project with little noticeable benefits for the quality of life. In short the most powerful effect of national park planning was not the implementation of the park in the marsh, but the creation of a new economy.

As discussed previously, the vision for the national park was based on the fantasy of the marshes postcolonial travelers, like Thesiger and Young, provided for the marsh and the childhood memories of Iraqi exiles that elaborated the marsh as a tactile wonderland. Miyazaki writes that hope animates capitalism, examining how neoliberal ideas become sources of hope (Miyazaki 2006:151). Through marsh restoration the neoliberal ideals of opening up the Iraqi economy to foreign investment and expertise were realized. Mitchell argues, “The discourse of international development constitutes itself in this way as an expertise and intelligence that stands completely apart from the country and the people it describes” (Mitchell 2002:210). Mitchell asserts that development agencies did achieve results in the area of creating a monopoly of expertise (Mitchell 2002:211). Pursuing marsh restoration did exactly that; it created a demand for expertise and it simultaneously denied Iraqi capability of producing such knowledge.

Fantasy calls temporality into question by re-examining formulations of the future and the present (see Miyazaki 2006; Ramaswamy 2004). Marsh restoration is a future

oriented project that displaces present violence in Iraq in the formulation of the national park. At the same time, marsh advocates do recognize the effects of war on their Iraqi colleagues. Mol writes about the simultaneous existence of a multiplicity of realities that are politically enacted (Mol 2002). Iraqi death, kidnapping, and loss during the years of “post-conflict” reconstruction were ruptures in the dream of the national park. These ruptures were moments when the reality of violence on the ground in Iraq broke through into the community of international investors involved in the project. The personal dimension of these losses was what carried them forward into the public meetings on national park planning. Though personal loss was acknowledged, however, it did not redirect the fantasy of a national park blanketing the entire wetland system of southern Iraq.

This chapter proceeds in three parts. First, I outline the specific parameters of the national park and the planning methods used in its pursuit. Second, I analyze pedagogical aspects of building the national park, in which Italian engineering contractors and *Nature Iraq* taught Iraqi scientists and ministerial employees to fantasize as a planning strategy. Specifically, I focus on a presentation contractors made to *Nature Iraq* and Iraqi ministries in Sulaimaniya during which time Iraqis were asked to conjure a vision of the park in twenty years. I consider how the pedagogy of planning was related to the creation of new subjectivities and a new cosmopolitan citizenship in Iraq. These changes in citizenship and subjectivity were intended to bring Iraqis into a contemporary field of global politics by imparting lessons about participation in government and global policy aligned with the neoliberal mandate of opening the Iraqi economy. Third, I consider the effects of fantasy in the lives of Iraqis who were called upon to dream in line with international environmentalists. Here I analyze the relationship of environment and war as two entangled political agendas that, as they had elsewhere and at other times, acted in concert in Iraq.

An Ecological Network

In February 2007 *Nature Iraq* and its Italian colleagues convened meetings in Iraq to plan the construction of a national park in Iraq's marshes. It was the first time in the history of the organization that meetings involving teams of foreign experts would take place on Iraqi soil. Though there had been organizational meetings in Iraq before, they were convened by *Nature Iraq* for their Iraqi scientific staff or for colleagues at Iraqi universities in Baghdad or southern Iraq. With the April 2007 opening of organizational headquarters in Sulaimaniya, Iraq, marsh advocates now enjoyed the unique opportunity to work from within the country while still maintaining a safe distance from Baghdad.

Azzam had managed to score working rights in Kurdistan, something other NGOs working in Iraq could not easily do, by taking on responsibilities for overseeing a new project. He would shepherd the creation of the American University in Iraq, Sulaimaniya campus (AUI-S) that a familiar network of American and British based Iraqi exiles, some now in positions of Iraqi government, wanted to institute in Kurdistan (Wong 2007). This group, including Kanan Makiya and Fouad Ajami, once sought to actualize their visions of Iraq's vibrant future in the nation's capital post-2003. As their dreams collected dust in DC offices in the form of architectural draft plans for museums that could not now be built, this group looked to Kurdistan where the autonomous government favored international investments and where exiles hoped their vision for Iraq could be implemented. The first step toward gaining a foothold in Kurdistan lay in constructing the American University. Since he had demonstrated his ability to run a multimillion dollar organization in Iraq, the partnership of Iraqis and exiles building the school looked to Azzam first to break ground on university construction and second to hire the school's chancellor who would eventually replace him as the project executive.

Azzam seized the moment, using his work with the school and the powerful lobby of Iraqi politicians, including Barham Salih (then the Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq) and Jalal Talabani (the President of Iraq), associated with the project to carve out a space for *Nature Iraq* to re-locate north. The move enabled Azzam, who had been absent from day-to-day operations since violence forced his re-location to Amman in 2006, to regain control over the nonprofit's daily business. It was a critical time for *Nature Iraq* because within the first few months of 2007, the organization's two senior executives, Dr. Mustafa and Dr. Hussein al Saghir, both resigned their posts with the nonprofit. The senior staff turnover had just begun as the first meeting was convened in February, as Dr. Mustafa had already pulled away from the organization, and continued into the spring when Dr. al Saghir made his exit. Azzam was invigorated by the prospect of once again becoming more involved in *Nature Iraq*, relishing drinks with staff well into the evenings on the porches of their Sulaimaniya home and office. He sometimes expressed the stress that came with his position when he spoke about deciding who among the staff he would re-locate from Baghdad, where every day violence soared, to Sulaimaniya, a comparative safe zone. He repeatedly said, "I do not want to play God" and openly spoke about not wanting to lose any of his current staff, but at the same time realizing that not everyone would want to leave their appointments at the Universities, their primary professional affiliation, to work exclusively in Kurdistan away from their families in Baghdad.¹⁴⁸

When Azzam relocated *Nature Iraq* headquarters to Kurdistan, he turned to international advisors with expertise in ecological rehabilitation to help him clarify the mission and the work of the organization. Whereas the NGO previously focused its efforts on sampling water and marsh biota and then analyzing these materials in the Baghdad lab, in this phase the organization would concentrate on developing a more

¹⁴⁸ The re-location was contentious among *Nature Iraq* scientific staff, and Azzam held a meeting April 25th and 26th, 2007 in order to discuss the organizational restructuring and determine how to maintain staff on payroll who could not make the move north.

holistic picture of the entire marsh ecosystem, expanding beyond individual pinpoints within one marsh lake to formulate a wider picture of the three interconnected wetlands and thus the entire marshland regional habitat.

In consultation with his Italian colleagues and other experts hired to advise him, Azzam re-organized *Nature Iraq* to meet the challenges of this comprehensive analysis. Teams would still collect data on birds, other biota, and water quality within the marsh, but they would focus their efforts on the big picture, on creating a portrait of what the mass of data revealed about the marsh ecosystem. The change was a move toward greater organization and clarity of purpose. To assist, Azzam brought Dennis Heatherington, who prompted the re-focusing and who had years of senior level experience working in the international field of ecological policy, back into the organization as an advisor. Dennis had initially been part of the Canada team, but his partner ousted him from program leadership in what was widely recognized within the marsh advocate community as a bold territorial move. In addition to advising Azzam, Dennis would train *Nature Iraq* scientists to move from sampling water and soil, and from documenting birds and marsh mammals, toward classifying marshland *habitats* over broader wetland regions. The new focus on the differing ecosystems within the Iraqi wetlands would provide a more comprehensive picture of the marshes to global stakeholders, like the United Nations and other international NGOs like the *International Union for the Conservation of Nature*, and would assist marsh advocate efforts in gaining public recognition by way of treaty and convention for the wetlands. This shift in *Nature Iraq* business proceeded in tandem with the organization's efforts to form a national park in the marshes.

Where habitat classification was intended to provide a more complete overview of the Iraqi marshes, the national park was intended to be the physical manifestation of this universal vision. As Azzam and colleagues pursued treaties and conventions to

conserve the marshland area, they created a blanket of protection from a patchwork of policies. Whereas the Ramsar Convention governed Hawizeh on the border of Iraq and Iran, the national park would encompass the Central Marshes and involve part of Abu Zirig, leaving only Hammar, which bordered the Central Marsh, untouched by global treatise. The effect was that through a trail of international paper, the Iraqi marshes would be legally incorporated as an ecological network. The chief function of this network would be to ensure the preservation of the Iraqi marshes and to regulate human activity within the wetland region. While much of the marshes would be open to human use, a core area of the national park proscribed all human activity.

The idea of the park as part of an ecological network emerged even before *Nature Iraq* and their Italian contractors began meeting with the Iraqi national ministries in Sulaimaniya. Earlier in 2006 Bionatura and AcquaTerra, with sponsorship from the Italian Ministry of Environment and Territory, organized a series of trainings on the concept of the national park for nine candidates drawn from *Nature Iraq* and the Iraqi Ministries of Environment, Water Resources, and Municipalities and Public Works. In the fall of 2006, the Italian firms funded trainings for the group in northern Italy near their offices in Padua—trainings that included field trips to the Venice lagoons and the Delta Po Park, a park marketed as a tourist destination and an Italian wetland recognized under the Ramsar Convention. *Nature Iraq* and Bionatura held the last of national park trainings at the Azraq Oasis in Jordan, a site also recognized by the Ramsar Convention and one ordained a UNESCO World Heritage Site in November 2007.

Azraq

Just like the Iraqi marshes, the wetlands at Azraq were a historic oasis. The Jordanian government declared Azraq a formal reserve in 1978, but due to water demands by the early 1990s the marsh was almost entirely dry. In 1994 the Jordanian

government rehabilitated the wetland with a 3.3 million USD grant from the Global Environment Facility acting in partnership with the United Nations Development Program. In 2008 the International Union for the Conservation of Nature devoted more funds and resources to the further revitalization of Azraq. The Italian government also funded the initiative, and the European Union earmarked an additional grant for a special “gender component.”¹⁴⁹ From the late 1990s to the present, the *Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature* marketed Azraq as an area of interest for ecotourism. Azraq was one among several linked sites that included the Dana Biosphere Reserve “Rift Valley Spectacular,” the Ajloun Woodland Reserve “Oak Forest Escape,” the Mujib Reserve “the Lowest Reserve on Earth,” the Wadi Feynan Eco-Lodge, and the Dibeen Nature Reserve, each marketed under the slogan “Adventure Awaits: Jordan’s Hidden Treasures...RSCN’s Nature Reserves” (Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature 2007). The reserves were separate from Jordan’s most well known wonders—Petra, the Dead Sea, and Aqaba among others. Hence they were “hidden,” awaiting discovery by more adventurous tourists not content with following the rest of the crowd only to the typical destinations. They were travelers who wished to see and experience Jordan beyond the mainstream reserves. The Royal Society initially ran Wadi Rum under its jurisdiction, but responsibility for the park was later transferred to the Aqaba Regional Authority. In 2006 and 2007 the Royal Society was responsible for a consortium of smaller tourist destinations, but was widely known as an ecological franchise both in Jordan and beyond.

¹⁴⁹ For information about the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and its involvement in Azraq see: http://www.iucn.org/about/union/secretariat/offices/rowa/iucnwame_ourwork/iucnwame_reward/iucnwame_azraqoasisdialogue/
For details about Azraq as a UNESCO World Heritage Site see: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5156/>

Though Jordanian officials insisted that tourism in these smaller reserves was not a great source of national income, following the 1991 Gulf War, numerous foreign institutions invested in tourism development, viewing the industry as a potential economic asset for a resource poor country.¹⁵⁰ In 1996 the World Bank launched the Second Tourism Development Project, which included plans for Wadi Rum, Petra, Kerak, and Jerash (Brand 2001:575). Internationally the country promoted itself as a hotspot for elite travelers looking to leave the spas at the Dead Sea for the Jordanian version of safari: refined adventure in the Arabian desert. Jordan anticipated tourist desires with excursions that ranged from stargazing in the red sands of Wadi Rum to romantic interludes in the eco-chic lodges of the Dana reserves. Even though the Jordanian government insisted it did not make substantial revenue from the Royal Society reserves, these conservation areas rounded out their image as an ecologically beneficent kingdom wherein the modern day King and Queen sought to extend their dominion over the lands in the form of environmental conservation. In short, the Jordanian government capitalized on this ecological ethos. The interconnected network of smaller reserves enabled Jordan to promote the country internationally as socially just. The Jordanian government cited their efforts to conserve a complete and interrelated system, ranging from the spectacular reserves at Wadi Rum and Petra to ecological pockets like Azraq and Dibeen. As a small country without many other resources, conservation was Jordan's ticket to tap into streams of global commerce through international treaties and conventions that linked environmentalism to World

¹⁵⁰ Both the Director of the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature's Wild Jordan Center, a café in the heart of Amman with information on each of the country's reserves, and the Jordanian Minister of Environment told me that revenue from tourism did not comprise a significant portion of national income. Personal interview with Khalid Irani, Jordan Minister of Environment and former Director of the Royal Society, October 22, 2006. Chris Johnson, Director of the Wild Jordan Center. July 23, 2007. Personal Interview. Amman, Jordan.

Bank and UN investment and marked the country “liberal” and open to western influence.¹⁵¹

Despite the fact that the Jordanian reserves were not economically advantageous, they featured prominently in stylized picturesque brochures printed on “eco-friendly paper” aimed at international tourists. Whether these smaller reserves were profitable was not important, what was vital was the idea that Jordan was devoted to environmental integrity. In the creation of the reserves, the Kingdom of Jordan did bring money into the country: global environmental organizations, like the UN, invested in the conservation of these niche ecologies through substantial grants.

On a grander scale than the smaller reserves, Jordan’s landmark destination Petra, one of the Seven Wonders of the World, identified and capitalized on tourists’ desire for Bedouin mystery. On candlelight night tours Jordanian guides led guests in total silence from the mouth of the narrow gorge, the Siq, to the opening at the infamous treasury building where a Bedouin poet and musician sat in a field of candles and enchanted the crowd with ancient lore and song. Shryock writes, “The heritage industry in Jordan is an attempt to market ‘tradition’—*karam* [hospitality akin to nobility and grace], old stone houses, and generous ancestors fit into this category like pre-cut puzzle pieces—by presenting the past in ways that appeal to a modern, transnational public...” (2004:45). The point was not how much revenue reserves brought to Jordan; the point was that they existed at all. By marketing the country as an environmental haven, Jordan cast itself as an ecological innovator and created a market for luxury travel like no other Arab country in the Middle East region. It was a model *Nature Iraq* and their Italian partners often talked about wanting to emulate. Azzam believed that the

¹⁵¹ The World Bank and the UN Development Program along with the United Nations Environmental Programme and seven other international bodies administered the Global Environmental Facility. It is notable that the World Bank and the United Nations Development Program also administered the Iraq reconstruction fund, IRRFI. Pools of international monies often ran through these institutions.

Iraqi national park in the marshes could be even more elaborate because of its size and historical significance.

The network of Royal Society reserves demonstrated Jordan's ecological commitment countrywide. With Jordan's profile as a new celebrity hotspot the Royal Society tapped into a global aesthetic that translated luxury as boutique environmentalism. Park administrators placed "women's empowerment" activities at the heart of these reserves in glass enclosed rooms. Administrators believed that this would demonstrate the country's commitment to gender equality, a feature that would interest international tourists.

The promise of social justice sold, but wasn't necessarily delivered upon. Writing about Wadi Rum, Laurie Brand points out that development schemas did not benefit residents of Rum in the ways that had been intended and in fact created new problems for locals who were displaced when villages were moved or who could not access the new tourist economy directly (Brand 2001). Hayden argues that the World Bank and the Global Environmental Facility fund projects that produce global benefits rather than domestic ones (Hayden 2003:60). It was the Global Environmental Facility that supported the restoration of the Azraq oasis in Jordan. In the fall of 2006, Azzam consulted with Khalid Irani, then the Jordanian Minister of Environment and whom Azzam initially met at the Harvard Conference in 2004 when he was serving as the Director of the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature. Azzam sought the minister's advice as *Nature Iraq* prepared its own application to the Facility. What the Royal Society had done for Jordan, Azzam intended *Nature Iraq* to do for Iraq. The marshes would be one site in an interlinked system of reserves. The national park was the first step toward that future vision.

Park Logistics

Next to the Iraqi marshes, Azraq was diminutive. The marsh had a small basin, native fish had to be re-introduced, and given Jordan's well-known water shortage the wetland in 2006 was more the size of a pond than a marsh. Iraqis scoffed. The Iraqi marshes were not only vaster than their Jordanian counterpart, the 50 million endowment of the Iraqi marsh restoration project far surpassed the combined budgets for the creation of all the Royal Society reserves collectively.¹⁵² Based on the size of the marsh and the extent of foreign support for restoration, *Nature Iraq* had hopes that they would be able to recreate, and even trump, Jordan's ecological network by creating their own.

The park system was intended to introduce foreigners and expose people of the Middle East to "Iraq's great civilization," Azzam often said. Azzam initially described the park as a "peace park" where Iraqis could appreciate their roots, and people of the Middle East region would be reminded that western civilization began in the marshes. He envisioned bringing tours through the marsh to experience this heritage much like tourists visit Roman ruins. He said, "Roman culture is rooted in Ur culture. Why can't we have that?"¹⁵³ In addition, Azzam believed that developing a tourist economy in the marshes would have positive implications for the ways that Americans and other foreigners, who had so many misconceptions of the Middle East, would view the region. Azzam believed that the only way the bias would change was by people experiencing the region directly. He told me, "Are they ever going to experience the Middle East? I don't know. That's too big of a thing for me. The marshes are big enough for me."¹⁵⁴ Despite his words, Azzam clearly believed that developing the marshes for ecotourism would be one step in this process of building a better regional image. He said that

¹⁵² Chris Johnson. July 23, 2007. Personal Interview. Amman, Jordan.

¹⁵³ Azzam Alwash. October 30, 2004. Personal Interview. Harvard University. Boston, MA.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

building the peace park was “important for the region overall” because it would remind the Middle East of their roots, but the history Azzam told of the marsh was one that was shaped by postcolonial explorers in the region and was one that fit with the international ideals of environmentalism.¹⁵⁵ Azzam pre-empted the critique that *Nature Iraq* was overly focused on marsh environs at the expense of local communities by citing that tourism would be a community asset. Tourism, he asserted, would provide economic opportunities through subsidiary projects like mat-weaving that would highlight local skills for tourist spectators.

At the Azraq training, Antonio presented to the team of nine an overview of what they had accomplished to date and a concept of what a national park in the marshes might be. During his presentation Antonio described the park as a node in a field of interconnected conservation areas, much like Azraq in Jordan. He suggested that the first national park in the marshes would contribute to the eventual creation of an “ecological network” between the marshlands resulting in the creation of a comprehensive marshlands system.¹⁵⁶ Antonio described his vision of this network by saying that planners would locate the first national park near Chibayish surrounded by other areas that could be developed in the future. For example, he continued, the Shatt al-Arab could potentially be linked into the system. The Hammar and Hawizeh marshes, Antonio added, would “remain natural systems...[T]he idea is that over the years some areas will be kept untouched and they will be connected through ecological categories. This is a future vision of a system of parks that can live in companion with other areas where economic activities are developed hopefully in a sustainable way, but it will take time for them.”¹⁵⁷ Though Antonio did not say this directly, the ecological network he

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Antonio. December 5, 2006. “Feasibility Study for the Mesopotamian National Park: Three Scenario Models.” PowerPoint Presentation. Azraq, Jordan.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

defined would blanket the south where it would inevitably inculcate new forms of governance and authority that expressed global environmental values. At a time when mainstream media widely reported the possibility of secessionist southern Emirates of Shi'a political parties in governorates including the marshes, the parallel foreign drive for marsh revival is intriguing. The marsh project, after all, grew out of the US Department of State *Future of Iraq* meetings that were designed to cultivate secular Iraqi leadership from a community of exiles including Azzam Alwash. In this sense the marshes expressed the ethics of a secular environmentalism defined within and implemented by classic neoliberal institutions like the World Bank, G-8 nations, and ecological fund facilities.

In order to protect as much of the vast wetland expanse as possible, Azzam, Antonio, and other marsh advocates selected the site of the national park intentionally. While Hawizeh would be protected under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, the national park was meant to conserve the entire Central Marsh and part of Abu Zirig. The park would extend for a total of one thousand square kilometers spanning the jurisdiction of Dhi Qar, Basra, and Missan governorates and involving the region's historic villages of Chibayish and Suq al-Shuyukh. Chibayish would be the park's main urban center with the ranger's station 3 km away.

Antonio outlined that there were four major purposes for the creation of the park. First and foremost, the park was intended for environmental protection. Second, the conservation area would afford educational and scientific research opportunities. Third, the park would be designed much like the Italian Delta Po park to include small businesses that capitalized on the resources in the area for socio-economic development. Finally when the violence abated and Iraq settled again, potentially twenty years down the road, the area would be a site for international tourism. As with other conservation areas the Iraqi marshland national park would be separated into a core, a

buffer, and an external area, each designed to regulate the extent and kind of human activity within zones of the park environs. Bionatura used remote sensing analysis and relied upon *Nature Iraq* field studies when determining what part of the marshes would be included in the core. Antonio said that they selected the area for the core because “it was one of the least populated so it doesn’t have as many permanent settlements.”¹⁵⁸ They selected the area they ultimately chose because it did not have any known settlements at the time that they were preparing the park. They also used geospatial data and the UN Environmental Programme remote sensing maps to determine which part of the central marshes would remain consistently flooded.

Areas of Influence

Different kind of activities could involve different ranges of people, from local settlements to national (and international) level, also considering the timeframe of the proposals.

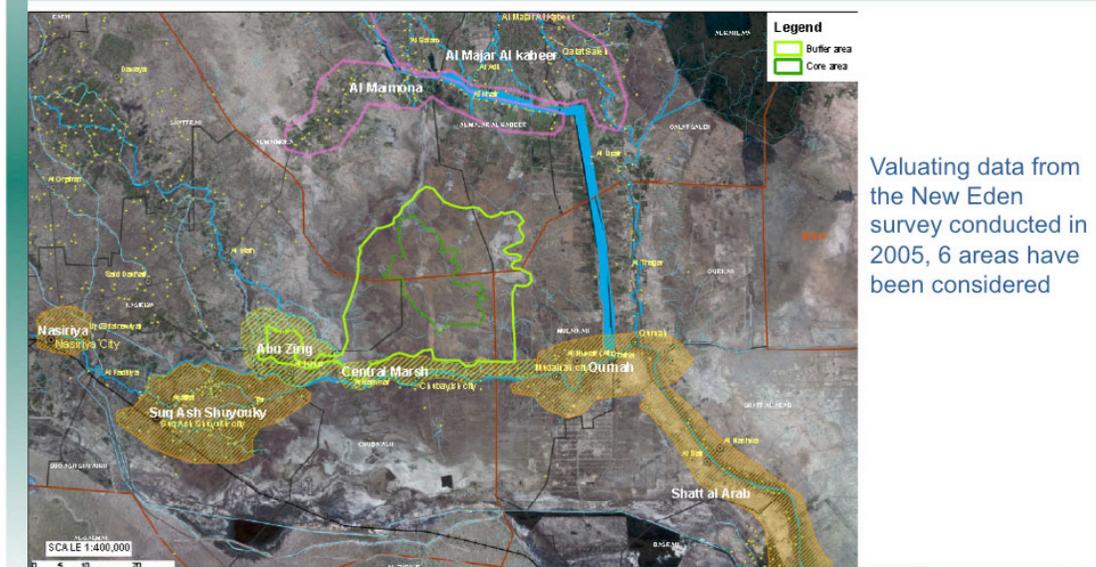


Figure 47: Bionatura PowerPoint slide of the National Park boundaries, February 2007¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ Antonio. December 5, 2006. Azraq training for National Park. Azraq, Jordan.

¹⁵⁹ Bionatura presentation. February 15-17, 2007. “Feasibility Study for Mesopotamia National Park: Planning Scenarios.” Sulaimaniya, Iraq. The bright green outline designates the park’s buffer area while the darker green outline enclosed within it designates the core, protected area of the park. Chibayish City is marked on the map on the bottom center perimeter of the buffer

Antonio told the group that the goal of the park was to:

have these areas be part of a related network. To allow for migration of species inside the marshland area, for example. In any case at some point this area will be developed in the future. For example the cities will house industries and things will be developed along the Tigris and Euphrates. But the idea is to keep some “corridors” open. Like Hawizeh, Hammar, Abu Zirig marsh and also to keep some connections between these systems.¹⁶⁰

The corridor that the network would create would not only conserve more of the region of the marshes, it would act as a channel in Iraq through which foreign investors could directly access the Iraqi national government and thus the Iraqi economy.

Human activities



A key issue in the definition of the Park's asset is the **regulation of human activities** within the Park's area

- The primary objective within the **core area** is the protection and restoration of the natural environment, therefore human activities have to be carefully controlled and limited, so that they do not jeopardize the natural evolution of the marshlands ecosystem
- In the **buffer area** the compatible human activities are allowed (extensive agriculture, regulated fishing and hunting, economic activities traditionally related to the marshlands); they need to be planned and regulated according to the Park's main objectives, so that they are sustainable in the long term and they do not interfere with the ecosystem's restoration
- In the **external area** that is directly influenced by the Park, several socio-economic benefits are expected to be brought in as a result of the progress of the Park itself (employment, supplies and services, tourism) and by the restoration of the marshland ecosystem (commerce of various natural goods and products and derived income)

Figure 48: Bionatura PowerPoint slide on human presence in national park¹⁶¹

area and Suq Al-Shuyukh is highlighted in yellow off to the left bottom corner of the park perimeter. In the upper right hand corner just under the legend in the dark grey is Hawizeh marsh, the marsh protected by the Ramsar Convention for Wetlands of International Importance.

¹⁶⁰ Antonio. Bionatura Presentation. December 5, 2006. Azraq, Jordan.

¹⁶¹ Bionatura presentation. February 15-17, 2007. "Feasibility Study for Mesopotamia National Park: Park Area." Sulaimaniya, Iraq.

Park area

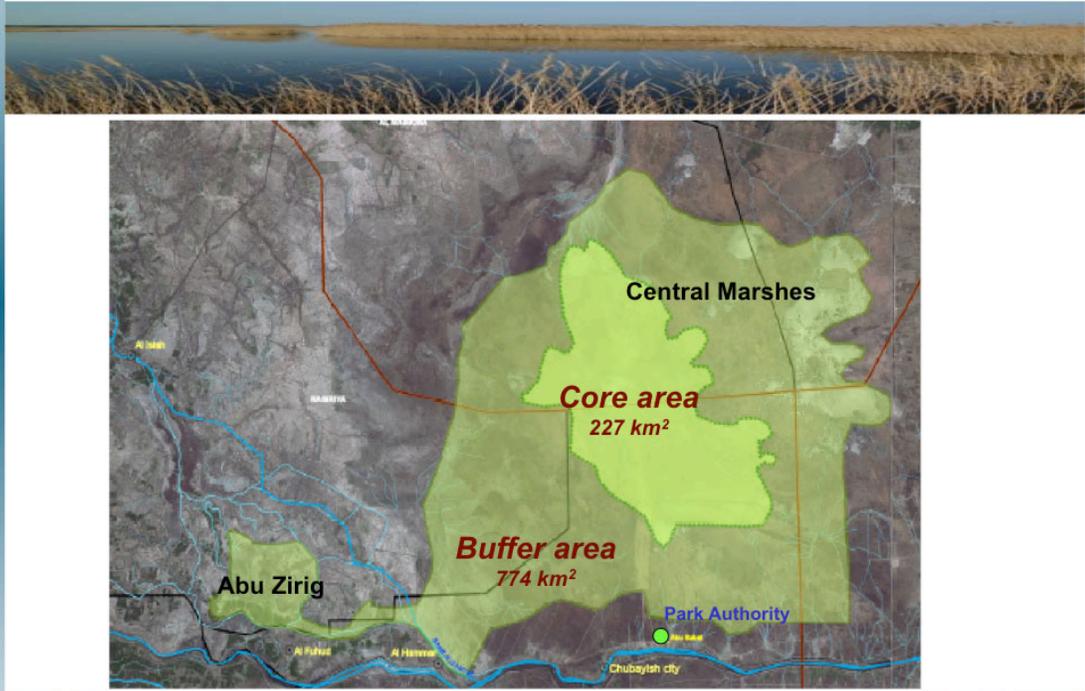


Figure 49: Detail of core and buffer area¹⁶²

West et al. indicate that the ways that national parks are designed and instituted create problems for local communities by dividing environment into zones of human exclusion or regulation (2006:256). Buffer zones in protected areas do not necessarily lead to conservation, West et al. assert, but do create conflict and economic loss as previous land-tenure systems are destroyed and hunting and grazing areas are turned into *zones* people cannot use (2006:259). With the creation of national parks, when culture becomes a selling-point for marketing ecotourism, states and international organizations tend to approach natives as commodities (West, et al. 2006:257). Native American communities, for example, were famously displaced by protected areas but then made to reappear in these parks as purveyors of tradition, providing entertainment desired by tourists (West, et al. 2006:260). Often during discussions about the national

¹⁶² Ibid.

park, during moments when *Nature Iraq* and Italian investors discussed marsh residents they did so in these terms.

When residents were recognized, marsh investors saw them both as “backward” and exalted them as the direct descendents of Sumerian civilization. Azzam commented on this paradox in an early interview I did with him:

There is a certain doctrine that is taught in schools that conforms to the Ba’ath party vision of what Iraq is, what Iraq should be and in that vision, Ma’adan don’t count. They are just as impure as the Kurds. And so, Iraqis themselves don’t appreciate the Ma’adan. They appreciate the beauty; they appreciate how gorgeous the marshes are. Those who remember them. But they don’t appreciate the fact that the Ma’adan are the remnants of the Sumerian culture. Once they figure that out, once they understand that, once they get educated about it, I think there will be a new understanding. I mean the Red Indian was viewed as a savage in this country. In re-visioning, re-writing history taught us to understand the beauty of their culture. Yes we still look down on them, they are backwards people, they are simpletons, but we have respect. We don’t denigrate them. And maybe there will be a point in the history of Iraq...¹⁶³

Even as Azzam insisted that he did not “denigrate” marsh residents, his words clearly indicate otherwise. Azzam explained that he had to admit that even though he appreciated the people of the marshes, he loved the marshes more than he loved the people. For him, the marshes were a place where he could climb into his canoe, dip his paddle into the water, and escape into the marsh.¹⁶⁴ Where for Azzam the marshes were an escape, for his staff they were a violent place, since work on the marshes put them in immediate danger. However, Azzam did have power and influence and was able to create in the marshes a new kind of polity that governed human activity and had undeniable effects on the appraisal of organic life.

While it was Antonio at Bionatura, the largest Italian engineering firm on the project, who coined the term “ecological network,” it was Dennis who was meant to assist the staff in learning this new approach. With Azzam’s re-entry, as a more direct presence in the nonprofit, *Nature Iraq* had for the first time an organized method and

¹⁶³ Azzam Alwash. October 30, 2004. Personal Interview. Harvard University. Boston, MA.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

approach. Unlike in the early years of the project when Azzam landed grants before he had even returned to Baghdad and had to immediately figure out how to start a nonprofit in Iraq, hire reliable staff, and begin scientific studies of the marsh, after years of experience he was now able to quickly identify advisors and resources that would help him turn *Nature Iraq* into a national presence, beyond the signature project of the marshes, and an internationally renowned environmental organization. The national park was a huge step forward for the organization because it would use the infrastructure of international conservation to protect the marsh environs. In doing so, the marshes would become a place requiring *management*. The actualization of the national park would require the commitment and attention of the Iraqi national government and nonprofits like *Nature Iraq* to ensure its existence. Perhaps unwittingly, by pressing for the park creation, *Nature Iraq* worked to guarantee its continued existence and place of prominence in Iraqi national politics.

Rupture I: Nadim

Two months after the Azraq training, in February 2007 *Nature Iraq*, Bionatura, and Architetura began the more intensive negotiations with the Iraqi ministries over national park design. At this time the Ministry of Agriculture began to attend stakeholder meetings as well. *Nature Iraq* and other marsh investors were especially delighted at their involvement for two reasons. One, Sadr controlled the Ministry which at that time had a policy of not working with foreign organizations. Even though *Nature Iraq* was officially registered as an Iraqi NGO, they were often nonetheless seen as a foreign organization, so the Ministry had made a notable exception. Two, the Ministry of Agriculture was the legal body endowed, under Saddam Hussein, with the governance and creation of national parks. They controlled property rights to the land and were an essential part of the Iraqi ministerial team deciding the creation of the park itself. Also

newly in attendance at these meetings was the freshly created State Minister of the Marshland who advocated directly for marsh communities. The additions reflected both how desirable it was for national, and regional, ministries to involve themselves with the marsh restoration project and also how *Nature Iraq* was moving forward with a more comprehensive approach.

During these meetings, I met Nadim who was acting as an advisor to the Minister of Environment. A distinguished, slender man with white hair and glasses, Nadim was one of the few mid-level ministerial employees dressed impeccably in business suits and ties. He spoke perfect English and was immediately curious about my research. Over the several days of the conference, Nadim checked in with me from time to time and he assisted me in getting a meeting with the regional Minister of the Marshes who had initially been reluctant to talk. During my interview with the Minister, Nadim helped along my Arabic by translating.

After the conversation and after the Minister departed, he shared his own perspective on the war and the work of environmental organizations like *Nature Iraq* with surprising candor. He couldn't believe the US would oust the Ba'ath Party only to allow religious leadership to overtake Iraqi governance. Like other Iraqis I spoke with, he was shocked by the extent of Iran's perceived influence in the south. The level of corruption, embezzlement, and the lack of political accountability in the CPA and in the Iraqi government astonished him. He felt that Iraqi exiles who had been living out of the country and returned to assume leadership posts in national government were "out of touch" with the lives of Iraqis who never left and couldn't possibly govern effectively as a result. He informed me that because the Minister of the Marshes led a newly created *regional* ministry, he didn't have the clout he needed to hold national ministries and foreign investors accountable to his criticisms of their work. Not to mention the fact that despite his renouncements that his leadership of the Hezbollah party in Iraq was

unconnected from the party in Lebanon, several in Iraqi national government remained skeptical and were reluctant to collaborate with him.

After Nadim offered his analysis, he turned to himself. He earned his PhD at a university in London and taught in Iraq for many years. After 2003 when the UN and the CPA created the Ministry of Environment, Nadim went to work at the Ministry as a Director General because the salary was high and the work was more interesting than anything else available to him. There weren't, he told me, a lot of rewarding or challenging jobs for him in Iraq. For reasons he did not specify directly, Nadim stepped down from his post at the Ministry several months before the February 2007 Sulaimaniya meetings but continued to work for Minister Othman as a consultant. The timing of his resignation coincided with personal tragedy.

His son had been murdered just before Christmas. Nadim recalled that his family wanted to move south to escape violence in Baghdad. He kept putting it off due to the demands of his job. He wanted the move to correspond with his break for the Eid (holiday) so that he could continue his work uninterrupted. Just days before their scheduled departure, his son was walking home from school when he was followed and killed in the middle of the street. Full of guilt, anger, and self-blame, Nadim told me that he cried for fifty days. If only he had moved earlier as his family wanted. He tried to get the police to pursue his son's killer, but with the rise of attacks on universities, including attacks on individual professors and students, one death did not compare to the multitude of the masses.¹⁶⁵ After his son's death, Nadim told me that he just didn't have the passion for his work any longer. Heartbroken, he started to slowly disengage.

¹⁶⁵ 2006 was the peak year in violence targeted against centers of education in Iraq (UNESCO February 10, 2010). On November 14, 2006 about 50 gunmen invaded the Ministry of Higher Education in Baghdad and kidnapped dozens of employees. Iraqi officials said that the number kidnapped totaled 150, the American military estimated that 55 people were kidnapped from the Ministry (Burns and Luo November 15, 2006).

After we left Sulaimaniya in mid-February 2007 I never saw Nadim again. Azzam and others noted his absence and wondered what had become of him. Some said he left Baghdad and moved elsewhere in Iraq. There was no way to know for sure. It was this ambiguity that Iraqis faced daily. Nadim was the first of other disappearances among ministerial staff that I personally experienced. It was in Sulaimaniya that I began to understand the stakes of wartime environmentalism. At the meetings Nadim was one of a few who did not hesitate to speak candidly or to risk offense in order to question plans. He was intellectually curious and politically astute. Like *Nature Iraq* scientific staff, mid-level Iraqi ministerial employees were some of the most vulnerable in Baghdad. Seen as collaborators of the foreign occupation, once exposed, these employees were walking targets without the protection of senior level staff. Their survival was entirely dependent on a combination of personal luck and individual wit. People like Nadim who worked for the ministries left the community of scientists, experts, and investors on the marsh project suddenly, without warning.

Chibayish

Nedah turned to me and whispered under her breath, “he spelled Chibayish wrong. It’s Chi-bayish, not Chu-bayish.”¹⁶⁶ In pointing this spelling detail out to me, Nedah highlighted that Italian contractors did not know basic details about an area for which they were hired to plan the park. In the plans for the national park, Chibayish would play a major role. On the first day of the meetings, Nicola, the head of Architettura, and Ahmed, consultant on the project and liaison with the Ministry of Municipalities and Public Works, presented their plans for the development of the city as the marshland center. In the preliminary urban plan developed by Architettura and the Ministry of Municipalities and Public Works, Chibayish was the forerunner for the capital

¹⁶⁶ Nedah Hussein Al Giboori. February 15, 2007. Personal Conversation. Sulaimaniya, Iraq.

of the marshlands region, of the entire network, because it was the most urban and most famous city of that area. To assess the population of the marshes, Architettura and the Ministry relied on a combination of field survey and remote sensing analysis.

Nicola told marsh investors that he was able to use a very high-powered six-meter resolution satellite compared to the UN Environmental Programme's 250-meter resolution. This meant that every pixel in a remote sensing image referenced six meters of ground. Even the UN's highest resolution analysis of Aster satellite images was only



Figure 50: Nicola presents plan for Chibayish in Sulaimaniya¹⁶⁷

fifteen-meter resolution. By comparison Nicola could see details on buildings the UN could not, yet the photos could only display buildings from the top down. To complement satellite diagnostics, Ahmed for the Ministry of Municipalities and Laith for *Nature Iraq* led a field survey of the marshlands area, going house-to-house and counting the

¹⁶⁷ Nicola. February 15, 2007. "Al-Chubayish: Preliminary Urban Plan." Architettura PowerPoint Presentation. Sulaimaniya, Iraq.

buildings and recording data about families living there. In a capacity building exercise, Nicola told the audience, a team of 20 surveyors selected by the Ministry of Municipalities and Public Works went to the marshes from July-August 2006 and again in September 2006 to study the area. Laith and Ahmed, their supervisors, divided up the region into individual sub-areas, each assigned one surveyor (Eden March 2007). Nicola recounted that the crew assembled a catalog of over 6,000 photos and documented more than 3,000 buildings. From their work, they came to several conclusions.

The relative strengths of the marshes, Ahmed identified, were the availability of labor, the traditional handicraft activities, and the location of the city geographically and environmentally. The weaknesses included the depressed economy and the lack of adequate public services. The combination, Ahmed suggested, would be ultimately advantageous because Chibayish could accommodate a lot of public services and new construction projects which would create jobs and improve the area overall. The team envisioned the creation of a new industrial zone that would support local milk, fish, and paper industries while also encouraging the development of handicrafts. Tourism, they identified, would play a major role in the economic growth of Chibayish because tourist facilities would be built in the city itself. One issue they had in particular was the question of landed property and who held ownership over land versus who had the right to use the land without the privilege of ownership. This was a sticking point for *Nature Iraq* and marsh advocates since some residents living in Hammar marsh, south of the Central marshes in the area between Suq al-Shuyukh and Chibayish, were opposed to the Ministry of Water Resources releasing water in the area because they had been farming the fields created when Saddam Hussein drained the area in 1991. So far they had been successful in preventing the inundation of their crops.

During Ahmed's part of the presentation, the Minister of the Marshes raised a question. How did they translate the word "region" to Arabic? The Minister was, as

Ahmed identified, insinuating that the place of Chibayish at the center of the marshes might not be clear for marsh residents. It was a political question. The Minister continued by saying that the government was planning to break the country up into three regions, so deciding that Chibayish was the epicenter of marshland activity seemed premature when everything was about to change politically. Abdullah, a *Nature Iraq* field manager, translated and emphasized, “this is a *very* important comment.”¹⁶⁸ In response, Mohammad, the *Nature Iraq* ornithologist, added that it was also a matter of local municipalities and provinces fighting to host the center of the marshes. Though I did not observe these local disputes, I did notice that similar disagreements occurred at the level of national governance, as the Ministry of Agriculture vied to maintain some jurisdiction over the park while Azzam and project investors lobbied for the control over the park to be moved to the Ministry of Environment.

This exchange indicated that what from a distance seemed easily deciphered with satellites and field surveys in practice did not lend itself to neat organization. The Minister’s interjection served as a palpable reminder that life in Iraq was ultimately contentious. Next to Nicola’s multi-colored Chibayish poster-size maps, in which aspects of the city were neatly divided into different zones of activity from farming to industrial production to tourism and downtown promenades, the Minister’s picture of Iraq was downright ugly. During a time when human life was continually under threat, the idea of development, wherein every actor and each variable could be discretely calculated and arranged, carried the promise of an easy solution. The Iraqi Ministry of Environment, given its neophyte status and reliance on *Nature Iraq*, firmly supported this idealistic vision, whereas the Iraqi Ministries of Water Resources and Municipalities and Public Works interrupted that dream by questioning whether the campaign was realistic. For his

¹⁶⁸ Nature Iraq stakeholder meetings. February 15, 2007. Sulaimaniya, Iraq.

part, the Minister of the Marshes constantly tried to re-direct attention toward the needs of people living in the marshes proper.

Green Villages

As refugees displaced when the marshes were drained in 1991 began to rush back to the region, they did not return to the rural marsh hinterlands and instead settled in cities. This created additional strain for marshland cities like Chibayish, and on a larger scale Basra, as scarce urban resources strained to accommodate the influx of residents. During his presentation, Ahmed proposed, "The optimal solution for this issue is the construction of 'green villages' that will accommodate the refugees."¹⁶⁹ The green villages were planned community housing designed by Azzam, Bionatura, and Architettura to provide housing with modern conveniences to marsh residents. The construction of these villages, they hoped, was one way to stem criticism that they were focused on the environment at the expense of marsh residents.

Residents expressed to *Nature Iraq* that they wanted better schools and hospitals, electricity, potable water, cell phones, and computers with internet access. While *Nature Iraq* insisted that it was not a direct services organization, in response to these concerns the organization proposed the construction of twenty-eight communities, each comprised of thirty to thirty-five individual houses, located between the Euphrates and the Central Marshes in proximity to the national park. Every house would be an environmentally friendly adaptation of traditional reed homes. The outside structure would look very much like former marsh homes that were built with reeds, but inside there would be plastered walls and concrete floors. Azzam was very excited about these

¹⁶⁹ Qasim. February 15, 2007. "Al-Chubayish: Preliminary Urban Plan." PowerPoint Presentation. Sulaimaniya, Iraq.

villages, but he had a hard time finding funding for them since the Italian Ministry of Environment was reluctant to build the housing.

Azzam had a plan. During a visit to his house at the end of winter 2007, I asked about international interest in the oil fields under the marshes. Azzam told me that it was a supergiant field. He and Dennis Heatherington had been talking about the development of that field, which they knew to be inevitable. Dennis suggested that just like the Alaskan wildlife preserve where oil companies were required to pay into a trust for the preservation of wildlife in the preserve, oil prospectors in the marshes should contribute to the conservation of the area.¹⁷⁰ For the last year and half, Azzam had been talking to representatives at Shell, and Conoco-Phillips and Exxon-Mobil had also been in contact. One day when Azzam was in Europe, the Shell representative contacted him and said she needed to talk to him. They spoke by phone and she asked him to come in for a meeting. He remembered:

I said, well, I'm not going to take any money from you, I'll pay my ticket to Dubai, but you can pay for my hotel. I went and met with her and her staff and the Iraq desk representative. They had prepared a presentation for me that they wanted to develop one of the supergiant oil fields. They asked about my contacts in the area and what they should do to develop good will. And that was the end of that. I met them again later. They asked me about who Basil Rahim was, so I answered them. And then I ran into the Iraq desk representative again here in Amman when meeting Barham Salih. So what their plan is, I have no idea. I'm trying to finish the Green Village and then I'm going to hit them, all of the oil companies with the plan and say that I want you to start building this.¹⁷¹

Azzam hoped that by trading information about the marshes, he would be able to gain additional funding for marshland development projects, particularly the Green Villages. At the time I left the field in December 2007, the villages remained an unrealized idea. I have reason to believe that there may have been early attempts to build some of the housing because in the spring of 2006, in Geneva, Switzerland, Hassan Partow joked that Azzam ran into a little problem with the Green Villages because as soon as they

¹⁷⁰ Azzam Alwash. April 12, 2007. Personal Interview. Amman, Jordan.

¹⁷¹ Azzam Alwash. March 13, 2007. Personal Interview. Amman, Jordan.

were built and assembled, villagers dismantled and looted them. Hassan added, that was “not the kind of community participation Azzam had in mind.”¹⁷² I could not get a clear response out of Azzam about the villages, but, if events had transpired as reported, it was an example of how marsh investors’ vision of an ideal marsh community was shaped at a distance, without the involvement of community members (see Ferguson 1994). By this account marsh residents did not feel ownership of the project or have a stake in these ecologically pure villages, but saw them instead as raw material resources to trade for dollars. Dollars that could help them buy what they wanted and needed. Whatever that was, it was not green villages.

Seemingly altruistic campaigns, like environmentalism, act as a shield for international investors to conceal for-profit business deals. Environmentalism is a critical means of winning bids on contracts, as it has been during Iraqi marsh restoration. Italy, for example, continues to be the largest funder of *Nature Iraq*, granting the NGO upward of 30 million Euros from October 2004 and 2007, more than any other environmental NGO in the region. Italian contractors told me during ethnographic research that their work on the marsh restoration project actually cost them thousands of dollars. But, as one Italian engineer said, it was a price they were willing to pay in order to make the connections they needed to generate other business opportunities in Kurdistan. He did not have direct knowledge but believed the ultimate goal for Italy was to curry favor in order to win the contract to develop the oil fields in southern Iraq. “This was a good investment,” he said, “so that they [the Italian government] could gain access to oil.”¹⁷³

By July 2007, the Italian engineering firms working with *Nature Iraq* had formed a separate entity, Aden al-Jedidah, for the private opportunities they negotiated with Iraqi government ministries. The director of *Nature Iraq*, Azzam, assisted his Italian

¹⁷² Hassan Partow. June 1, 2006. Personal Conversation. Geneva, Switzerland.

¹⁷³ Marcello. December 5, 2007. Personal Interview. Padua, Italy.

colleagues in winning these bids by introducing them to members of government. For his role he was paid five percent of each contract, money that Azzam reinvested in his environmental initiatives.¹⁷⁴ These slippery relationships between environmental projects and for-profit business characterize reconstruction-era Iraq. On November 4, 2009, for example, Italian oil conglomerate Eni won the bid to develop Zubair oil field, one of the largest untapped reserves in country that underlies the Iraqi marshes.

Scholars have shown that NGOs play a crucial role in the expansion of neoliberalism (Ferguson 1994; West 2006). In contemporary Iraq, environmentalism provides one means through which campaigns of liberalizing the Iraqi economy are instituted. Operating in a self-identified field of conservation, global environmentalists are grouped as other political actors within the field of nongovernmental reconstruction. *Nature Iraq* leadership accessed funding channels and policy resources through their conservationist platform. Environmentalism in Iraq, despite arguments to the contrary, has therefore been a means by which to access political authority and lucrative private business.

The Museum of the Marshes

In addition to the work that *Nature Iraq* and the Italian firms did on the project, the Iraqi Ministry of Culture had its own investment in the marshes and planned to build a museum near the city center of Chibayish. At a time of great foreign interest in the Iraqi marshes, ministries that were able to involve themselves in the restoration initiative and created their own projects. The Ministry of Culture held its own separate competition for the building contract, for which Muhammad Makiya, a well-respected architect and son of Kanan Makiya, submitted a bid. In the end the Ministry selected Riadh Tappuni, Sahar Rassam, and their associates, all Iraqi exiles living in Canada, to build the museum. It

¹⁷⁴ Azzam Alwash. February 18, 2007. Personal Conversation. Sulaimaniya, Iraq.

would be modeled after the individual islands upon which each marsh family constructed their reed homes. The plan included a research center for international academics to visit the marshes and conduct scientific research.



Figure 51: Tappuni and associates marsh museum model, June 22, 2005¹⁷⁵

During a visit to Beirut in April 2007, I met Sahar and Riadh and we spoke about the museum. I waited for them at Starbucks on Hamra Street in downtown Beirut and when they arrived they looked impressively chic. Casually elegant in khakis and lightweight sweaters, the middle-aged married couple appeared as though they had stepped out of a J. Crew catalog. As we sat and talked, Riadh explained his design philosophy. The buildings, he told me, resembled a natural history museum in the sense that the architectural form “combines all the elements of nature.”¹⁷⁶ Riadh and Sahar said that their basic motive was to create something harmonious that would complement and not detract from the environment. They would involve local people in the construction of the museum and use local materials, like reeds that would clad the walls, as much as possible. The team planned the museum to be ecologically sound and self-sufficient. Since potable water was an issue, drinking water would be purified on site, windmills in combination with a light continuous water spray would naturally cool the air, solar energy

¹⁷⁵ BDP. June 22, 2005. “International Team Wins Iraqi Marshes Project.” BDP News. <http://www.bdp.com/News/2005/International-Team-wins-Iraqi-Marshes-Project/>

¹⁷⁶ Riadh Tappuni. April 8, 2007. Personal Interview. Beirut, Lebanon.

harnessed by panels installed on the roof would supply electricity and heat, and the construction team would create a “green roof” by installing a plant garden from indigenous marsh species that would both cool the building and serve as a small park visitors could enjoy. Their plans were intended to accentuate natural marsh beauty.

Riadh and Sahar had been working consistently with the Ministry of Culture on the project and spoke to them weekly. The Ministry intended to build the museum; they had the budget of the 6 to 10 million USD required and in April 2007, they were starting to invite builders to bid on the contract. Riadh was very concerned about how the project would be implemented. He told me that they designed the building using the latest available technologies. He doubted that Iraqi contractors knew how to install or use imported technology like solar panels and water heaters, steel rod reinforcement, the museum’s water purification system, and the compound’s digester needed to transform organic material like plants into gas for cooking. He and Sahar would be involved from their home in Canada, but teaching contractors how to use and install technology by phone was less than ideal. A priority, he said, was to get the Italian engineering firms and *Nature Iraq* invested in the project so that they might assist the construction team in building it.

Riadh told me that the disheartening thing about the project was that he and Sahar designed it “for the community. To benefit the community.”¹⁷⁷ Since he could not go to the marshes, he couldn’t talk to people there. He said, “The whole idea was to help the community and now his role in supervising the building of the project will happen from a distance.”¹⁷⁸ This was especially disappointing for Riadh who spent years working on urban development and housing and who led the Iraq Task Force for the UN Economic and Social Committee for Western Asia shortly after the 2003 war. He was

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

used to being on the ground, as he was in 2000 in southern Lebanon at the end of the Israeli conflict. Another blow to the project was that their original contact at the Iraqi Ministry of Culture, an architect and a friend, had been elected to Iraqi Parliament. When she left the Ministry, Riadh said, she created a vacuum because no one there understood their project in the way that she did. It was unfortunate, but it was also typical of business at ministries; often those who were most talented were the ones who left.

Challenges

During Nicola's presentation on Chibayish, Iraqi ministries raised questions about how Architettura and *Nature Iraq* collected data and the criteria they used in evaluating their findings. Nedah, in particular, pushed Nicola to not only define his methods in greater detail, but also consider the data that ministries had collected. At 39 Nedah was the Director General of Urban Planning for the Iraqi Ministry of Municipalities and Public Works. She was born in the marshes, in Suq al-Shuyukh, but lived in Baghdad with her family where she graduated college and got a Master's degree in Urban and Regional Planning. Nedah asked several questions, and Nicola did his best to remain patient and answer them, but with multiple interruptions to his PowerPoint presentation, it was clear that he found her inquiries stressful. Nedah first asked how they could compare the data with the legal document: "Why did you take this area? What criteria did you use to define this area? Sometimes the houses are outside the Master Plan. We need to start with the boundaries of the legal Master Plan."¹⁷⁹ Nicola suggested that it wasn't a problem if he collected more data than was available inside the bounds of the legal Master Plan. If he did then they could just not use it. Azzam popped up, "Ok, we can put the boundaries of the legal Master Plan on top. Adriana, have the Iraqis do that. It's good practice,

¹⁷⁹ Nedah. February 15, 2007. Personal Comment. *Nature Iraq* stakeholder meetings. Sulaimaniya, Iraq.

right?”¹⁸⁰ By adding the outline of the park jurisdiction defined in the Master Plan to the map, Azzam hoped that questions like the relationship of the data to the site would be more easily addressed. Nicola went on with his presentation.

This back-and-forth banter between Nicola and Nedah continued. In fact, a few minutes later as Nicola discussed the survey of the buildings that *Architettura* and *Nature Iraq* had done, Nedah interjected again. She raised the point that while Nicola’s survey accounted for registered businesses, it did not account for the illegal economy.



Figure 52: Azzam (far left) and others check out Nicola’s plans for Chibayish

Nicola protested, “but I am not a policeman, I cannot determine the information.” Nedah replied, “There’s official office data and you need to compare it to what you have found.”

¹⁸⁰ Azzam Alwash. February 15, 2007. Personal Comment. *Nature Iraq* stakeholder meetings. Sulaimaniya, Iraq.

Nicola agreed, “Yes, yes.”¹⁸¹ Though he grew frustrated by the constant interruptions, Nicola acceded, yielding to Nedah’s point. She was pushing him to work in greater collaboration with Iraqi ministries when developing plans for the urban revitalization of Chibayish. Her constant interruptions seemed intrusive to *Nature Iraq* and the Italian companies presenting their preliminary plans, but without regular involvement as marsh investors were formulating plans for the park, Nedah had no other opportunity to express her concerns. Instead, *Nature Iraq* and the Italian contractors presented their formulated plans to Iraqi ministries who sat in the audience.



Figure 53: Nedah, second from the left, listens to the Bionatura PowerPoint presentation¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ Nicola and Nedah. February 15, 2007. Personal Comments. *Nature Iraq* stakeholder meeting. Sulaimaniya, Iraq.

¹⁸² *Nature Iraq* stakeholder meeting. February 16, 2007. Sulaimaniya, Iraq. On the far left, sitting next to Nedah on the right, the representative of the Ministry of Agriculture looks on. To Nedah’s left sits the Minister of Environment, Othman, and to the Minister’s right sits the State Minister for Marshland Affairs.

One exchange in particular highlighted the fundamental disagreement between *Nature Iraq*, the Italian contractors, and the Iraqi ministries. As Nicola wrapped up his presentation, Nedah emphasized that there were still points of ambiguity with the data and the criteria they used in evaluating their findings. The issue was that they needed to know the density of the buildings over the entire area for each sector that Nicola mentioned was not equally alike. One representative in attendance raised the point, “You need to explain how you collected this information and what criteria you used.” An account of the exchange is revealing.

- Nedah: First we need to develop the criteria. You have to explain why you chose this criteria because we have many different forms of criteria that different ministries use. We have national codes that number areas officially. So if we are going to use this system, we need to know the rationale behind it.
- Azzam: [To Nicola] Explain to her that there were 120 small sections based on small streets and then we sectioned off this area because they may have the same data.
- Nicola: We broke them into these areas based on the data we collected and grouped similar data into areas that are marked off. It was based on actual data that came out.
- Rep: So that is not an official boundary! Oh, you have to explain that.
- Azzam: You have to improve your English.
- Rep: You have to say how you will deal with this where there are empty plots that don't have buildings yet. I think this is a problem for Dr. Ahmed.
- Azzam: The data is already there.
- Nedah: You made your analysis just based on your own survey, but now we need to compare it to the official documents we have because we have lots of official information that we collected.

In stakeholder meetings Iraqi ministries were meant to look on and approve. The structure of the meetings did not encourage their involvement in any substantial way: ministries were not co-participants in the presentations; rather they sat in the audience and received information the Italians and *Nature Iraq* presented. There were brief periods for question and answer, but these rushed opportunities at the end of meetings were not long enough to support elaborate conversation. There was not a true collaboration between ministries and *Nature Iraq* in the same way that there was between the Italian contractors and the organization. Nedah refused to follow convention

and instead seized moments to demonstrate again and again how Italian contractors could not develop effective plans for the marshes from a distance, how vital it was for them to involve Iraqis in the planning process in a more substantive and meaningful way. She may have verbalized critique in the form of discussions about density criteria, but it was her actions and not her words that were the most powerful commentary. By continually inserting herself into the presentation, Nedah insisted on her presence in the discussion.

Among the group of ministerial representatives in attendance at the meetings, Nedah was the most powerful voice of dissent and the strongest advocate for Iraqis defining the future of the country. At one point during the February meetings, Nedah grew frustrated and impatient and told Nicola that the Iraqi ministries would not simply approve pre-formulated plans. It was the Italians' job to present them *several* possible options and it would be up to the Iraqi ministries to decide what was best for the country, not the Italians. Nedah pushed, but her passion for the project was also a great complement to project investors. She was not opposed to foreign investment in the marshes; to her conserving the environment there presently "made good business sense."¹⁸³ Rather, Nedah insisted that these foreign investors more robustly include ministries in the process of developing plans for the park. She wished to redirect the relationship from one where foreign investors set the terms for the park, to one where the authority of the ministries was more deeply respected. Nicola, Azzam, Antonio, and even Bionatura's CEO Emilio may have been frustrated with her at times and disagreed with her at others, but each of them respected her tremendously and demonstrated this by sharing break time meals with Nedah, spending time with her outside of the meeting space, and talking about her as a challenging person but whose strong will they admired.

¹⁸³ Nedah. February 16, 2007. Personal Conversation. Sulaimaniya, Iraq.

Rupture II: Nedah



Figure 54: “Iraqi Soldiers at the Public Works Ministry After Monday’s Bomb Blast”¹⁸⁴

BAGHDAD, Feb. 26 — An explosion inside the Ministry of Public Works on Monday wounded an Iraqi vice president and the public works minister and killed at least five people, in what officials described as a possible assassination attempt (Cave February 27, 2007).

My Dear Friends,

My friend, Nedah, a DG for the Ministry of Public Works, was killed on Monday in the bombing that was intended to take out VP Adel Abd al-Mahdi. A huge loss. She was one of those rare people who weren't afraid to stand up for what she believed in. She publicly insisted that Azzam and the Italian contractors take into account the needs and rights of people living in the marshes. She was our age and unbelievably courageous. She was also the star participant of a recent set of meetings. Another colleague of hers, who I also knew, was killed in the bombing as well. I had just spent a week with them in Sulaimaniya, Iraq.

I'm ok. I spent Thursday afternoon with Jim Glanz, front-page reporter on Iraq for the NY Times, who was passing through Amman on his way out of Baghdad en route to NYC on the day that I heard the news. He was able to give me the details of the bombing. It's not just that Nedah died, but that her vitality and strength gave me hope that someone in the government would actually hold these investors accountable. But this is Iraq today; so many talented, promising people are dying.

Azzam, as much as he disagreed with her, is a mess. He told me Thursday when I saw him to work on the website for *Nature Iraq*. I felt like I got punched in the stomach. He tried not to cry. The loss of that exile dream, the dream of a democratic and prosperous Iraq, is palpable. I don't think that people realized they would not only lose their dream, but that they would also make such

¹⁸⁴ (Ameen February 27, 2007)

tremendous personal sacrifices. To say this war is a disaster doesn't even touch how powerful its effects truly are. I feel just as frustrated with the Left as I do with the Right back in the States.

This time back in Amman is much different than the fall; the war is somehow more present even here in Jordan. Not in terms of violence, in terms of the way it's directly affected people's lives. People that run humanitarian organizations are telling me that they have trouble sleeping at night because of the difficulties they face. One director of a major international refugee organization said "Give me a break, the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration is throwing 10 million at the Iraqi refugee community in Jordan. But don't relocate 7,000 families and think you've done anything." She has no idea how she's going to provide services to the upwards of 700,000 Iraqis here.

Despite the spate of recent articles on the refugee crisis and Sy Hersh's pieces about Iran in the New Yorker, the thing that Americans don't get is that this war is not just contained within Iraq, its reverberations have touched the lives of people in Jordan and Syria in very serious ways and reached as far as Lebanon where a civil war is possibly in the cards. Amman, for example, is a city of 2 million. Within the last 3 years, 700,000 Iraqis have relocated here. That's a third of the city. A third! A third of the city that has no access to legal work, no access to education, no access to health care. This war is regional and its consequences will be lasting.¹⁸⁵

In the meetings that followed, Nedah's absence was notable. The Ministry of Municipalities had essentially been gutted of its senior staff, with four of its Director Generals killed in the blast and numerous support staff that lost their lives along with them. The Minister appointed a new Director General for Urban Planning, Rahman, to fill the post. Rahman had previously attended meetings and trainings, like the one at Azraq that *Nature Iraq* convened on the marshes. Generally quiet, he was reluctant to speak at the stakeholder meetings and it seemed as though he were slightly uncomfortable with his new responsibilities. He told me that he escaped the bombing because he was on vacation at the time, planning for his retirement. He did grow into the role, but the difference in leadership was dramatic.

When Nedah died, marsh project planning was no longer so rigorously questioned, no longer held to the same standards of accountability at Sulaimaniya stakeholder meetings. Like other charismatic, strong Iraqi leaders who perished, her loss seemed so much bigger than the death of one person. It was a loss for Iraq.

¹⁸⁵ Excerpt from an email I sent from Amman, Jordan to friends, colleagues, and family.

The Newsletter

Two months later, on the second day of the April stakeholder meetings in Sulaimaniya, Antonio and Mia tried a new technique in communicating their vision for the marshland national park. They would teach Iraqi ministerial representatives and *Nature Iraq* scientists to dream. Antonio began, "Please during this presentation, you will try to use your fantasy."¹⁸⁶ As Antonio handed the floor over to Mia who prepared a newsletter from the year 2027 as an aid to the exercise of imagination, the first PowerPoint slide appeared at the front of the room. Significant in all of the Italian presentations was, first and foremost, the name: the national park was not the *Iraqi* national park, but the *Mesopotamian* national park. Mesopotamia was an immediate reference to a time that had passed, a time that Field knew and Thesiger sought to preserve but which ended almost sixty years prior. By locating the park in that temporal era, Italian contractors were already setting it up as a space apart from the current, near future, and immediate past of political life in the marshes. They were abstracting the park from any contemporary moorings and designating for the space a fundamentally distinct temporal location, one that did not address or include the 2003 war and its boiling aftermath. As Mia advanced to the next slide, the slogan of preservation flashed across the screen: "Use It, Don't Lose It." Amusingly, Mia had misspelled *lose*, but she had taken the care to impose this message above two images from the marsh; one of a man poling his *mashuuf* (canoe) through the marsh, and the other an image of birds alighting on reedbeds. These images of "traditional culture" were meant to be evocative, rallying Iraqis to the national park charge. Mia handed out copies of the newsletter. Significant in the document was that the newsletter asked Iraqi ministerial representatives specifically,

¹⁸⁶ Antonio. April 28, 2007. "Feasibility Study for the Mesopotamia National Park: Park & People. Linking Conservation and Communities." Sulaimaniya, Iraq.

named as they were in the cover article “Mesopotamian Marshlands National Park: A Utopia Becomes a Reality,” to imagine the effects of their work in 2007 in twenty years time. Yet the image of the park itself was not based on current knowledge of the area, but on an idea presented in the works of Thesiger and Gertrude Bell. In other words, the fantasy Mia and Antonio created for their Iraqi colleagues was based on the writings of colonial officers and post-colonial adventurers, people who were also foreign visitors. Their influence was noted, but the newsletter included interviews with fictive marsh residents who described their lives in self-referential terms. There was no acknowledgement that these self-understandings were creations of a colonial past.

Marsh residents, the newsletter assumed, cared about traditional handicrafts and wanted their children to make their lives in the vicinity of the marshes not only for the current generation, but for generations to come. In other words, the newsletter presumed that there would be no cultural change. It was a belief that continued the logic of the marsh restoration movement—that the marshes were the origins of Sumerian culture that continued, virtually unchanged, for 5,000 years. People in the marshes might market their cheese regionally, thereby extending their personal reputation and esteem for the marshland region, but otherwise they would continue to live in reed homes with their children much like their parents and grandparents had before them. At the same time, marsh residents would welcome tourists in.

The imagining that Mia and Antonio encouraged was one in which marsh residents *desired* attracting tourists to the area to witness their handicraft making and to enjoy their traditional way of life. None of the ecological changes that would take place

Looking 20 Years into the Future ...

***Abu Subat – Al Chibayish and Thi-Qar Governorates
The Prime Minister, Six Ministries, Government High Representatives, and
International Authorities Participated Yesterday in a Historical Ceremony***

Mesopotamia Marshlands National Park, a utopia becomes reality

The first Iraqi National Park is 20 years old

September 9th 2027 - In front of the International Centre of Research in the National Park of Mesopotamia, a ceremony took place to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Park's foundation.

Blue skies and placid waters provided the ideal setting for this historic day. The Prime Minister, along with the Minister of the Environment, the Minister of Water Resources, the Minister of Municipalities and Public Works, the Minister of Agriculture, the Minister of Culture and, of course, the Minister of the Marshlands, to a crowd of several eager participants, delivered a speech to an enthusiastic crowd of park supporters recognizing the fundamental forces that contributed to creating the first national park of Iraq. "A project that seemed unattainable, was realized and here, in front of our

eyes, we can see the results: clean blue water, reeds swayed by the winds, birds on the horizon. The secret of this achievement depended on twenty years of patient work, the devotion of all involved parties, and the collaboration between the government, various institutions, universities, and, primarily, the marsh inhabitants themselves. "Certainly," the Premier declared, "The road has been long and difficult and, as with any new collaborative project, we faced many constraints and challenges. Today the state of the marshes demonstrates that we have successfully achieved a balance between nature and socioeconomic development." After the ceremony, the Ministries and other participants embarked on a tour of the Park and surroundings areas.

THE INTERVIEW

**Proud of being the Chief Ranger
My challenge**



A fisherman in Central Marsh

Ali is 29 years old ... he skilfully manoeuvres the boat along the Abu Subat channel. We are going to visit a traditional Village inside the marshes. During the trip Ali tells us his story.

See the interview inside.

A "Report" from the past: Gertrude Bell described the Euphrates almost 90 years ago

Gertrude Bell (1868-1926) was for many years in Iraq. Her life was governed by a love of the Arab peoples. She learned the Arabic language, investigated their archaeological sites, and travelled deep into the desert. Her letters and photos are all collected in a web site.

We started about 5 P.M., got to Qurnah just before dawn and went straight on up the Euphrates. It is the most curious sight. The whole country is under water, the villages, which are mainly not sedentary, but nomadic, are built on floating piles of reed mats, anchored to palm trees, and locomotion is entirely by boat.

On either side of the broad channel of the Euphrates, where there are not palms and reed villages, a dense forest of reeds stretches to the horizon. Through it are narrow open channels and you see the white sails of the mashhufs, the pitched native boats, standing up over the reeds.

16 June 1916



Figure 55: Mia's Newsletter, April 28, 2007

Park Staff comes from all surrounding settlements: Including 20 rangers and 15 researchers. Scientists Travel the Globe to Visit the Marshland Center

“I decided to become a ranger when I was eight”

Ali, the chief ranger of the park, tells his story:

Are you from the Marshlands area?

My family escaped Iraq in 1990, and went to Iran. In 2003 we returned to our village, Abu Subat in Chibayish City, where 32 families were living. Now it has become quite a large village. I was only five when we returned and I don't remember the move very well.

Do you like your job?

I used to go fishing with my father and my grandfather. One of the first things I learned was to manage a boat. For a boy like me, every time on the boat was a fantastic experience. It's still fantastic! I like going through channels between the reeds, enjoying the silence, and hearing the occasional sound of birds...

Why have you decided to become a ranger?

When I was eight I was very lucky because I attended the first week-long educational course for children organised by the park authorities. During the course, I discovered the marshes again and I became aware of the value and importance of our nature and environment.

Where was the course held?

In Abu Subat, near the park center

And your family? Do you have any brothers or sisters?

We are a big family, my older brother is a buffalo breeder, he started with a pilot project in 2012 and now his cheese is known everywhere in Iraq.

My sister attended an arts and crafts class and now she weaves beautiful little carpets with wool that is dyed with natural pigments. Tourists visiting our park are always looking for traditional products.

One of my other brothers was involved in a pilot project organized by the Park Authority for the development of sustainable practices in the production of rice. After that, he received a small grant for the implementation of rice fields and now has several fields producing Amber rice.

Do you have children?

Yes, two, one daughter and a boy. He is only three months.

What do you want for your children?

I hope they will stay here, in the marshes. Perhaps they will attend the university and become experts in marsh fauna. That's my hope.



A photo of Ali in his father's mashuf, in 2007, when he was nine years old



Ali with his daughter



Ali's father in 2007



The Abu Subat Channel



Figure 56: Page two of Bionatura's Newsletter

in instituting the national park and marketing the site as an ecotourist destination were, in this fantasy, seen as having any bearing on the lives of marsh residents themselves. They were cast in this future vision as perfectly content even though they lived in resource poor communities surrounded by global opulence. For much like in the colonial era, no ordinary international traveler would have the means to get to the marshes. It would be an adventureland for the monied few.

As Bionatura, *Nature Iraq*, and other marsh investors presented their ideas and goals for the national park, they instructed Iraqis in the lessons of environmentalism. Eager to access the resources of foreign capital for their own ministries, representatives and ministers learned to adopt the language, imperfectly. A Director General at the Ministry of Agriculture, for example, proposed to Mia in April that they would build their own separate national park in the marshes. The idea was surprising: the Ministry had been reluctant to get involved with *Nature Iraq*, and farmers cultivating in the area of the former marsh were actively opposed to any further marsh inundation that would compromise commercial agriculture. The Director General described their park as a walled in hunting grounds. Killing for sport in an enclosed space was not the vision of a national park Mia and Antonio had imparted. Their park was meant to be an uninterrupted space, with land as “wild” and “natural” as “free” as possible. These ethics of freedom expressed by the park aestheticized the “freedoms” of liberalism, namely the elimination of political barriers to foreign investment in and regulation of the Iraqi economy.

Others in attendance mastered the vocabulary. In the next round of stakeholder meetings held in July, Abdullah had prepared a special presentation for the Ministry of Environment, the only ministry in attendance. Or, rather, his children had. Primary school aged, they stood in the front of the room and delivered a PowerPoint presentation on the birds of the marshes. *Nature Iraq* staff like Laith and Abbas by summer had begun

writing poetry about the marshes. As Iraqi staff at *Nature Iraq* worked in environment, they adopted a sentimental ecological vocabulary that expressed the ideals of citizenship. The more staff was removed from the marsh, the more embellished and poetic their discussion of the area was. Those who routinely traveled to the marshes told another story. One staff member told me “Marsh Arabs are mean” and that it would be advantageous to restore the area so that it could be developed for tourism in order to teach marsh residents how to work with people from outside the community. By this account, the park was a civilizing mission.

Citizenship

Whatever the case, the park prompted new arrangements of citizenship that were consistent with neoliberal economic ideals. As a late nineteenth century concept advanced by John Muir, Tsing writes that “the national park idea catered to a model of citizenship that privileged those who imagined themselves as cosmopolitan and civilized travelers, and thus potential park visitors” (2005:96). Nature loving, Tsing writes, was learned at university (2005:126). To summit a peak, she asserts, is to conquer it for the nation, evidenced by the fact that the climber plants his or her national flag at the top (Tsing 2005:133). In marsh restoration, Antonio emphasized in February and again in April, the key concept was that the park would serve as an “outdoor classroom and research laboratory” where school children would visit and learn to value the special environment of the marshes and doctoral students and PhDs the world over would come to conduct scientific research.¹⁸⁷ Azzam and others at *Nature Iraq* started early by developing the *Bird Book for Children*, a full color children’s book in Arabic aimed at beginning readers and writing a chapter for high school history books on the significance

¹⁸⁷ Antonio. February 16, 2007 and April 28, 2007. Personal conversation at Iraqi stakeholder meetings. Sulaimaniya, Iraq.

of the marshes. Down the road, they planned trainings for people living in the marshes on the importance of conserving the environment and moving away from using chemicals as a fishing technique to developing more ecologically friendly methods. Under this model, being a good citizen in Iraq meant being accountable to the environment.

By this accord, marsh residents were seen as “simpletons,” who needed to be educated in order to adopt a care and appreciation for the environment. It was marsh residents who needed to adapt to the ethos and values of foreign investors and a new Iraqi government. This was not a reciprocal arrangement, where each party would learn from the other. Marsh investors did not often consult marsh residents, but expected them to be receptive to learning from them. West et. al. write that national parks produced a kind of virtualism where international technologies—like treaties and conventions—produced ideal subjects according to the values of global environmentalism. If people, like marsh residents, did not fit the model they were asked to change or were regarded as failing (West, et al. 2006:261).

One proposal considered, and recommended by the Minister of Environment, to shore up the protection of the environment was to create an environmental police in the marshes area. To ensure the protection of birds, she suggested, the Minister of the Marshes needed to put police in the marshes.¹⁸⁸ The idea was not new but based upon a model that the Jordanian government used in their reserves.¹⁸⁹ Rather than militarize the conservation of nature, Azzam proposed creating subsidies for good behavior much like the farm subsidies in the United States. Azzam recalled seeing a man fishing in the marshes with a net in 2003 and asked why he fished that way, did he think about the environment. The man replied, “What is environment when my sons are hungry.” People

¹⁸⁸ Minister Othman. February 16, 2007. *Nature Iraq* stakeholder meetings. Sulaimaniya, Iraq.

¹⁸⁹ Elaine. December 5, 2006. Personal comment. *Nature Iraq* Azraq trainings. Azraq, Jordan.

are dependent, Azzam suggested, on the environment, and the quality of their lives depends on ecological vitality. Instead of criminalizing behavior, Azzam saw education as a key conservation strategy.

Education's utility for marsh restoration lay in its ability to create new kinds of subjects in line with a new form of citizenship, one that expressed the values of liberal traditions like environmentalism. Significant is that what is recognized as environment and what is understood as environmentalism—the advocacy for the conservation of nature—is defined in the west under the parameters of international treaties and conventions formed within hallmark neoliberal institutions like the World Bank.

Neoliberalism, Harvey asserts, refers to the privatization of assets in which competition is the primary virtue, and in which personal and individual freedom are guaranteed and each individual is responsible for his or her own actions (2005:65). Neoliberal polities privilege the free mobility of capital and state sovereignty over commodity, and capital movements are surrendered to the global market; states must collaborate to reduce barriers. Neoliberals, Harvey argues, favor government by experts and elites, and international agreements between states guaranteeing the rule of law and freedoms of trade are critical to the advance of the neoliberal project on the global stage (2005:66).

Neoliberalism, Hayden states, is designed to facilitate or enforce the intensification and expansion of capitalist markets. Nature, she argues, has increasingly been treated by development agencies, national governments, organizations regulating trade, and some conservationists as a good best regulated through market mechanisms (Hayden 2003:48). The result is a neoliberal nature in which international frameworks, both discursive and institutional, produce not only objects, but particular kinds of subjects (Hayden 2003:49). In other words, neoliberal nature produces neoliberal subjectivities (Hayden 2003:59). Under this system, ecological resources like wild plants,

microbes, and cultural knowledge were defined as part of an international commons (Hayden 2003:64).

In reconstruction era Iraq, one of the major objectives, as expressed by the UN Resolution sanctioning the war and humanitarian operations in the country, was to facilitate the opening and the integration of the Iraqi economy into mechanisms of global trade (United Nations Security Council November 28, 2006). The marsh project fit perfectly into the mandate, for it encouraged the integration of the Iraqi economy within various global technologies. Italian contractors would bring expertise and experience into Iraq and through various trainings, like the one at Azraq, and meetings, like those in Sulaimaniya, would slowly integrate Iraqi ministries into a global economy. The adjudication of international treaties like the Ramsar convention for wetlands of international importance and the UNESCO World Heritage program would extend the reach of global policy into Iraq through the marshes. At the same time, individual ministerial representatives and *Nature Iraq* scientists would learn how to operate within this field of international business. In this field of international commerce and conservation, nature loving as expressed for the marshes was a direct line toward global success. Iraqis would master the comportment of neoliberal citizenship through the environment.

The relationship between economy, citizenship, and environment is particularly clear in this map depicting the 2027 Iraqi national park and surroundings. Depicted in the map are the core and buffer areas of the park and the various activities and centers that Bionatura and Architettura planned to include within the area. Antonio broke these activities into three major categories: educational (pink), socio-economic (blue), and tourist (yellow). Bionatura imagined that marsh residents could capitalize on traditional sources of income and activities like fishing, gathering reeds, and making handicrafts while connecting them to a broader regional market. The training center within the socio-

economic platform would enable *Nature Iraq* and marsh investors to educate marsh residents in the ways they could convert these household activities to products for market. Environmental education centers would be placed near every park entrance and there would be a particular emphasis on attracting young, school-aged



Figure 57: "Park and Surroundings in 2027: What Could it Look Like?"¹⁹⁰

visitors complete with a youth hostel in addition to an upscale hotel to house them overnight. Training would continue to be a central part of marshland management even twenty years after the opening of the park. These centers along with the lab and the convention center would ensure a continual, stable stream of foreign influence in the marshland region. Finally, the tourist accommodations would highlight the heritage of civilization in Iraq's marshes.

¹⁹⁰ Bionatura. April 28, 2007. "Feasibility Study for the Mesopotamia National Park: Park & People. Linking Conservation and Communities." Sulaimaniya, Iraq.

Plans for tourism reflected Thesiger and Azzam's respective visions of what was notable about the area and ranged from the wonder of birds to the unearthing of archaeological ruins. Ecotourism, West et. al. argue, reduces local people and landscapes to simplified images (2006:262). The 2027 map of the Iraqi marshland national park establishes a framework for doing just that. The plan reduced the park to images that would be commercially marketable for tourism and for global conservation. They were images that reflected foreign understandings of the marsh, localized them in the marsh where they were intended to become a reality, and projected them back into the field of global policy and international capital.

Ministries

Nature Iraq and the Italians had a somewhat complicated relationship with the ministries. Mustafa, one of the two senior level employees of *Nature Iraq*, worked as an advisor to the Ministry of Environment for most of the time that he had been working for Azzam. As a newly created organization, the Ministry of Environment looked to *Nature Iraq* and other foreign investors for guidance in setting their national agenda. For this



Figure 58: Iraq Minister of Environment Narmin Othman with Azzam Alwash, April 2007, Sulaimaniya

reason, Azzam enjoyed considerable influence with the Ministry. Azzam's charisma and enthusiasm sometimes dominated the stage and Mustafa, once frustrated, suggested that Azzam should be more careful not to let his influence show publicly.¹⁹¹ At stakeholder meetings, ministries vied to control individual pieces of the marsh restoration project in order to gain their own direct relationships with the foreign investors Azzam and others brought into the marsh with the permission and involvement of the national government. Ministries in attendance, including the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Municipalities and Public Works, the Ministry of Water Resources, and the state Ministry of Marshland Affairs, sat with their respective constituencies and did not generally mix with representatives from other ministries.

¹⁹¹ Mustafa. August 17, 2006. Personal Conversation. Amman, Jordan.

As Azzam presented their plans for moving forward with the second phase of the national park in April 2007, massive disagreement ensued between each of the ministries as to who had legal jurisdiction over the marsh region. The Ministry of Agriculture claimed that it was under his jurisdiction because it was land. The Ministry of Environment wanted control of the project because it dealt with flora and fauna. The Ministry of Water Resources had an interest in managing the area because they controlled water and its distribution throughout Iraq. To settle the conflict, Azzam suggested creating an Inter-Agency council where all involved ministries would send representatives to jointly agree on how they would proceed. By the close of the meeting, the issue remained unresolved but the ministries had acknowledged that technically the Ministry of Agriculture governed the property rights of the area. *Nature Iraq*, other investors, and some ministries agreed to formulate a plan whereby the jurisdiction of the park would fall under the governance of the Ministry of Environment. As they did so, national governance began to shift to not only accommodate, but also prioritize the environment.

As ministerial representatives, ministers, *Nature Iraq*, and project investors debated the creation of the park, the Minister of the Marshes continually raised concerns that the needs of marshland residents had to be more rigorously addressed. At his first stakeholder meeting, the Minister addressed the issue of referring to marsh residents as ma'adan. He said "the Arabic root of the word ma'adi is 'resistor' unfortunately it is translated as 'backward'...if there is backwardness it is because of the central government."¹⁹² Under Saddam Hussein, he said, the central government had consistently denied social services and education to the area. He urged the new national government and foreign investors to face social problems like illiteracy and raise the

¹⁹² Hassan Radhi Al Sari, Minister of Marshland Affairs. February 17, 2007. *Nature Iraq* stakeholder meetings. Sulaimaniya, Iraq.

standard of living to the equivalence of Iraq's cities. To do so the Minister suggested creating cultural training programs in computer literacy, household management, and small business development like the development of artisanal handicrafts. The Minister's vision was right in line with what *Nature Iraq* and the Italian companies had proposed in the park, but the distinction became clear in a personal interview I conducted with him in which he emphasized that marshland restoration investors needed to do more to provide direct services in the marshes. He saw their interest in marsh ecology, but he wanted to see greater awareness of and devotion to meeting the needs of people living in the marshes.

The Minister was not the only one to raise criticisms. By September 2007, problems between *Nature Iraq* and the Minister of Water Resources intensified. Privately, one marsh investor told me that Minister Rashid had grown frustrated with the top down approach of *Nature Iraq's* marshland development plan where project investors formulated plans and then looked to Iraqi ministries to adopt them as they were. While the Minister expressed concerns about the declining water supply in Iraq due to dam construction in upriver countries like Turkey, Azzam argued that making the marshes a priority would not take a prohibitive amount of water. At the last stakeholder meeting I attended in Amman, Dennis Heatherington told me that he was not sure how much longer he would continue his involvement with the marsh restoration project. It depended, he said, on the commitment of *Nature Iraq* to marshland community participation in the marsh project.

Rupture III: Gamal

At the April meetings, I met Gamal for the second time. A portly man with white hair and neatly pressed shirts, Gamal had always been welcoming to me and I looked forward to seeing him. Gamal was much, much more distressed than the last time I saw

him a couple of months ago in February. He seemed worn down like so many others who said that they were mentally exhausted. As we sat down to talk, Gamal couldn't concentrate to tell me about his work. Instead, he told me that the violence was inescapable. He had personally been kidnapped three times on his way to or from work. Gamal wasn't able to stop thinking about it because people would constantly tell him bad stories, about those who were killed or those who were kidnapped and tortured. There was no escape. Drawing from the example of *Nature Iraq*, Gamal tried to convince his Ministry to open a temporary office in Erbil or in Sulaimaniya where it was relatively safe to work and where employees could work a normal business day. The Ministry was not receptive. At that moment, Gamal told me, the security was constantly pressing on his mind. He thought about moving his family up to Kurdistan or outside of Iraq to escape the violence. He worried about it incessantly. The situation, he said, had gotten worse over the last three months. Not only had Nedah been killed, but also other friends had been killed. He told me that the climate on the street could change abruptly, with a snap of the fingers. He was worried that the civil war was only hours away. As Gamal spoke tears welled in his eyes and he removed his glasses to catch them. He prided himself on his integrity and carried himself with dignity. When disputes erupted between ministerial representatives, Gamal was the one people looked to in order to negotiate an agreement. He had hit his emotional limit and as we spoke, I watched him come undone.

He said the US government could do more. They could close the city of Baghdad, put up blockades, and secure the area. Leaving it open was not going to solve the security problem. Gamal told me that the last time he saw people at the April stakeholder meeting was during the February meeting. Even though they worked in the same neighborhood of Baghdad, he did not see his colleagues routinely. People had become cautious about going to work.

Other ministerial representatives told me that they did not take the same route to work twice in order to avoid establishing any daily patterns. Patterns were the most deadly, they said, because routine exposed you to attack. Gamal only saw his colleagues at the Ministry of Water Resources. He looked at me and said the most important thing on everyone's mind is "the security." It was impossible to be effective in your work, he said, when you're depressed and worried all the time. When he left Baghdad, as during these meetings, he forgot how bad the situation was. So when the US government kept to the Green Zone, it would be hard for them to *feel* how people are feeling. It would be hard for them to understand or realize how bad the security situation really was. Gamal said that they could not know what people were coping with on a daily basis.

By the end of the April stakeholder meetings AcquaTerra stepped in to hire Gamal as a consultant. Through their relationship with *Nature Iraq*, which had an established office in Amman, the company whisked Gamal and his family to Jordan. Given AcquaTerra's investment in the hydrology of the marshes, Gianluca, a director there, had been working with Gamal for a while. When Gamal approached him, Gianluca told me, he moved immediately to do what he could to assist and he was relieved he could help.

During those April meetings other ministerial representatives approached AcquaTerra and Bionatura as well, asking to come on board as contractors so that they too could leave Iraq for Jordan. Some approached Azzam and asked if *Nature Iraq* could take them on and move them to Kurdistan. As violence in Baghdad intensified and attacks against ministries became routine, companies working on marsh restoration were seen as a resource for getting out. Gamal was a special case for these organizations because he was seen as an asset to their project, someone they had

relied upon for a while. Given who he was they jumped to assist. There was no open door policy for ministerial representatives.

This was a contrast from how *Nature Iraq* treated its own scientific staff. Azzam sought to protect his staff as much as possible, going to lengths to find work for people to do who could not make the move to Kurdistan. He wanted to retain his staff even if it meant that a former field scientist would keep his job with the organization by translating documents or doing other administrative work from home. After the attack, the Baghdad office would be closed. Azzam worried about finding a job for personnel like the Baghdad office cook, a woman most of his staff complained could not cook well. When she needed expensive surgery and had no insurance, Azzam stepped in and personally paid her medical bill. People did not understand why he would keep her. As mentioned previously, when Azzam and other ornithological consultants noticed that Mohammad had a talent for birds, he and others worked to get him into a graduate program at a London University and personally planned to bear some of the cost for his education. Azzam saw his role in marsh restoration as a sort of guardianship—a custodian of the marshes and a mentor to his staff. He had sacrificed his relationship with his family and given up a lucrative career to work on the project. His intentions were beneficent, but he did not recognize that the effects of his work created challenges for the Iraqis who carried out the marsh restoration mandate.

Whereas Azzam could protect his staff because they worked for him directly, he couldn't protect the ministers who liaised with the organization. In Iraq their lives were at risk and there was no easy remedy. In the labor of marsh reconstruction, there were the team of *Nature Iraq* scientists who went to the field and analyzed samples in the Baghdad labs and there were the ministerial representatives who collaborated with the organization and worked to marry their objectives to international law and policy through Iraqi governance. In other words, it was the *Nature Iraq* scientific team and the Iraqi

ministries that actualized marsh revitalization. Whereas *Nature Iraq* employees gained protection from their work, those at the ministries were fundamentally on their own.

Conclusion: War and Environment

The Iraqi marshlands national park was meant to highlight the ecological riches of the southern Iraqi wetlands and showcase Iraq's ties with Sumerian civilization. Attention to the environment was meant to accomplish several things: 1) it would create a vibrant tourist economy, thereby welcoming foreign visitors into Iraq once again; 2) it would provide opportunities for the education of Iraqis, thereby increasing awareness of issues like environment at a time when environmentalism and conservation had become the hallmark signs of justice and ethical governance; and 3) it would enliven international scholarship on wetlands by facilitating research of foreign scholars in partnership with Iraqi academics in the marsh environs. In planning the national park, marsh investors instituted an *economy of life* whereby the properties of environment were linked directly to the instruments of international conservation, commerce, and capital. While ecological life became the subject of unprecedented international attention, the representatives of ministries, whose task it was to prepare and submit Iraq's applications to global treaties and conventions, withstood extreme personal violence to bring the plans to bear. As investors brought the marshes to life, Iraqi ministerial representatives faced death. In the marshes, what is referred to as "nature" or "environment" is quite literally the aesthetic trace of international power. The image of the marshlands national park was as much the picture of human devastation as it was the more hopeful sign of Iraqi revitalization.

Several months after our last meeting, I visited Nicola at his small office on the edge of the Italian Dolomites and the foothills of the Alps. Like others, he had taken Nedah's death to heart and it seemed to me that he just didn't enjoy the project as much after she passed. I had a particular fondness for Nicola from the moment I told him about

my project, and he grew excited by the idea that I was studying the reconstruction effort and not the marshes proper. During our interview in his office, I asked him about working from a distance. He told me that he felt as if he were “designing in the dark.” He wasn’t sure if the plans he drafted for the park would become a reality or not and he wasn’t used to that. As an architect, he liked to see the buildings. Nicola told me, “Normally, I work in reality.”¹⁹³



Figure 59: Photos from Nicola's office¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ Nicola. December 6, 2007. Personal Conversation. Belluno, Italy.

¹⁹⁴ Top left corner, a montage of his personal photographs from Iraq framed and hung on the wall behind his desk. Top right corner, close up on the photo of Nicola and Nedah. Bottom center, the view from inside Nicola's office out on the Alpine town.

Conclusion

Magic



Figure 60: Azzam and Scott Pelley in the marshes for 60 Minutes¹⁹⁵

"I gotta tell you, this is not like any part of Iraq I've ever seen before," Pelley noted, as they boated past thick, lush and green reeds rising out of the water.

"Right? I mean, when you say Iraq, it's a desert, right? It's burning oil," Alwash said. "It's magical, is what it is. This is magic."

—60 Minutes feature on *Nature Iraq*, November 2009

Almost a year after President Bush walked out of the White House and boarded the helicopter back to Texas, the restoration of the Iraqi marshes continued to make headline news. The story of a revived Eden began as a platform for the Iraqi Opposition Movement in Exile and the US government to make the case for the removal of Saddam Hussein. By 2007 it had become transnational. This dissertation has argued that

¹⁹⁵ The 60 Minutes Story "Iraq's Marshlands: Resurrecting Eden" aired on November 15, 2009 as a feature story that covered anchorman Scott Pelley's visit to the marshes with a news crew and Azzam Alwash (60 Minutes November 15, 2009).

environmentalism provided a means by which foreign investors, from governments to international and supranational organizations to private businesses, could enter Iraq under the guise of altruism. Through environment these foreign marsh advocates advanced the neoliberal mandate of re-integrating Iraq into a global political and economic infrastructure that favored foreign interests and preserved foreign bodies. Furthermore, this dissertation has argued that foreign investors working on marsh restoration created and adapted technologies for distanced administration of the project. Foreign project administrators and experts were safely ensconced in their offices drafting hydraulic plans for marsh regeneration and creating architectural drafts for the national park as the Iraqi scientists they employed traveled deep into the marsh to extract the hydraulic and biological samples that would substantiate restoration. The result was a radical inequality of life: marsh restoration privileged the ecological over the human. This politicization of life in “post-conflict” Iraq confirmed the power of a foreign network as sovereign. What registered in mainstream media as the enchantment of environmental redemption had political effects that went publicly unacknowledged.

Emergence

The popularity of marsh restoration had to do with a number of factors emerging collectively in the early twenty-first century. Environmentalism gained international prominence and recognition steadily from the mid-twentieth century up to the present. Through the UN treaties that governed environment, ecology was globally recognized for its intrinsic worth. Legally UN conventions established environment as a fundamental political right ensuring *life*. Such doctrines positioned environment as a moralizing force that could be brought to bear on codes of wartime ethics and political rule.

International recognition of environment as a moral domain enabled the US government to cite Saddam Hussein’s draining of the marsh in 1991 as a warrant for

military intervention in 2003. Six years later, despite Pelosi's attempts to refute it within the US government, the logic prevailed. Scott Pelley greeted his 60 Minutes Sunday evening audience with the opening line: "It turns out Saddam Hussein did possess a weapon of mass destruction and he used it in a slaughter that few people had heard of until now" (60 Minutes November 15, 2009). Pelley continued by describing the draining of the marsh as a kind of crime against humanity that resulted in a massive assault on a civilization, the "ma'adan," who had lived in the wetlands for thousands of years. Before breaking to footage of his journey through the marsh, he noted "Saddam used water in a strike against his own people not even an atom bomb could match" (60 Minutes November 15, 2009). The 60 Minutes piece described the marsh in terms established by contemporary advocates who used the language postcolonial travelers Field and Thesiger used to elaborate an image of the marsh more than a half century before at another time of foreign influence.

Pelley's hyperbolic language overstated the importance of the marshes; in my experience most people in the United States and countries outside of Iraq likely did not even know the marshes existed. His narration, however, pointed to the ways that the marshes had been politically instrumental for the US government, as in the case of President Bush who attempted to use them as a rationale for pursuing the 2003 invasion of Iraq, and marsh advocates, who likened the draining to an assault on a delicate ecosystem and the intentional destruction of a region they described as a living Sumerian enclave. Governments, exiles, and international organizations alike used this kind of story about the marshes as a way to pursue marsh restoration and, in the process, gain footing in reconstruction-era Iraq.

The logic therefore laid the groundwork for investment in Iraq as much as it did for the war itself. The most powerful effects of marsh restoration lay in the creation of a new national economy that privileged foreign investment. Through marsh restoration,

foreign governments and international experts re-established connections with Iraqi scientists and members of government. Their efforts to restore the marsh included numerous trainings by foreign experts for Iraqis, whose science was deemed outdated. This monopoly of expertise established the authority of foreign leadership for the marsh project (see Mitchell 2002:211).

Trainings experts organized were not held in Iraq, but all over the world and moved Iraqis round the globe to ensure that they would acquire technical skills needed for research. Iraqis attended workshops on national park creation, ornithology, remote sensing, and basic computer programming; it was a practical education for project specific goals that did not prepare Iraqis to lead these initiatives but to supply data to foreign experts who administered the marsh initiative. Critical at these workshops was not the subject matter, which was often too basic or too complicated for the customary two weeks allotted. What really mattered was that Iraqis learn to embody a new kind of citizenship. For many Iraqis these workshops were their first experience getting on a plane. Iraqis were asked to master social fluency in circles of international environmental advocacy by adopting the comportment of the globally mobile jet-setting elite who flew from one continent to the next.

Endurance



Figure 61: The Kufa Gallery now a marketing firm, December 2007

In December 2007 I returned to London to follow up with organizations and colleagues I met before I lived in Amman. On one crisp evening I walked through Notting Hill at dusk to the Kufa Gallery eager to see Mohamed Makiya and to learn about recent happenings. I arrived to find a small marketing firm in place of the gallery. A confused associate told me that they had taken over the space some time ago. As this meeting place for Iraqi exiles closed its doors, *Nature Iraq* continued to gain international prominence.

Nature Iraq thrived where other exile projects had not because it tapped into a global movement with greater longevity that had the infrastructure necessary for foreign investment and that appealed to both the politically Left and Right. The organization capitalized on the momentum it got in the lead up to and the early years of the war and secured its staying power because of its environmental mandate, its strategic location (in proximity to Zubair oil field), and its resonance with contemporary economic and political reforms in Iraq. On October 17, 2007 Hawizeh earned environmental protection as a

wetland of strategic importance under the Ramsar Convention. UNESCO today recognizes the “Mesopotamian Marshes” on a tentative list for admission as a World Heritage Site (UNESCO October 29, 2003).

Despite its political and media successes *Nature Iraq* continues to face challenges on the ground in the marsh. In the spring and summer of 2009, media reported that the marshes were drying once again due to drought (Flintoff March 9, 2009; Robertson July 13, 2009). More recent reports, including the 60 Minutes story, indicate that the drought has either not been long-lasting or that other areas of the marshes remain inundated (60 Minutes November 15, 2009; Shafy August 3, 2010). Regardless *Nature Iraq* will have to contend with ecological limits of restoration, the political priorities of the national government which don't always overlap when it comes to the allocation of water resources, and the beginning of oil prospecting at Zubair (Williams November 3, 2009). As conditions in the south remain such that it is difficult to work in the marsh, Azzam Alwash and *Nature Iraq* have begun to concentrate their environmental work in Kurdistan where they are able to maintain ground operations. Already the organization is encouraging ecotourism in Iraq's northern “wonderland” (BBC News September 23, 2010). Though Kurdistan is beautiful, the image does not convey the same magic as what marsh advocates typically described as a 5,000 year Sumerian oasis that sits above one of the country's supergiant oil fields.

History

Whatever the future holds for *Nature Iraq* and the Iraqi marshes, the movement to restore the marshes made a lasting impact on the country. Environmentalism became big business in Iraq, weaving the marshes into national heritage. In 2008 history



Figure 62: NPR photo for story on Iraqi marsh history in textbooks

textbooks were revised to include Saddam Hussein's order to drain the marshes in response to the 1991 Intifadah. When asked about current day events in Iraq, one child replied "the events following the US invasion in 2003 are still too fresh to be included" (Lawrence October 14, 2009).

In "post-conflict" Iraq marsh restoration had identifiable effects. The distanced approach environmental and humanitarian organizations took in order to preserve the lives of program administrators has become a viable method for managing reconstruction operations in Afghanistan and for preserving US lives in military campaigns throughout the Middle East and South Asia. Illumination of the marsh amplified an ecosystem in ways that occluded Iraqi experience of the ground, enabling post-war planning to continue without taking account of the violent present. The project moved forward largely without recognition of the people who lived in the marshes. It was as if the ecosystem existed independently of the local communities who made it their

home. The choice not to take marsh residents into account, and the administrative structure of restoration which preserved the sanctity of—largely foreign—project administrators while deploying Iraqi residents into the marsh, introduced valuations of life that privileged the foreign over Iraq, and the ecological over the human. These changes assisted the UN sanctioned revival of foreign influence and investment in Iraq—change investors realized through the Iraqi environment.

Appendices

Appendix I: Timeline of Major Events in Iraq

October 2001	Tom Warwick at the U.S. Department of State post-Saddam transition in Iraq by assembling a group of over 200 Iraqi engineers, lawyers, businesspeople, doctors and other experts into 17 working groups including one on water, agriculture, and environment. See: http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB198/index.htm
January 29, 2002	President Bush's State of the Union names Iraq as part of the 'Axis of Evil'
April 29, 2002	Preparation for Iraq invasion begins, Bush Administration announces plan for an air and ground invasion using 70,000 to 250,000 troops
May 22, 2002	President Bush travels to Berlin to convince European leaders that he will listen, if not accept, their advice as he decides foreign policy as concerns Iraq, Iran, and the Middle East
July 2002	Future of Iraq Project meetings begin. In total the U.S. State Department held 33 meetings between July 2002 and early April 2003. Azzam Alwash, Director of Nature Iraq, was a member of the Future of Iraq Project along with Kanan Makiya and other prominent Iraqi politicians and members of the Iraqi Opposition Movement. See: http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB198/index.htm
August 9, 2002	Bush Administration officials meet with members of the Iraqi Opposition Movement in Washington, DC including Ahmed Chalabi of the Iraqi National Congress; Ayad Allawi of the Iraqi National Accord; Jalal Talabani of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan; Hoshyar Zebari who acted as an aide to Masoud Barzani, leader of the Kurdish Democratic Party; and Abdel Azziz al-Hakim, a representative of SCIRI (later ISCI, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq) a Shiite group. The Opposition Movement announced that they secured American support for a conference that would discuss the future of Iraq if Saddam Hussein were removed from power.
September 12, 2002	President Bush speaks at the United Nations, challenging the UN to force Saddam Hussein to disarm and end his regime's repression of Iraqi people.
October 11, 2002	The Senate follows the House to authorize President Bush

to use force against Iraq, giving him a broad mandate.

November 8, 2002 The United Nations approves Resolution 1441, urging Iraq to disarm or face serious consequences.

November 18-26, 2002 Ramsar Convention Meetings in Valencia, Spain. Azzam lobbies for the Iraq marshes to be considered for adjudication to the Ramsar convention protecting the site as a wetland of international importance. He is locked out of the official meeting space.

November 25, 2002 UN weapons inspectors return to Iraq

December 7, 2002 Iraq gives UN 12,000 pages on weapons

December 14-16, 2002 Iraq Opposition Conference held in London. Participants in the conference include prominent Iraqi exiles and members of the Iraqi Opposition Movement. The meeting drafts a document that supports invasion and outlines several items that could be included in the new constitution, including the restoration of the Iraqi marshlands. See: <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/12/14/world/threats-responses-opposition-hussein-foes-meet-london-but-rivalries-fracture.html>

At the end of the conference, a 65 member committee was formed that was intended to provide the nucleus for a post-Saddam government. See: <http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2002-12/a-2002-12-17-32-Iraqi.cfm>

December 18, 2002 U.S. military gives preliminary approval for deployment of up to 50,000 troops allowing the President to attack as early as January.

January 10, 2003 Kanan Makiya, Brandeis Professor and author of *Republic of Fear*, Rend Rahim Francke, Executive Director of the Iraq Foundation (sponsor of Nature Iraq), and Hatem Mukhlis, a New York Iraqi-American physician, were invited to meet President Bush at the White House. Makiya tells President Bush that invading American troops would be greeted by Iraqis with “sweets and flowers.” See: <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/01/12/world/threats-responses-opposition-iraqi-dissidents-reassured-talk-with-bush-about.html?scp=1&sq=Makiya%20President%20Bush%20January%202003&st=cse>
http://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/02/magazine/02IRAQ.html?scp=4&sq=Iraq%20London%20Conference&st=cse&page_wanted=2

January 27, 2003 Hans Blix, chief U.N. weapons inspector, states that Iraq did not cooperate with the I.A.E.A. investigation.

February 5, 2003 Secretary of State Colin Powell presents evidence to the U.N. aimed at proving Saddam Hussein posed an imminent threat.

March 17, 2003 President Bush gives Saddam Hussein 48 hours to exit Iraq

March 19, 2003 Combat in Iraq begins

March 31, 2003	9/11 Commission hearings begin and continue through June 17, 2004. In total the Commission sat for twelve hearings.
April 9, 2003	Saddam Hussein's statue in Firdos Square is toppled
April 10, 2003	U.S. backed Islamic cleric Sheikh Abdel Majid al-Khoei, head of the London based Khoei Foundation is killed by a group of rival Shiite leaders in Najaf.
April 11, 2003	Chaos sweeps Baghdad streets as stores are looted and ministries burned.
April 21, 2003	Coalition Provisional Authority launched. The C.P.A. operates until June 28, 2004 and derived authority from UN Security Council Resolution 1483.
May 1, 2003	Aboard the U.S.S. Lincoln President Bush declares the end of major combat operations in Iraq.
May 6, 2003	L. Paul Bremer named U.S. Special Envoy to Iraq.
May 16, 2003	Bremer announces that Iraqi self rule will be delayed indefinitely. Looting and widespread violence cited as a threat to quick transfer
May 22, 2003	The U.N. Security Council votes to end 13 years of sanctions against Iraq and passes Resolution 1483 giving the U.S. and allies a mandate to occupy and rebuild the country. Specifies the role of the IMF and the World Bank in reconstruction at the same time that it authorizes humanitarian involvement. See: http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N03/368/53/PDF/N0336853.pdf?OpenElement
May 23, 2003	Bremer disbands the Iraqi Army. Post Conflict Branch UNEP Geneva holds first meeting for marsh advocates on Iraqi marsh restoration in Geneva, Switzerland. Alwash for the Iraq Foundation, U.S. Aid, IUCN, the WWF, and several Italian government representatives and private contractors attend.
June 22, 2003	Widespread disruptions in electrical grid, water, and sewage networks reported as a result of looting and sabotage.
June 24, 2003	Implementation of the Iraq Trust Fund. At the request of donors at the Iraq Donors Meeting held in New York on June 24, 2003 UNDG (the United Nations Development Group) and the World Bank created The Iraq Trust Fund, known officially as <i>the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq</i> , (IRFFI or the Facility).
July 13, 2003	The Iraqi Governing Council, selected by the U.S. and a group of Iraqi exiles and political parties, meets for the first time. The 25 members of this interim Iraqi government are members of the Iraqi elite and representatives of the former Iraqi Opposition Movement including Ayad Allawi, Masoud Barzani (his aide Hoshyar Zebari is elected IGC Press Secretary), Abdel Azziz al-Hakim, Jalal Talabani, and Ahmed Chalabi.
July 20, 2003	U.S. troops in Mosul kill Saddam Hussein's sons Uday and Qusay
August 14, 2003	UN Security Council Resolution 1500 recognizes the establishment of the Iraqi Governing Council on July 13,

August 19, 2003	<p>2003 and establishes the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) to support the Secretary General in fulfillment of the UN commitment to Iraq for 12 months.</p> <p>U.N. Headquarters destroyed in Baghdad, the blast kills Sergio Vieira de Mello, the Special Envoy and top U.N. representative to Iraq. Partow is in town for UNEP meetings with the Iraqi Governing Council and, due to scheduling changes, escapes the blast.</p>
October 11, 2003	<p>The New York Times reports that the majority of aid workers have left Iraq after a series of attacks. Quietly since the bombing of its headquarters, the U.N. reduced its staff from a peak of 600 in August to 35. Even the International Committee of the Red Cross, typically the last to leave, cut its staff from 130 to 30. The UN begins to rely heavily on its staff of 4,233 Iraqis to deliver essential services including food distributed through the World Food Programme and 3 million gallons of water daily in Baghdad and Basra through UNICEF. See:</p> <p>http://www.nytimes.com/2003/10/12/world/struggle-for-iraq-reconstruction-aid-workers-leaving-iraq-fearing-they-are.html?scp=1&sq=%22Aid%20Workers%22%20Iraq&st=cse</p>
December 10, 2003	<p>The Pentagon excludes countries that did not support the war effort from bidding on Iraq reconstruction contracts.</p>
December 13, 2003	<p>Saddam Hussein is captured near Tikrit</p>
January 25, 2004	<p>David Kay, the CIA's former chief weapons inspector announces that the U.S. was wrong in its prewar belief that Iraq had stockpiles of illicit weapons.</p>
March 8, 2004	<p>Interim Constitution signed by the Iraqi Governing Council</p>
March 17, 2004	<p>Nancy Pelosi questions inclusion of Iraqi marsh drainage in a House Bill 564 citing official reasons for U.S. intervention in Iraq. This Bill was issued in light of the recent revelation that U.S. intelligence did not support the pre-war claim that Iraq had storehouses weapons of mass destruction.</p>
March 24, 2004	<p>Richard A. Clarke, former National Coordinator for Counterterrorism at the National Security Council, testifies before the 9/11 Commission about White House counterterrorism strategy prior to the attack. See:</p> <p>http://www.9-11commission.gov/hearings/hearing8.htm</p>
March 31, 2004	<p>Four Blackwater contractors killed in Falluja</p>
April 2004	<p>The Iraqi uprising intensifies, several Shiite shrines attacked over the last year, roadside bombings are responsible for most deaths of U.S. personnel, and the U.S. delays bringing troops home. In April dozens of Iraqi civilians are killed in country-wide attacks.</p>
April 28, 2004	<p>Abuses at Abu Ghraib revealed</p>
May 11, 2004	<p>American captive decapitated and Zarqawi claims responsibility</p>
May 20, 2004	<p>House approves \$447 billion in military spending on Iraq war</p>

- June 1, 2004 Iraqi Governing Council appoints Ayad Allawi interim Prime Minister and Barham Salih Deputy Prime Minister. The IGC also appointed a cabinet of 33 diverse members, only a handful of whom served on the Council. Upon making the decision, the IGC dissolved itself. Lakhdar Brahimi, the UN Envoy, oversaw the UN – led process. His involvement was intended to add credibility to the decision. See: <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/06/01/international/middleeast/01CND-IRAQ.html?pagewanted=1>
- June 8, 2004 UN Security Council Resolution 1546 recognizes the dissolution of the Coalition Provisional Authority and the sovereignty of the Iraqi state with the establishment of the Iraqi Interim Government. It documents that the continued presence of the Multinational Forces – Iraq is at the bequest of the Iraqi Interim Government and sanctions their presence for a period of 12 months. Outlines that the MNF-I will provide security for United Nations staff in Iraq.
- June 28, 2004 In a surprise, two days early Iraq leaders are granted formal sovereignty. After Bremer leaves Iraq, the Coalition Provisional Authority is quietly dismantled. See : RAND National Security Research Division. 2009. *Occupying Iraq: A History of the Coalitional Provisional Authority*. Pittsburgh, PA: RAND Corporation, 326.
- August 12, 2004 UN Security Council Resolution 1557 extends the mandate of UNAMI in Iraq for a period of 12 months.
- October 19, 2004 Margaret Hassan, Director of CARE International in Iraq and long time Baghdad resident with Iraqi family members, is kidnapped.
- October 24, 2004 Huge cache of explosives vanishes in Iraq
- October 2004 Venice meeting of Eden Again, Italian government, Italian engineering firms and early Iraqi marsh project investors.
- October 28 – 30, 2004 Harvard Conference on the Mesopotamian Marshes in Boston. Azzam Alwash of Eden Again; Baroness Nicholson of the E.U.Parliament; Hassan Partow of UNEP’s Post Conflict Branch; Latif Rashid, the Minister of Water Resources; Ed Theriot, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; and Khalid Irani, then Executive Director of the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature and future Minister of Environment for Jordan were all in attendance along with Nik Wheeler who traveled to the Iraqi marshes in the 1970s to photograph the area, several British and U.S. scientists, and a slew of engineers.
- November 7, 2004 Seige of Falluja begins
- November 17, 2004 Video of Margaret Hassan’s execution is released to the public. Her death emphasizes that no aid worker, irrespective of esteem or residence, is above reproach.
- January 2005 First Eden Again Key Bird Area expedition to the marshes. The team is kidnapped. Two women are immediately released, the others are held for \$25,000 USD ransom.

- January 30, 2005 Amidst widespread violence, Interim Prime Minister Allawi insists that elections proceed as usual and on January 30, 2005 Iraqi elections held. During his campaign to retain his office, Azzam Alwash of Nature Iraq acts as Allawi's campaign manager. Many Sunnis protest the elections and stay home from the polls. The Shia United Iraqi Alliance wins a majority of seats.
- July 13, 2005 Iraqi civilian death toll rising, statistics to date range between Iraqi Interior Ministry estimate of 12,000 to Bloomberg School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins University estimate of 100,000
- April 6, 2005 After months of political wrangling, the 275 members of the Iraqi transitional National Assembly elected the nation's new president, Kurdish leader Jalal Talabani and two vice presidents, Adel Abdul Mahdi, a Shiite, and interim President Ghazi al-Yawar, a Sunni Arab.
- April 7, 2005 President Talabani and his two Vice Presidents, who together form the Presidency Council, name Dawa Party leader Ibrahim al-Jaafari prime minister of Iraq. Jaafari replaces interim Prime Minister Allawi, the American favorite for the post. Iraq's transitional government is a parliamentary democracy with a legislature, executive branch, and independent judiciary. In the Executive Branch, the Prime Minister exercises the most political power, with the role of President more akin to a chairman of the board rather than a CEO. The transitional government will write a permanent constitution and run the country until the election of a permanent government. The election is initially scheduled for December 31, 2005. See: Council on Foreign Relations "Iraq: The Transitional Government" <http://www.cfr.org/publication/8078/iraq.html>
- August 8, 2005 Iraqi leaders submit draft constitution to the National Assembly
- August 11, 2005 UN Security Council Resolution 1619 extends the mandate of UNAMI in Iraq for another 12 months.
- August 2005 Nature Iraq and CIMI, an Iraqi marshland project sponsored by the Canadian government and the University of Waterloo, bring several Iraqi scientists to Montreal for the INTECOL conference.
- October 15, 2005 Iraqi Constitution, written largely by Kurds and Shiite members of government, narrowly passes

- October 18, 2005 Saddam Hussein trial. Preliminary charges outlined at his first court appearance on July 1, 2004 included: 1) Anfal ethnic cleansing campaign against Kurds in 1988; 2) gassing Kurds in Halabja in 1988; 3) invasion of Kuwait, 1990; 4) crushing the Kurdish and Shia rebellions after the 1991 Gulf War and the subsequent draining of the southern marshlands; 5) killing political activists over 30 years; 6) massacre of members of the Kurdish Barzani tribe in 1983; and 7) killing of religious leaders in 1974. More precise charges were rendered during his trial. See: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3320293.stm
- October 31, 2005 Campaigning for the December 15th parliamentary elections begins and Ayad Allawi tries to regain office with a secular platform. See: <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/31/international/middleeast/31elect.html?scp=8&sq=allawi+election&st=nyt>
- November 8, 2005 UN Security Council Resolution 1637 extends the mandate of the Multinational Forces in Iraq until December 31, 2006. Extends the arrangements outlined in Security Council Resolution 1483 for the proceeds of export sales of petroleum, petroleum products, and natural gas to be deposited in the Development Fund for Iraq and for this fund to continue to be monitored by the International Advisory and Monitoring Board. Additionally, 1637 authorizes MNF-I to provide humanitarian and reconstruction assistance.
- December 15, 2005 First Parliamentary Election to fill 275 seats in the Council of Representatives.
- February 22, 2006 Bombing of Askariya shrine in Samarra, one of the holiest Shiite shrines, sets off sectarian conflict around the country.
- March 25, 2006 Baghdad's homicide rate triples to 33 a day. From March 7 to March 21, 191 bodies, badly mutilated, surface in garbage bins, drainage ditches, minibuses, and pickup trucks.
- April 9, 2006 A joint report from the U.S. Embassy and the military command details the changing nature of the Iraq war, raising concerns over growing sectarian and ethnic conflict
- April 22, 2006 Maliki, leader of the Dawa Party, made first permanent Prime Minister of Iraq and Barham Salih is appointed his Deputy Prime Minister. Jalal Talabani is elected President and Tariq al-Hashemi and Adel Abdul Mahdi are elected his Vice Presidents.
- May 2006 Over the last ten months the middle class exodus from Iraq swelled to about 7 % of the country's population and a quarter of its middle class.
- May 20, 2006 Iraq's first permanent post-Saddam government, the unity government, is approved by Parliament and sworn in. See: <http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/meast/05/20/iraq.main/index.html>
- May 29 – June 9, 2006 UNEP IMOS training course on remote sensing in Geneva, Switzerland

June 3, 2006	Senior Iraqi and American officials cite attacks on oil pipelines as responsible for making the network more vulnerable to smuggling
June 7, 2006	Zarqawi is killed
June 2006	More than 100 civilians killed per day in Iraq, UN reports
July 27, 2006	International Compact of Iraq formed by the UN and the Government of Iraq. The Compact was designed to create a new partnership with the international community and to build a strong framework for Iraq's continued political, security and economic transformation and integration into the regional and global economy
August 2006	Nature Iraq exhibit of bird photographs at RSCN's Wild Jordan Center in Amman.
August 10, 2006	UN Security Council Resolution 1700 extends the mandate of UNAMI in Iraq for another 12 months at the bequest of the Foreign Minister of the constitutionally elected Government of Iraq as outlined in a letter to the Secretary General dated August 3, 2006. Recognizes the work of the International Compact of Iraq.
October 4, 2006	New counterinsurgency strategy that emphasizes protection of civilians announced
October 16, 2006	Abdul Azziz al-Hakim wins support from Parliament for his Bill to form an autonomous state from nine southern provinces. See: http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/12/world/middleeast/12iraq.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=%22In%20Victory%20for%20Shiite%20Leader%22&st=cse
November 5, 2006	Saddam Hussein sentenced to death for the killings of 148 civilians in Dujail in 1982
November 8, 2006	Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld resigns
November 23, 2006	Bombings kill 144 people and wound 206 in the Shiite district of Sadr City in Baghdad. Dozens of Sunni insurgents lay siege to the Shiite run Ministry of Health before fleeing when troops arrive
November 28, 2006	UN Security Council Resolution 1723 urges the formation of a national unity government in Iraq and Prime Minister Maliki's National Reconciliation Plan. Sanctions the continued presence of the Multinational Forces in Iraq until December 31, 2007.
December 6, 2006	Iraq Study Group calls for shift in U.S. policy in Iraq.
December 2006	Nature Iraq Azraq Oasis training in Jordan for Iraq Ministerial employees and Nature Iraq staff.
December 18, 2006	Pentagon report says that the number of attacks against Americans and Iraqis rose to its highest level over the summer and autumn with an average of 960 attacks each week
December 30, 2006	Saddam Hussein executed
January 4, 2007	General Petraeus named top military commander in Iraq

- January 10, 2007 President Bush announces the “New Way Forward,” the Iraq military surge with a buildup of over 20,000 troops over the next six months. In actuality, closer to 30,000 troops were deployed when Bush announced in March that he would be sending an additional 8,200 troops to Iraq and Afghanistan. Most mainstream media cite the number at 30,000 in Iraq. See:
<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/09/world/middleeast/09surge.html?scp=38&sq=u.s.+surge+iraq&st=nyt>
- January 31, 2007 The independent Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction reports that despite nearly \$108 billion budgeted for Iraqi reconstruction, electrical output and oil production still function below pre-war levels.
- February 15-17, 2007 First Nature Iraq Sulaimaniya meetings
- March 26, 2007 Daily Show spoofs Nature Iraq’s *Field Guide* to birding in Iraq.
- April 14, 2007 Nature Iraq offices in Baghdad are invaded by militia
- April 25 – 28, 2007 Second Nature Iraq Sulaimaniya meeting. April 25 - 26th internal Nature Iraq staff meetings between Azzam and the NI Iraqi scientific team. April 27 – 28th official meetings between Nature Iraq, Italian contractors, and Iraqi Ministries.
- May 3, 2007 Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon launch the International Compact with Iraq in Sharm al-Shiekh to build a framework for Iraq’s integration into the regional and global economy. See:
<http://www.iraqcompact.org/en/about.asp>
- June 10, 2007 The U.S. military reaches out to Anbar Sheikhs to expel Al Qaeda operatives in the region
- July 2-3, 2007 Third Nature Iraq meeting in Sulaimaniya with the Italian contractors and the Ministry of Environment. In a surprising turn, the Ministry of Water Resources declines to attend.
- June – August 2007 UN offices in Amman under the leadership of OCHA plan a major redirection of humanitarian work in Iraq, directing focus away from reconstruction and toward emergency assistance for the first time since President Bush declared the end of combat operations in Iraq on May 1, 2003.
- August 10, 2007 UN Security Council Resolution 1770 extends the mandate of UNAMI in Iraq for another 12 months and outlines a series of specific tasks that they will assist the Iraqi government with during this time including work on reconciliation, implementing the International Compact on Iraq, humanitarian assistance, and economic development.
- August 14, 2007 Attacks in Kurdish area kill 190 in town near Syrian border
- August 28, 2007 Despite commitment from U.S. government to take in Iraqis who assisted the U.S. operation in Iraq, Iraqis still find the process impossible for most
- August 29, 2007 Sadr cease fire
- September 7-9, 2007 Fourth Nature Iraq investor meeting, held in Amman due to cholera epidemic in northern Iraq. Unlike other meetings, this one is moderated by a specialist in leadership training.

September 9, 2007	Petraeus testifies in Congress, warning against a rapid pullback of troops. Surge effectiveness is publicly acknowledged by media.
October 30, 2007	Secretary of State Rice and Secretary of Defense Gates agree that State Department security convoys will be under military control
November 2007	The number of military deaths rises, making 2007 the deadliest year of the war for U.S. Troops
December 18, 2007	UN Security Council Resolution 1790 extends the mandate of the Multinational Forces – Iraq until December 31, 2008 and extends arrangements outlined in Resolution 1483 that the proceeds from the sale of petroleum, petroleum products, and natural gas be deposited in the Development Fund for Iraq.
December 30, 2007	General Petraeus issues year end review that states violent attacks in Iraq are down 60% since June and that civilian casualties have sharply declined but cautions that only economic and political progress will ensure stability.
January 12, 2008	Iraqi Parliament passes law that eases restrictions on ex-Baathists, allowing some to return to government but also directing others into retirement.
January 29, 2008	A federal report states that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers charged the government hundreds of millions of dollars for supervising projects in Iraq that have failed or fallen behind schedule because oversight was weak or nonexistent.
February 1, 2008	Female suicide bomber kills 62 at the Ghazil bird market in Baghdad.
April 19, 2008	Al-Sadr's militia cleared from Basra after a monthlong operation that was strongly supported by Iran's Ambassador to Baghdad.
April 24, 2008	Citing recent government crackdown on Shiite militias, Tawafiq, the largest Sunni bloc in the government, returns to Prime Minister Maliki's cabinet after a boycott of nearly a year.
May 20, 2008	Iraqi Troops push deep into Sadr City as Prime Minister Maliki moves to wrest the area from militia control.
June 8, 2008	Former Interim Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari is expelled from the governing Dawa Party for creating a political movement that had opened talks with rivals of Dawa's leader Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki. See: http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/08/world/middleeast/08iraq.html
July 18, 2008	In a concession, President Bush agrees to a general timeline for U.S. troop withdrawals from Iraq.
August 7, 2008	UN Security Council Resolution 1830 extends the mandate of UNAMI in Iraq for 12 months.

- December 22, 2008 UN Security Council Resolution 1859 recognizes the expiration of the mandate for Multinational Forces – Iraq on December 31, 2008. Extends the arrangement outlined in Resolution 1483 for the proceeds of petroleum, petroleum products, and natural gas to be deposited in the Development Fund for Iraq. By early December most countries comprising the Multinational Force coalition begin withdrawing their troops from Iraq. The U.S. negotiated a separate Security Agreement for American troops in Iraq into 2009 and Britain negotiates a separate agreement, but will maintain a much smaller presence in Iraq in early 2009 and plans to finish their work in country in the early months of 2009. See:
<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/06/world/middleeast/06iraq.html?fta=y>
- January 1, 2009 U.S. – Iraq Security Agreement goes into effect. The Security Agreement replaces the UN Security Council Resolution on the presence of Multinational Forces. It stipulates that U.S. troops will leave Iraqi cities by June 30, 2009 and that all remaining troops will leave Iraq by the end of 2011. See:
<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/28/world/middleeast/28iraq.html?pagewanted=1>
- January 31, 2009 Iraqi Provincial elections for local councils in 14 of the 18 provinces; the Dawa Party, the party of Prime Minister Maliki, wins a clear plurality of votes. See:
<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/iraq/elections/index.html>
- April 30, 2009 Britain ends combat operations in Iraq. One month ahead of the May 31st deadline, the UK pulled the 20th Armoured Brigade out of Basra. On March 31, 2009, the UK transferred responsibilities for command of the Basra province to the U.S. military. See:
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/8026136.stm and
<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/01/world/middleeast/01basra.html?scp=5&sq=British%20withdrawal%20from%20Iraq&st=cse>
- June 30, 2009 U.S. troops withdraw from Iraq's cities. Iraqis call the day "Sovereignty Day." See:
http://www.salon.com/opinion/feature/2009/10/26/obama_report_card/
- July 25, 2009 Kurdistan Regional Elections. The Kurdistan Party, Barham Salih's Party, wins a majority of votes. At the time Salih is the Deputy Secretary General of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).
- August 7, 2009 UN Security Council Resolution 1883 extends UNAMI's mandate in Iraq for another 12 months.
- August 19, 2009 Two truck bombs detonated at the Finance Ministry and the Foreign Ministry killing 95 people and wounding 600.

- August 26, 2009 Abdul Azziz al-Hakim dies of cancer in Tehran, he left directive in his will that his son Ammar al-Hakim succeed him in leadership of Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council. See: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/01/world/middleeast/01iraq.html>
- September 1, 2009 Barham Salih steps down as Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq to hold office as the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government. Azad Barwari, member of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) is slated to be his Deputy Prime Minister. Massoud Barzani, who won 70% of the vote to be re-elected President, recommends the two appoint a new cabinet. Once an advocate of a separate Kurdish region, Salih now supports a united Iraq. A charismatic figure, Salih appeared on the Colbert Report June 10, 2009 citing that his PhD in Oceanography prepared him for Iraq political office. His interview aired in the lead up to the Kurdish election. Salih widely uses popular media like Twitter and Facebook to promote his policies. See: <http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/4/67890/> Also see: http://topics.nytimes.com/topics/reference/timestopics/people/b/massoud_barzani/index.html
- October 20, 2009 Mustansiriya University is temporarily closed by Prime Minister Maliki due to murderous student gang attacks on teachers and students. See: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/20/world/middleeast/20university.html?fta=y>
- October 25, 2009 Two coordinated bombings at the Iraqi Defense and the Iraqi Interior Ministry kill upward of 155 people and wound 500. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/27/world/middleeast/27iraq.html?ref=world>
- November 3, 2009 Iraq signs contract with consortium of oil companies to develop its largest oil field. A partnership of British Petroleum and the Chinese National Petroleum Company signed a 20 year deal to develop Rumalia which contains about 17.8 billion barrels of oil. On November 2, 2009, Iraq signed an initial agreement on the 4.1 billion barrel Zubair oil field with a consortium of the multinational Eni, an Italian oil company, the U.S. based Occidental Petroleum, and the Korea Gas Corporation from South Korea. Zubair is the oil field in proximity to the Iraqi marshes. See <http://news.moneycentral.msn.com/ticker/article.aspx?Feed=AP&Date=20091102&ID=10477147&Symbol=OXY> and http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/04/world/middleeast/04iraq.html?_r=1&scp=2&sq=Iraq%20oil&st=cse

November 15, 2009	Azzam Alwash and Nature Iraq are featured on 60 Minutes. Interviewer Scott Pelley begins by saying "It turns out that Saddam Hussein did possess a weapon of mass destruction" and calls the destruction of the marshes an attempt to wipe out a civilization in the cradle of Eden. The story is called "Resurrecting Eden."
March 7, 2010 March 26, 2010	Iraqi National Elections Ayad Allawi's coalition wins the majority of votes in Parliamentary elections making him the Prime Minister elect. Nouri Al-Maliki contests the results as fraudulent. http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/27/world/middleeast/27iraq.html?hp
June 1, 2010	U.S. Troops withdraw from the Green Zone. Iraqi Court ratifies election results, confirming Ayad Allawi's win. Allawi unable to amass a quorum of coalition partners in support of his leadership and no government is seated.
November 10, 2010	Breaking news that Iraqi leaders have reached an agreement for the executive government: Nouri Al-Maliki will retain his Prime Minister post and Jalal Talabani will keep his Presidency. Ayad Allawi's political future remains unclear.

Appendix II: Ethnographic and Archival Research Schedule

Date	Location	Research
May 2003	London, England	Preliminary ethnographic research with Iraqi exiles at community organization.
October 2004	Boston, MA – Harvard	Ethnographic research at Mesopotamian Marshes conference.
March 2005	Chicago, IL – Field Museum	Archival research on Henry Field who published <i>The Anthropology of Iraq</i> in 1934 based on research of the lower Euphrates in 1918. Field later ran a craniometry survey of marsh residents from 1953 – 1958 with the assistance of the Basrah Petroleum Company physician.
August 2005	Montreal, Canada	Ethnographic research at the INTECOL (International Congress of Ecology) conference where Nature Iraq gave several presentations under the sponsorship of CIMI (Canada – Iraq Marsh Initiative) with funds from CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency).
September – December 2005	London, England	Ethnographic research with Iraqi exiles who participated in the Future of Iraq project or Iraqi Opposition Movement. Archival research at the PRO on British colonial work in the Iraq marshes.
March – April 2006	New York, Boston, D.C.	Ethnographic research with reporters covering Iraq, with U.S. Aid and their subcontractor DAI for the Iraqi marsh project, with the U.S. State Department, with Kanan Makiya, and with Mishkat Moumin the first Minister of Environment in Iraq.
May – June 2006	Geneva, Switzerland	Ethnographic research with remote sensing scientists at UNEP’s Post Conflict Branch Iraqi Marshland Observation System (IMOS) program. Participant observation at training of Iraqi scientists as UNEP transferred programmatic responsibility to Iraq.

August 2006 – October 2007	Amman, Jordan	Ethnographic research with Nature Iraq at their headquarters and with UN branches and international NGOs working in Iraq from Jordan.
February 12 – 19, 2007	Sulaimaniya, Iraq	First research trip to new Nature Iraq headquarters to attend stakeholder meetings of the NGO, the Iraqi government, and Italian contractors. The official meeting dates are February 15-17 th .
April 21 -29, 2007	Sulaimaniya, Iraq	Second research trip to attend stakeholder meetings with Nature Iraq, Italian contractors, and Iraqi Ministries. From April 25-26 th Azzam met with Nature Iraq scientific staff only for an “all hands” evaluation and reorientation of the organization. The stakeholder meetings took place April 27 – 28 th .
June 30 – July 7, 2007	Sulaimaniya, Iraq	Third Research trip to attend stakeholder meetings with Nature Iraq, Italian contractors, and Iraqi Ministry of Environment. The Ministry of Water Resources declines to attend. The meetings took place July 2 – 3 rd .
September 7-9, 2007	Amman, Jordan	Fourth stakeholder meeting. This time held in Amman, Jordan due to a Cholera outbreak.
September 10 – October 15, 2007	Delhi, India	Archival research at the India National Archives on Ottoman and British imperial officials working in Iraq marshes in early 1900s to 1922. Trip to Kerala to tour wetlands of similar size, history, and public reputation as the Iraqi marshes to gain additional context.
November – December 2007	London, England; Padua, Belluno, and Rome, Italy	Follow up research in London with Iraqi exiles. Kufa gallery now closed. Research at offices of Italian contractors. Attempted meeting with Italian Ministry of Environment and Territory, but cancelled at last minute as leadership called to business in Iraq.

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