Dina Khoury*

Between Empires and Nation: Memories of the Great War and Iraqi National Identity**

بين الإمبراطوريات والأمة: ذكريات الحرب الكبرى والهوية الوطنية العراقية

Abstract: This article discusses the relationship of World War I (WWI) memory to Iraqi national identity. It argues that from the establishment of the monarchy until the fall of the Hashemite dynasty in 1958, there was no national consensus on what WWI meant for Iraqi identity. The Hashemite kings sought to link the War with the formation of the first modern Iraqi Arab state. For those who oppose Hashemite commemoration of the War, it represents the colonization of Iraq. After the 1958 revolution, WWI was gradually incorporated into the narrative of an anti-imperialist modern state that had struggled for liberation since its founding. The Gulf Wars and the failures of the post-colonial modern state have led to a re-evaluation of this memory.

Keywords: Memory; Iraqi Identity; World War I; Hashemites; Colonization.

ملخص: تتناول الدراسة العلاقة بين ذاكرة الحرب العالمية الأولى والهوية الوطنية العراقية. وتجادل بأنّه لم يكن هناك إجماع وطني على معنى الحرب الكبرى بالنسبة إلى الهوية العراقية من بداية الفترة الملكية التي امتدت إلى سقوط السلالة الهاشمية عام 1958. لقد سعى الملوك الهاشميون لربط الحرب بتأسيس الدولة العراقية العربية الحديثة. أمّا بالنسبة إلى معارضي إحياء ذكرى الحرب الهاشمية، فهي تمثل استعمارَ العراق. وبعد ثورة عام 1958، دُمِجَت الحرب العالمية الأولى تدريجيًا في سردية الدولة الحديثة المناهضة للإمبريالية التي كافحت من أجل التحرير منذ تأسيسها. وقد أدّت حربا الخليج وإخفاقات دولة ما بعد الاستعمار الحديثة إلى إعادة تقييم ذكرى الحرب هذه.

كلمات مفتاحية: الذاكرة، الهوية العراقية؛ الحرب العالمية الأولى؛ الهاشميون؛ الاستعمار.

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The presence of historical memory is both an education and a call to action.

Abdul Rahman Munif[1]

Nostalgia, it can be said, is universal and persistent; only other men's nostalgias offend.

Raymond Williams[2]

Writing less than a month after the occupation of Iraq in April 2003, the late Saudi/Iraqi novelist and public intellectual Abdul Rahman Munif pondered the meaning of a second US-led war against Iraq. He saw it as an imperial adventure, one that repeated British designs on Iraq during World War I (WWI). His book, hastily put together, is a collection of narratives of events drawn from Iraqi history of British imperial personalities and policies, and Iraqi resistance to these policies.[3] Munif's despairing and defiant book published only a month after the occupation, was an active remembering of victimization and resistance at a time, when Iraqis had not fought to defend a regime that had brutalized and pauperized them. Munif was no defender of the Baʿth regime. He was a strong advocate of democratization in the Arab world, a critic of the Baʿth in Iraq and of the Saudi regime among others. His call to his compatriots to remember, however, was an attempt to re-enforce one kind of historical memory, one familiar to Iraqis immersed in the history of the formation of their sense of nationhood as it had been taught in history books and other media of public culture.

It is perhaps not hard to understand why memories of WWI have become so integral to the public discourse on Iraq in the wake of the US invasion. The time was redolent with imagery of empire and resistance. Along with "Resurrecting Empire", to quote historian Rashid Khalidi, the last two wars in Iraq have resurrected memories of WWI.[4] Jacque Le Goff, among others, has alerted us to the modern proliferation of collective memories fuelled by the media and the spread of "immediate history".[5] The instantaneous nature of the recall of images and themes by Iraqis and non-Iraqis presumes the existence of a collective memory (*dhākira*) of the War that is immediately available, without history and without erasures.

In this article, I historicize the memory of the WWI. I focus on the relationship of memory to power, to the formation of the Iraqi state, and to the creation of a state-sponsored Iraqi identity. Any process of production of a collective memory involves elisions of other memories, therefore this article seeks, as much as the sources allow for, alternative remembrances of the War.[6] My purpose is not only to explore the ways official memory of the War was contested but also try to understand the parameters of such contestation and the ways it helped shape multiple understandings of Iraqi national identity among different individuals and communities.[7]

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1 Abdul Rahman Munif, *al-ʿIrāq: Hawāmish min al-Tārīkh wa-l-Muqāwama* (Beirut: al-Dar al-ʿArabiyya lil-Ulum wa-l-Nashr, 2003).

2 Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).

3 Munif. The destruction and looting of Baghdad's cultural heritage was a clear distinction that Munif and others drew between the British and American invasions.

4 Rashid Khalidi, *Resurrecting Empire, Western Footprints and America's Perilous Path in the Middle East* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004). For reproduction of WWI British officials reports, see: Paul Rich (ed.), *Iraq and Imperialism, Thomas Lyell's The Ins and Outs of Mesopotamia* (Lincoln: Author's Choice Press, 2001 [1991]).

5 Jacque Le Goff, *History and Memory*, Steven Rendall & Elizabeth Claman (trans.) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 95.

6 See: Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), for an insightful analysis of the elision of certain memories of the Revolution. See also: Shahid Amin, *Event, Metaphor and Memory, Chauri Chaura 1922-1992* (Berkely: University of California Press, 1995), for how subaltern memories are transformed and/or deleted from nationalist memory. For the debates on collective vs. historical memory, see: Susan Crane, "Writing the Individual Back into Collective Memory," *American Historical Review*, no. 102 (1997), pp. 1372-1385. Alon Confino's warning against the danger of fragmenting memory studies in a way that would reduce them into folkloric studies (my term) is well taken, so is his warning among others that memory should not be reduced to ideology. See his article: Alon Confino, "Collective Memory and Cultural History," *American Historical Review*, no. 102 (1997), pp. 1386-1483.

7 Kurdish, Jewish, and Christian memories of the War offer distinct perspectives. I will not be able to discuss those in this brief article.

It is remarkable that until the 1970s, there existed little consensus in Iraq's national discourse on the meaning and impact of the WWI. Iraq, after all, was formed as a nation state in the aftermath of the WWI. Like its Syrian neighbour, it was the creation of colonial powers. Yet the collective memory of the War in Syria has been successfully incorporated into a national narrative. The social memory of the War is of Ottoman oppression, great social dislocation caused by mobilization and conscription, and a famine that led to massive emigration. Its political memory centres on Ottoman suppression of Arab Nationalist aspirations starting in the late Ottoman period, the execution of nationalist leaders in Damascus in 1915, commemorated during Martyrs Day till the present day, and the resistance of nationalists who joined the Great Arab Revolt in 1916 and entered triumphantly into Damascus under the leadership of Faisal and established the first Arab state. Despite their defeat by the French in 1920, the collective memory of the War and its aftermath was of Arab participation in the making of their own modern history.[8]

No such memory of the War developed in Iraq. Rather, it is the revolt against the British, remembered as the Revolution of 1920 that has entered the collective memory of Iraqis as the single event that forged their national identity.[9] That is not to say that the Monarchy established with the help of the British did not try to create a memory of the War as a turning point in the formation of Iraqi nationhood. But it came against divergent individual, regional, and communal rememberings of the War.[10] Viewed by many of its challengers as a foreign creation, its leader imported and installed by the British from Arabia, the Monarchy ran into strong opposition from sectors of Iraqi society who challenged its official memory of the War.

Why did the Monarchy's agenda for the commemoration of WWI fail to take hold in Iraq? How was it contested? I argue in this paper that until the Monarchy was overthrown in the Revolution of 1958, remembrance of WWI was an important element in the formation of a multi-faceted Iraqi national identity but remained fragmented. Until the 1950s, few memoirs of the War were written by Iraqis. What little remembrance existed came in the form of poetry, short articles in the press, or popular stories. These remembrances of the War were united by a loosely defined anti-colonial mood that could be alternatively nationalist, pro-Ottoman, Iraqi, or Islamic.

The Revolution of 1958 that ushered in the Republic created a space for contending voices within Iraq's new cultural and political elites to re-examine the history of WWI and the role of the old elite, now disenfranchised, in the formation of the Iraqi state. The 1960s and 1970s marked the reworking of the remembrances of the War into a collective nationalist memory. The anti-colonial mood was now transformed into anti-imperialist ideology as a younger intelligentsia recast memories of different individuals and communities into a narrative of perpetual national struggle against domination.

The Ottomans began their war efforts in Iraq by declaring general mobilization as early as August 1914. This involved the redeployment of the Baghdad-based 35th regiment to the Caucasus to fight on the Russian front. Of the 1,700 soldiers and officers who left Baghdad, only a few returned, while the rest perished in the cold or were taken prisoner by the Russians. Another regiment based in the city of Mosul was redeployed to Aleppo. Leaving its southeastern flank to be defended by tribal irregulars, to local gendarmerie, as

[8] Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000). The national memory of the War as the birth of an Arab Syrian nation led by leaders of the Great Arab Revolt was belied by the realities on the ground. See: James Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties, Nationalist and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of the Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

[9] There continues to be a heated debate on the nature of the 1920 revolt and the importance of the different actors (tribal, religious, urban). The debates started in the 1950s with the ascendance of tribal political power but continue to the present. For the 1950s, see: Ali Bazarkan, *al-Waqaʾiʿ al-Haqīqiyya fī al-Thawra al-ʿIrāqiyya* (Baghdad:Matbʿat Asʿad, 1954) and Furati, *ʻalā Hāmish al-Thawra al-ʿIrāqiyya al-Kubrā* (Baghdad: Jaridat al-Hatif, n.d.). The most controversial has been sociologist Ali al-Wardi's account which stressed the tribal character of the revolt, in: Ali al-Wardi, *Lamaḥāt Ijtimāʿiyya min Tārīkh al-ʿIrāq al-Ḥadīth*, vol. 5 (Baghdad: Matbaʿat al-Adib, 1978).

[10] Sami Zubaida, "The Fragments Imagine the Nation: The Case of Iraq," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, no. 34 (2002), pp. 205-215. For the best analysis of Iraq during this period, see the classic by: Hanna Batatu, *Old Social Classes and Revolutionary Movements in Iraq* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

well as to a poorly led and provisioned 38th army division, the Ottomans soon lost most of southern Iraq. Thousands of Iraqi and Turkish soldiers and officers were taken prisoner and interred in camps in India, while others died on the front. It was only after such defeats that the Ottomans began reorganizing their eastern front, appointing a new general and reconstituting the Ottoman units into Sixth Army Unit with the help of the German Field Marshal Von Der Golz. The effort allowed them a short-lived victory at Kut. The British had changed their leadership of the campaign, transferring it to the War Office in London from the India Office, and General Stanley Maude was appointed to overhaul the Mesopotamian war effort.[11]

Ottoman mobilization of their Iraqi subjects was countered by British attempts to win the hearts and minds of these same subjects. Efforts to buy the allegiances of Iraq's tribal population in the south were spearheaded by a number of British Arabists, among them Gertrude Bell.[12] Concomitant with these efforts, the Arab Affairs office in Cairo, then under British rule, was cultivating Sharif Hussein of Mecca, as a possible leader of an Arab revolt against the Ottomans. In exchange for his help, Sharif Hussein was made vague promises of leading an independent Arab state. Hussein declared his revolt, which became known in Arab historiography as the Great Arab Revolt, on 10 November 1916. Although the promised state did not include Iraq, the British began recruiting Iraqi officers and soldiers, particularly those in war prisons in India, to join the revolt. In that they proved moderately successful. By the time Faisal, Sharif Hussein's son, entered Damascus in 1918, a large part of the Sharifian officer corps was drawn from Iraq. They became the backbone of the Iraqi monarchy, established in 1921, with Faisal I as king.

Between 1918 and 1920, the British ruled Iraq in the same way they ruled India, relying on traditional notables and tribal leaders to cement their power, as they established the rudiments of a civil administration.[13] They avoided the urban educated elite who had been active during the Ottoman period in various political organizations that called for some kind of autonomous rule for the Arab provinces or those who had been supporters of the Young Turk government. From the beginning, however, a core of Iraqis opposed to British rule began organizing secret societies. Those drew their leadership and membership from different Iraqi constituencies. Some were based in the Shiʿi Holy Cities of Najaf and Karbala and in Kadhimiya, while others crossed sectarian and regional lines. Most of the opposition, however, was in Baghdad, the mid-Euphrates region, and the South. In 1920, several factors which included the formal imposition of a British Mandate by the League of Nations on Iraq and the demise of the Arab State led by Faisal in Syria, contributed to a massive uprising that crossed tribal and sectarian lines.

The 1920 Revolution led the British to reexamine the premises of their rule. The 1921 Cairo Conference set the new British policy. Faisal, the son of Sharif Hussein who had been defeated in Syria in 1920, was installed as King of Iraq, and the British ruled Iraq indirectly. For Faisal, his British supporters, and the Iraqi officers who followed him from Hijaz to Syria and then to Iraq, 1921 marked a new beginning. For others, it was the ambiguous, not to say disastrous, end to any hope of an independent Iraq ruled by Iraqis.[14]

The way WWI was commemorated and remembered was a referendum on who created modern Iraq, and hence helped shape a modern memory of it. For Faisal and his supporters, it was the creation of the Iraqi state under the Monarchy that served as the nexus of Iraq's modern sense of nationhood. This

[11] Muhammad al-Umari, *Tārīkh Ḥarb al-ʿIrāq*, vols. 1&2 (Baghdad: al-Matbaʿa al-ʿArabiyya, 1935); Ali al-Wardi, *Lamaḥāt Ijtimāʿiyya min Tārīkh al-ʿIrāq al-Ḥadīth*, vol. 4 (Baghdad: Matbaʿat al-Adib, 1974). al-Umari's two-volume work was the first military history of the War and was meant as a textbook for the students of Iraq's military academy. al-Umari was an officer in the Ottoman army and maintained his allegiance to the Ottomans until the fall of Mosul, his hometown. For the British side of the War until 1917, see: *Mesopotamia Commission Report* (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1917).

[12] Lady Florence Bell (ed.), *The Letters of Gertrude Bell*, vol. 2 (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1927); *The Arab War, Confidential Information for General Headquarters from Gertrude Bell*, Sir Kinahan Cornwallis (trans.) (London: The Golden Cockerel Press, 1940).

[13] Tobias Dodge, *Inventing Iraq* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004). Dodge examines the imperial mentality that went into the construction of British policy in Iraq.

[14] Peter Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq, 1914-1932* (London: Ithaca Press, 1976).

sense was intimately bound in official memory with an Arab past and with Arab culture, of which Iraqi culture was only a variant. Those who challenged this version of history associated his rule and those of his descendants with colonial subjugation. For them, memories of an Iraqi nationhood, no matter how ill defined, preceded his 1921 ascendance.

Underneath the official attempts to forge a homogenous Iraqi memory of the War and its meaning, other fragmented but no less potent memories of the War served in undermining its image as a heroic fight for the nation. The human suffering and social and cultural dislocation caused by the War was evident in the inter-war period. Difficult homecoming, former prisoners of war, laws of citizenship, foreign colonial overlords, Indian colonial civil servants, cinemas, new street names, statues honouring conquerors, were all associated with what poet Khayri al-Hindawi called, *ʿAhd al-Suqūṭ* [Age of Degradation], alluding both to the fall of Baghdad to the British and to what he and others viewed as an age of permissiveness and confusion.[15] It is this confusion and uncertainty that belies the official memory of the WWI as the time of *Nahḍa* [rebirth], a time when the enlightened elite brought modernity and liberated the Iraqis from Ottoman occupation.

Faisal's policy to fashion a memory of the War and of the creation of modern Iraq was deceptively simple. The Great Arab Revolt would be the defining Iraqi memory of the War and he himself would be consecrated as the founder of the new state. Furthermore, a policy of creating memory of an Arab past to which Iraq was a major contributor would become the cornerstone of the new identity. The policy was ecumenical in its approach to the various sects in Iraq, but quite problematic to the Kurdish minority. Soon after being installed in power, the Faisal government established a national holiday commemorating the day Sharif Hussein declared his Great Revolt. In 1924, the celebration included a military procession by the young Iraqi army and the laying of the foundation stone of the University of Al al-Bayt.[16] The celebration was called the *Eid al-Nahḍa* [Anniversary of the Awakening], implying as it did the awakening of the Iraqi/Arab nation from deep slumber. Throughout the 1920s but much more so in the 1930s, in celebrations and in educational curriculum, the Monarchy's version of what this awakening meant was bound with marking WWI and the formation of the state as the locus of the birth of modern Iraqi national memory.[17] By the 1930s, the government had succeeded in renaming most of the main streets of Baghdad after Arab and Islamic leaders.[18] This renaming of Baghdad's spatial grid was designed to re-enforce this sense of a new era born in the melee of the WWI and to ground this identity in an Iraqi Arab past.

The battle over the legacy of the War took place in several public forums, intensifying during the negotiation and renegotiation of the Anglo-Iraqi treaty that defined the relationship between the monarchy and Britain. I am interested here in addressing the challenge to the official memory of the War that took place around attempts to commemorate it. In particular, I shall focus on the public trials of two journalists accused of libel against the Great Arab Revolt and King Faisal.

In August 1930, Ali Efendi Mahmud, publisher of the newspaper *Ṣawt al-ʿIrāq* [Voice of Iraq] was brought to trial by the Iraqi state on charges of libel against the memory of the Great Arab Revolt of 1916 and some men in power associated with the Revolt. The Revolt, he wrote, had had disastrous consequences for the Arabs and Iraqis. It had led to their subjugation to colonial rule and the ascendancy of a ruling elite in Iraq associated with it.[19] The defendant questioned the way patriotism was linked to the Revolt and

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[15] al-Wardi, vol. 4, p. 344.

[16] *Al-Bilad*, Baghdad, 24 March 1930, reporting on the start of the commemoration in 1924, p. 2, American University of Beirut, Jaffet Library, Mic 178-NA 1930.

[17] Reeva Simon, *Iraq between the Two World Wars: The Creation and Implementation of a Nationalist Ideology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986). For the struggle over the educational message of Iraq, see: Zubaida, pp. 212-214.

[18] Fakhri al-Zabidi, *Baghdād: 1900 ḥattā 1934, al-Jāmiʿ min al-Mufīd wa al-Ẓarīf*, vol. 1 (Baghdad: Dar al-Huriyah lil-Nashr wa-l-Tibaʿa, 1990), pp. 296, 304-307.

[19] *Al-Bilad*, American University of Beirut Jaffet Library, Mic-NA August-October 1930, pp. 2-3.

asserted that there was another patriotism that was neither connected to Faisal and the Hashemites nor to the Great Revolt. His lawyer, Dawud al-Saʿdi argued:

> The truth is that our client was of a young age at the time of the Great Arab Revolt and was not able to assess its consequences. He has now matured and was able to study the Revolt, its reasons, results and the actions of its men. He has come to the conclusion that the Revolt was not for the benefit of Arab states either in principle or result and the actions of some of its men, particularly those in power testify that it was in the interest of the Allied powers.[20]

The journalist's questioning of the commemoration of the Great Revolt as central to the formation of the Iraqi nation was a slap in the face of the whole Hashemite enterprise. The Hashemites had neither created an independent Arab state nor liberated Iraq. In fact, the origin of the whole Revolt was suspect because of its connection to colonial powers. The trial of Ali Efendi Mahmud, one of several involving the press that took place in the 1930s amid the government's efforts to reform Ottoman censorship laws, was well attended.[21] It coincided with the renegotiation of the Anglo-British treaty that laid the groundwork for Iraq's induction into the League of Nations as an independent state, albeit under neo-colonial strictures. The treaty made a mockery, in the view of its critics, of the attempt of Iraq's ruling elites, many of them veterans of the Great Arab Revolt, to consecrate the Revolt as the defining memory of a War, one in which the Iraqis achieved their national goals.

The challenge to the official memory of the War was once again resurrected in a trial in 1947. On 21 March of that year, the newspaper *Rāyat al-Istiqlāl* [Banner of Independence], a mouthpiece of the opposition Istiqlal Party, published a poem titled *Timthāl al-Istiʿbād* [The Statue of Enslavement], alluding either to the Statue of General Maude or to that of Faisal I. The latter had commissioned the building of his own statue shortly before his death in 1933.[22] He placed it near the statue of General Maude, the conqueror of Baghdad, in a garden in the city's western Karkh district. The latter statue was built by the British shortly after the death of Maude in Baghdad in 1917, and became the centre for British officialdom to commemorate the Day of the Unknown Soldier.[23] The poet, using a pseudonym, questioned the function and value of the statue in the western part of the city. He claimed that it sat arrogantly mocking the people. Such arrogance was not warranted. "Had the person it represented led the Arab armies to victory?", the poet asked rhetorically; "Had he defeated the enemies and created for the nation a glorious history?"[24] The statue, the poet went on to say, was a symbol of enslavement and lost rights.

Clearly aimed at the statue of Faisal I, the poem elicited a strong response from the government. The director of the newspaper, Qasim Hammoudi, was arrested, and the offices of the newspaper were searched. Soon afterward the government took the newspaper and its director to court. For the duration of the trial, which lasted until August of the same year, a scholastic debate on the meaning of the 8 lines of the poem ensued. The defence lawyer and their expert witnesses, many of whom politically sympathetic to the defendant, argued that the rhetorical and grammatical construction of the poem proved that it was alluding to the statue of Maude. The prosecution insisted, using its own experts, that the poet meant Faisal's statue.[25] The attack against Faisal and, by implication, his family had a potency that the 1930 trial did not. It came after the British invaded Iraq again in 1941 following a pro-Axis coup, and reinstalled the

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[20] Ibid., p. 3.

[21] On these trials and the precariousness of the life of the press during this period, see: Rufaʿil Butti, *Dhākira ʿIrāqiyya, 1900-1956*, vol. 1 (Damascus: Dar al-Mada, 2000), pp. 131-211; Ahmad Fawzi, *Ashhar al-Muḥākamāt al-Ṣaḥafiyya fī al-ʿIrāq* (Baghdad: Matbaʿat al-Instisar, 1985), pp. 7-16. Butti was among the pioneers of the Iraqi press and founder of *al-Bilād* newspaper from which the description of the Mahmud trial is taken.

[22] al-Zabidi, p. 307.

[23] Ibid., pp. 181-212. When Maude's statue was unveiled in 1923, the official press compared him to Cyrus and Alexander.

[24] Fawzi, p. 99.

[25] Ibid., pp. 99-135. Fawzi reproduces a large part of the accusation and testimonies.

Hashemite Monarchy. The precariousness of the Monarchy's claim that it had created an age of awakening was particularly evident in its need to be rescued by foreign intervention.

The Monarchy's fear of the challenge to its official version of the War was well founded. From the beginning of the War and into the monarchical period, there was never a collective memory of the War as ushering a period of liberation and nation formation. Nor did each Iraqi community remember the War in the same way. The Shiʿi population, divided along socio-economic and urban/rural lines, did not have a single communal memory of the War. Nor did the Sunni population have such a memory. For some Sunni officers who joined the Arab Revolt in Hijaz, the War was part of the great march to Iraqi/Arab nationhood that began during the late Ottoman period. For others, the War marked the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire toward which they still felt a sense of patriotism. For some of those who chose not to join the Revolt, the War meant an extended internment in prison camps in Russia, India, and Egypt, and a difficult time adjusting to new realities.

Jihadi Rhetoric and Ottoman Transitions

The Ottomans began their war effort in Iraq, as elsewhere, with an appeal to the memory of an Islamic Empire threatened by the encroachments of the Christian powers. This was a well-worn trope in the continued attempts of the Ottomans to enlist the support of their subjects.[26] The appeal to a jihadi ideology found its supporters among large sectors of the Iraqi population. Particularly among Shiʿi clerics based in Kadhimayn Holy Shrine in the suburbs of Baghdad and in the Holy Cities of Najaf and Karbala, the appeal to unity in the face of threats from the infidels generated support.[27] The Ottomans needed these clerics to enlist the fighting power of the Shiʿi tribes of southern Iraq, many of whom obliged.

However, Shiʿi remembrance of the War was inflected with Shiʿi imagery. Rather than calling for allegiance to the House of Osman and its Sunni caliph, the clerics used the imagery of defence against the infidels and called for raising the Shiʿi banner of Haydar in the fight against the British. It was their heroic stand against the infidel despite their oppression by the Ottomans that was more important. For that reason, Sunnis and Shiʿis were encouraged to come together. Thus when the Imam Sayyid Mahdi al-Haydari, the foremost cleric of Kadhimiya mausoleum, embarked on his trip south to lead Shiʿi tribes, he was joined by both Sunnis and Shiʿis.[28] In Huseiniyyas, where the martyrdom of Hussein, son of Ali, at the hands of the Sunni Umayyads in 680, is commemorated, both Sunnis and Shiʿis came to listen to speeches likening Hussein's battle to that of Shiʿi and Sunni Iraqis facing the infidel.[29] Those who followed Sayyid Mahdi to the battle sang:

Sayyid Mahdi, the pillar of religion

We march to jihad with him

We march strengthened by you, O religion

O ye fighters of England, France, and Russia

Those who do not obey our rule, with swords we decapitate them

Haidar, Our pride, our fortress[30]

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[26] For the use of Muhammad's life and battles as exemplars during the War, see: Gottfried Hagen, "The Prophet Muhammad as an Exemplar in War: Ottoman Views on the Eve of World War I," *New Perspectives on Turkey*, no. 22 (2000), pp. 145-172.

[27] al-Wardi, vol. 4, pp. 130-131. The Ottomans recruited Hamid Kleidar, from a Shiʿi notable family that had traditionally been the keepers of the keys to the shrine of Imam Musa al-Kadhim, in Kadhimiya. They sent letters to the clerics in Najaf calling on them to issue of *fatwa* calling for jihad against the infidels. Shiʿi tribal leaders were also wooed particularly the mid-Euphrates tribe of Fatlah.

[28] Ahmad al-Husseini, *al-Imām al-Thāʾir: al-Sayyid Mahdī al-Ḥaydarī* (Najaf: Matbaʿat al-Adab, 1966), pp. 30-34.

[29] Talib Mushtaq, *Awrāq Ayyāmī, 1900-1958* (Beirut: Dar al-Taliʿa, 1968), pp. 9-16. Mushtaq, a Sunni resident of Kadhimiya, remembered his attendance of Husseiniyyas and his prayer at Kadhimayn during this period. See also: al-Wardi, vol. 4, p. 131.

[30] Al-Wardi, vol. 4, p. 132.

Despite this jihadi memory for defence of religion against the infidel, the Shiʿi community of Iraq did not find this call strong enough to not rebel. The initial support for the Ottomans exhibited by the Holy Cities of Najaf and Karbala soon dissipated. In 1915, Najaf, Karbala, and Hilla rebelled against the Ottomans. The dislocation caused by the influx into the cities of Iraqi soldiers who had deserted the Ottoman army fuelled the rebellions. Sociologist Ali al-Wardi, writing in the 1970s, remembers that his father, a Shiʿi functionary, had deserted and fled first to the tribe of Banu Asad, and then to Najaf. He returned to the military only after the Ottomans had cracked down on deserters and threatened to hold members of their family hostage if they did not report to duty.[31] Local histories of the cities portray these rebellions as the result of Ottoman mal-administration and oppression.

Other Shiʿis were less wedded to this version of communal memory of the War. They found that their lived experience of the War and their memory of it had more in common with the Sunni urban educated political community than with other Shiʿis. They shared with other Sunnis the idea of an Arab Iraq, but one not necessarily ruled by the Hashemites. They pitted their experience against that of Shiʿi tribes and at times even Shiʿi clerics. Ali Bazarkan was a Baghdadi well connected to the Shiʿi merchant community in the city, founder of the first Shiʿi secular school during the waning years of Ottoman rule. He and other Shiʿis from the commercial community in Baghdad had supported the Ottoman war effort with some reservations. At the end of the War, he and other Sunnis, both former pro- and anti-Ottomans, formed an anti-British secret society called the Guards of Independence. Their mission was to call for the complete independence of Iraq. The members cooperated with another secret society, al-ʿAhd (The Covenant), formed mainly of Sunni Ottoman army officers. Founded in 1913, its members had called for Arab autonomy under the auspices of Ottoman rule.

By 1920, Bazarkan was active in mobilizing the support among Shiʿi tribes and clerics for the 1920 Revolution. In 1954 he published a book called *al-Waqaʾiʿ al-Haqīqiyya fī al-Thawra al-ʿIrāqiyya* [The True Events of the Iraqi Revolution] The book was a response to the claim made by Fareeq Muzhir al-Farʿun, head of the Shiʿi Fatlah tribe, that those Iraqi officers who had been in the Ottoman army and had formed the al-ʿAhd and the Guards of Independence, did not really stand up to the British. That honour belonged to the Shiʿi clerics and tribes such as Fatlah. Although the tribal leader and Bazarkan were both laying claim to the legacy of the 1920 Revolution, both however, saw fit to locate the origins of their activism, and hence the legitimacy of their claims to the years before and during the War.

Ali Bazarkan's response to Farʿun's accusations was devastating. The head of the Fatlah tribe was distorting history because of the old hostility that tribes harboured toward the class of urban Iraqi Ottoman officials they called *efendiyya*. In fact, this class were the truly enlightened (*mutanawwirūn*), the only ones capable of leading a national movement. The tribes, those who wore the traditional dress (*muʿaqalūn*), were in fact feudal lords working for their own interest and switching allegiance according to the highest bidder. Farʿun's assertion that his tribe was at the forefront of the national struggle against the Ottomans and then the British was a misreading of the reality, an attempt to dress up as national consciousness which was an inherent trait of tribes to rebel against authority. As for Farʿun's claim that the 1915 rebellions of Najaf and Karbala against the Ottomans and later against the British were purely nationalist, it was the vanguard of enlightened urbanites that gave what was an essentially religious uprising a national agenda.

This urban/tribal dichotomy appeared in multiple memoirs written by army officers who fought the War, particularly in the mid-Euphrates region, in southern Iraq, and in the Hijaz with the Sharifian armies. Ali Jawdat, who later became prime minister, wrote that the tribal contingents that the Ottomans mobilized were unreliable and deserted the army in the middle of battles. These tribes often robbed the soldiers who

[31] Ibid., p. 120.

were supposed to be their allies. When the Ottoman army was defeated in Shuʿaiba in 1914, Jawdat fled to Suq al-Shuyukh, a tribal town in southern Iraq. He, however, was more apprehensive about his tribal hosts than he was about the British who eventually took him prisoner.[32]

Ali Bazarkan remembered that in 1916, he was visited by a distressed and much-weakened officer in the Ottoman army who had fled for his life from the tribes of the Shammar, Zabid, and Rabiʿa who controlled the road between Baghdad and Kut and robbed retreating Ottoman soldiers.[33] Examples of the unreliability of tribes and their treachery abound in the memoirs of these urbanites. It was only in the aftermath of the 1958 revolution, as we shall see, that a selective process of memorializing some tribes as central to a national memory of the War began, a process that continued well into the late Baʿth period.

Perhaps the thorniest issue for the generation that survived the War was how to articulate and understand the transition between Ottoman citizenship and identity to an Iraqi one. Nationalist historiography in the first half of the 20th century tended to see those who flip flopped in their allegiances during the War as opportunistic. The division that emerged was rather simply portrayed as between those who had been active members of Arab nationalist organizations such as the al-ʿAhd under the Ottomans, and decided to join the Great Arab Revolt and those who stuck to their loyalty to the Ottoman Empire. Invariably, those who joined the Revolt claimed that they were instrumental in the creation of a multi-ethnic non-sectarian Iraq, while others navigated the tricky waters of post-War Iraq, at once trying to find a place for themselves in it and disillusioned with the semi-colonial character of the state. Yet the sense of being between and betwixt, of witnessing change and at the same time being a victim of this change, cannot be simply categorized in nationalist historiography and memory of the War, which tend to subsume the complexity of the individual experience under one official category or the other. Nowhere is the ambivalence about the meaning of the War more evident than in the experiences of prisoners of war.

We have no precise numbers of Iraqis taken as prisoners of war. According to Ibrahim al-Rawi, an Iraqi/Ottoman officer who later joined the Arab Revolt, 1,700 Iraqis were drafted at the beginning of the War to go to the Russian/Caucasus front. Of these, only a few returned, and most perished or were taken prisoner.[34] In 1920, a number of Baghdadi prisoners of war released in Istanbul, mostly working-class soldiers, published a letter in an Iraqi daily asking for funds to help return them to Baghdad. They had spent the duration of the War in Russian prisons, had been transferred to Siberia and from there to Japan. After the War, they were shipped on a Greek vessel to Greece, then in the midst of a conflict with the defeated Ottoman government. Deposited in Istanbul by the Greeks, they found little sympathy with the remnants of the Ottoman government in the city. As Arabs, they were accused of betraying the Ottomans and directed to the British consulate. The British informed them that they were ready to send them home, but that they needed to finance their own trip. Destitute, they could only appeal to the generosity of their Baghdadi compatriots for funds.[35]

The bulk of the Iraqi prisoners of war, however, were those imprisoned in the campaign in southern and central Iraq. Those captured in the early campaigns of 1914 were eventually sent to Thayetmoyo prison camp in Upper Burma. By June 1915, there were, by the estimate of one prisoner, 4,889 soldiers and 158 officers from the Iraqi campaign. These included Turkish, Kurdish, and Arab soldiers and officers.[36] The British had tried to separate the Turkish from Arab soldiers by sending the latter to Sumerpur in India in

[32] Ali Jawdat, *Dhikrayāt* (Beirut: Matbaʿat al-Wafaa, 1967), pp. 33-36.

[33] Bazarkan, pp. 53-54.

[34] Ibrahim al-Rawi, *Min al-Thawra al-ʿArabiyya al-Kubrā ilā al-ʿIrāq al-Hadīth, Dhikrayāt* (Beirut: Matbaʿat Dar al-Kitab, 1969), p. 11.

[35] al-Zabidi, pp.179-181.

[36] Muhammad Raʾuf al-Sayyid Taha al-Shaykhli, *Marāḥil al-Ḥayāh fī al-Fatrah al-Mudhlima wa-ma Baʿdahā*, vol. 2 (Basra: Matbaʿat al-Basra, 1972), pp. 362-370.

the hope of enlisting their help against the Ottomans. Initially, they were not successful, as many soldiers and officers did not accept the British categorization.[37] Nevertheless, by June 1916, some 300 Arab officers and 4,000 Arab soldiers, mostly from Iraq, were interred in Sumerpur.[38] Some of these soldiers were drawn from Thayetmoyo, while others were taken directly to the Indian prison. After 1917, some of the Ottoman prisoners of war were interred in Egypt.

The memoirs of two Ottoman/Iraqi officers who were prisoners of war offer us a glimpse of the competing allegiance and understanding of Iraqi nationhood during the War. Although products of different social and economic backgrounds, both officers were members of an elite group of young provincial Ottomans who had the benefit of an Ottoman secondary education in Baghdad and attended institutions of higher education in Istanbul, in this case the Officers' Training College. The more detailed and personal of the two memoirs is that of Mahmud al-Shaykhli, who spent four years in prison. Taken prisoner in Kut al-Zayn, on 17 November 1914, only 10 days after the British landed troops in Fao, he was released in April 1919. Born to a middle-class Baghdadi family, he graduated from the Officers' Training College in Istanbul in 1903. Soon after he returned to Baghdad, he was posted to Basra and eventually to the Ottoman barracks in al-Hasa in eastern Arabia. As a junior officer (*yüzbaşi*), he was involved in training soldiers in Arabia embroiled in the struggle against the emerging power of Ibn Saud.

A professional soldier, al-Shaykhli found little to relate to when news of the Young Turk Revolution's proclamation of freedom and constitutional rights reached his barracks in 1908. For him, the "hysteria" that accompanied the revolution carried little resonance and remained meaningless to the rank-and-file soldier engaged in a battle for survival.[39] His primary concern was the training of troops in the remote and dangerous corners of the Ottoman Empire. When the Ottomans joined the War, he was sent to Amara in southern Iraq to train conscripts and tribal irregulars. Until his imprisonment at the battle of Kut al-Zayn, he served as a loyal Ottoman subject whose complaints were that the Ottoman army was poorly provisioned and poorly prepared. In a telling anecdote just before his imprisonment, he records the confrontation between soldiers and a Sunni cleric attached to his regiment at the order of the government to encourage troops to persevere and obey. The soldiers had spent three days without food and were low on ammunition. They laughed at the promise that the cleric made of a happy thereafter and said that what they needed most was not food for the soul but food for both the men and the guns.[40]

The bulk of al-Shaykhli's second volume of memoirs is devoted to his imprisonment. His detailed coverage of prison life, his recording of salaries received by the soldiers and officers, the kind of entertainment they helped organize, and the kind of food they cooked, all attest to his keeping of a journal during his imprisonment. Despite the immediacy of his memoirs, there is a sense of suspension of time and identity that is reinforced by the often ironic tone of the memoirs. As he travels from Basra, to India, to Burma, then to India, and finally to Egypt, he is thrust into a world in which the geography of war and empire are seen through the prism of a succession of prison camps. What unites them is a sense of larger imprisonment in a new world in which Indian and Egyptian soldiers, and ultimately Arab/Iraqi officers who joined the Arab revolt act as gatekeepers.

[37] Ibid., pp. 372-376. al-Shaykhli recounts how in November 1915, British officers in the Thayetmoyo prison camp attempted to separate Arab from Turkish officers. There was quite a bit of confusion among the prisoners. Some Arab prisoners were eventually taken to Sumerpur, where others chose to remain. A later attempt by the British to forcefully remove Arab prisoners from Burma resulted in a near mutiny of soldiers on the train in Ahmadabad. Ibrahim al-Rawi, an Arab officer who joined the Arab Revolt in its early stages, wrote that he was sent to Thayetmoyo despite his admission of his Arab descent. al-Rawi, p. 14.

[38] al-Rawi, p. 18.

[39] al-Shaykhli, p. 275.

[40] Ibid., p. 332. al-Shaykli writes that the Ottomans had no map of the terrain they were fighting in. One of the first things he notices when he is taken prisoner by the British is that they had a detailed map of Iraq.

But even the gatekeepers are caught in al-Shaykli's memoirs in a web of loyalties that made it difficult to give a coherent narrative that ends with liberation of any sort. Hence the title of his two-volume memoir is itself a testament to his ambivalence. *Marāḥil al-Ḥayāt Khilāl al-Fatra al-Muẓlima wa-Mā Baʿdahā* [The Stages of Life during the Dark Period and its Aftermath], is partly a story of imprisonment as a travel narrative where each stage becomes a means to examine in clinical detail the minutia of prison life and partly a commentary on the scope of the British Empire and the death of the Ottoman. Despite his being a prisoner of the more powerful Empire and a citizen of the dying one, al-Shaykhli maintains a remarkable distance from the jingoistic rhetoric of others of his compatriots who had written memoirs of this period. While his memoirs are hostile to British imperial policies and sympathetic to the Ottomans, the British, Turks, Indians, and Iraqis appear as individuals in his memoirs, and ultimately his judgment was that the human and political cost of the War was too high. The War was a dark period, but what comes after it remains unclear, hence his characterization of it simply as "its aftermath".

Nowhere is the sense of the War as a time of inchoate loyalties more evident than in al-Shaykhli's account of the British attempts to enlist the support of Arab officers and soldiers and in his encounter with Indian soldiers in the British army. When al-Shaykhli was first taken prisoner, he was led through a battlefield strewn with dead bodies like "the stones of a chess board" to a British officer who inquired about his rank and then asked him if he was an Arab or a Turk. Surprised, al-Shaykhli said that he was an Ottoman.[41] From then on, al-Shaykhli became aware of the policy of the British to enlist the support of Arab officers and soldiers and isolate them from Turkish officers and soldiers. At Thayetmoyo, Turkish and Arab soldiers were housed in separate bungalows and allowed different rations. The Arabs objected to what they perceived was the preferential treatment that Turks enjoyed and tensions ensued. Despite these tensions, the Arab/Ottoman officers and soldiers joined their Turkish comrades in celebrating the anniversary of the Sultan's ascension to the throne and all chanted in unison "Long Live my Sultan".[42]

Eventually, as the Arab Revolt got underway, Arab prisoners in Burma were moved to Sumerpur where they were subjected to several recruitment efforts and asked to join the Revolt. Between July and September 1916, just months after the official declaration of the Revolt, 624 soldiers and 26 officers left Sumerpur to join the Revolt. The majority of the soldiers changed their minds once they arrived to Hijaz, while 22 of the officers decided to join the Sharifian army.[43] The large discrepancy between the number of soldiers and officers continued to be a prominent feature of the British and Arab nationalist effort to recruit supporters indicating that the nationalist cause was attractive to the minority of Sunni Ottoman officers but not to the rank-and-file soldiers.[44]

It is at this point in his narrative that al-Shaykhli attempts an explanation of his loyalties. His assessment, written more than half a century after the War, was remarkably devoid of nationalist rhetoric. For him the choice was one of calculated risks and benefits. He found that the movement in Hijaz was disorganized, lacked coherence in goals, had no unified leadership, and was essentially too untested to warrant support. He added that he had a profound distrust of British intentions as his experience working in Eastern Arabia and the Gulf had given him ample proof of their predatory interest in the region. At the same time, he was sure that had the Ottomans gotten wind of his change of allegiance, they would execute or exile his relatives in Iraq.[45]

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[41] Ibid., p. 341.

[42] Ibid., pp. 365-340.

[43] Ibid., pp. 382-383. Those who changed their minds were either sent to prison camps in Egypt or returned to Sumerpur.

[44] al-Rawi, who was an early defector to the Arab camp, remembers his first days in the Hijaz when soldiers and the majority of the people of Jeddah were adamantly opposed to Sharif Hussein. Ottoman soldiers who had surrendered to the Sharif Hussein's army, roamed the streets of the city calling for the Sultan's long life [*Sultanim çok yasar*]. al-Rawi was instrumental in turning them into prisoners of War. al-Rawi, pp. 78-80.

[45] al-Shaykhli, pp. 384-385.

If the Hijazi enterprise for Arab liberation was not particularly worthwhile to al-Shaykhli, his journey into India proved much more educational. It was a harbinger of the new world order and al-Shaykhli's, as well as Iraq's, place in it. From the beginning of his imprisonment, al-Shaykhli came across what he perceived as a contradiction: colonized dark-skinned people fighting the colonizers war. He, as an Ottoman citizen and officer, did not view himself in the same manner. Nor did the attempts of his fellow officers who joined the Arab Revolt to argue that in some ways the situation of Arabs under the Ottomans resembled that of the Indians have much credence. As he journeyed deeper into the Asiatic part of the British Empire, he was impressed by the modernity of India, the extent of its rail system, the efficiency of the British administration of their Empire through the use of Indians, but he remained acutely aware of the division between European colonizer and the colonized. He commented, for example, on the divisions in the British army between officers, primarily white, and ordinary Indian soldiers.[46]

al-Shaykhli complained that he was initially treated as a lowly Indian soldier rather than an Ottoman officer and that the British were not, early in the War, following military protocol in the way they treated their prisoners. He was plagued by anxiety about the possibility of being colonized like the Indians and the Burmese. The India that he visited, however, was also a place where he could find Muslims who surreptitiously supported their Ottoman co-religionists. He and other prisoners were often given food by Muslim Indian soldiers.[47] Arab soldiers and officers were being transported from Sumerpur to Bombay to be shipped to Egypt. Suspecting that this was a trick devised to force them to go to the Hijaz, the soldiers refused to disembark from the train. Faced with the possibility of a small mutiny, the British began negotiating with the Arab officers. In a show of solidarity, the Muslim Indian soldiers guarding the train began passing cigarettes and food to the soldiers.[48] In another example, the funeral of the first Ottoman Turkish officer who died in Poona turned into a day-long procession in which the local population attacked British police.[49] For al-Shaykhli, it was clear that the protection he had enjoyed under the Muslim Empire had been lost and that he might share a similar fate as the Indian Muslims. However, his world now expanded to include an identity that connected him with Muslim colonized people across space.

al-Shaykhli's memoir reflected the conundrum of a man caught between two empires, not yet wedded to the idea of a heroic national narrative or struggle. He had, throughout his imprisonment, a keen sense of belonging to an Iraqi space, but that space was very much defined by an urban network of family, social, and cultural connections. The memories of Ibrahim al-Rawi and a number of other Ottoman/Iraqi army officers who joined the Arab Revolt and later became architects of the Iraqi state, were shot with an enviable certitude.[50] Their remembering was infused with a sense of nostalgia for the late Ottoman world in which they were among the select members of Iraqis who journeyed to Istanbul, joined secret societies, and helped shape what they perceived to be Arab national interest. A number of their colleagues chose to remain loyal citizens of the Ottomans, but continued to view their choice not as "betrayal", but as a courageous attempt to carve a place for their "nation" in the post-War period.

Most of the memoirs devoted a large section to this formative period in their lives. Many were imprisoned during WWI, but their prison experience was merely a brief interlude to their role in the Arab Revolt. It was not India or any other colonial space that was predominant in their narrative, but Hijaz and

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46 Ibid., p. 345.

47 Ibid., p. 342. There are numerous examples throughout al-Shaykhli's memoir of the differences in treatment they got at the hands of the Muslim Indian as opposed to the Hindu soldiers. Part of this discrepancy might be due to al-Shaykhli's biases. He at times harbored some racial resentment toward his Indian captors and did not find it easy receiving what he perceived as charity from ordinary soldiers. He was acutely aware of his military rank as officer.

48 Ibid., pp. 388-389.

49 Ibid., pp. 353-359.

50 Jawdat; Naji Shawkat, *Sīra wa-Dhikrayāt Thamānīn ʿĀman*, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Matbaʿat Dar al-Kutub, 1977).

Trans-Jordan. Hijaz became the launching pad for a war against the fake caliphate of the Ottomans. They were similar to the warriors of early Islam who mobilized tribal populations, this time fighting a new jihad in the name of Arab nationalism as defined by the leadership of the Arab Revolt.

Not all of these officers had the imagination or the gall to draw such a clear analogy between Sharif Hussein's endeavour and the Prophet's. Others were much more circumspect and relatively late converts to the Sharifian cause.[51] Ibrahim al-Rawi, however, did make such claims as he tried to mobilize his doubtful troops into battle.[52] For al-Rawi and other Iraqi Sharifian officers, the transition from multi-ethnic Ottomanism to Arab or Iraqi nationalism was not a fraught undertaking. At the same time, their understanding of both Arab nationalism and their vision of an independent Iraq was vague.

Ibrahim al-Rawi was born in Ramadi in 1895. He attended secondary school in Baghdad and completed his higher education at the officers' training college in Istanbul. He finished his training in 1914, a few months before the War. Despite his reservations about the prospects of an Ottoman victory and his hostility to the ruling Unionist party in Istanbul, he joined the Ottoman army because, as he told his friend Nuri al-Said, he was afraid of being executed by the Ottomans.[53] His unit was defeated in the battle of Amara and he was taken prisoner and shipped to Thayetmoyo and eventually to Sumerpur.

The outlines of al-Rawi's brief prison experience echoed that of al-Shaykhli's. However, there is a difference in the manner in which they experienced prison. al-Rawi, who devoted only 18 pages of his book to his Ottoman war experience and imprisonment, was focused on detailing the mismanagement of the War on the part of the Ottomans, their discriminatory practices against the Arabs even in prison, and on articulating his vision of Iraq. When the British began separating Turks from Arabs, some prisoners from Kirkuk said they were Turks, not Arabs, prompting al-Rawi to lecture them on how Iraq was a multi-ethnic and multi-sectarian society in which all such differences should be overcome.[54] al-Rawi was writing more than 40 years after the creation of the state of Iraq where such a vision continued to be a far from realized ideal. There were no indications that this clear national program for Iraq was ever articulated by a single political grouping in the country in 1915.[55]

In contrast to al-Shaykhli, al-Rawi was not troubled by the colonial subtext of his cooperation with the British. He drew no comparisons between the Indian experience and the Arab one. If he harboured any anxiety about any potential conflict between his Muslim identity and the nature of his alliance with the British, it was not evident. When he arrived in Jeddah, for example, he found the city, newly conquered by the Sharifian army, in disarray. Ottoman soldiers, Indonesian and Indian Muslims, as well as the local inhabitants were angry about what they perceived as the betrayal of the Muslim Empire. Blaming the disorder on the failure of the leadership of the Sharifian army to treat the Ottoman soldiers as prisoners of war, he proceeded to organize a Sharifian prisoner of war system in which Ottoman soldiers would be interred.[56] Having been just released from British prisoner of war camps where he had been taken as an Ottoman soldier, he found the switch remarkably easy. In his mind, Iraqi soldiers who had come with him to Jeddah but refused to join the Revolt, were victims of religious fanaticism and ignorance.

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[51] Shawkat was member of an aristocratic/bureaucratic Ottoman Baghdadi family and his uncle was at one time Grand Vizier. He was a relative latecomer to the Sharifian cause and was one of the supporters of the anti-British coup engineered against the monarchy in 1941 by Rashid Ali al-Gailani. His uncle, Hikmet Suleyman, was director of the department of education in Ottoman Baghdad, and was responsible for student mobilization during the War. Another uncle, who was a prisoner of war with him in India in 1917 accused his nephew of treason. See: Ibid., pp. 42-45.

[52] al-Rawi, pp. 84-85.

[53] Ibid., p. 12.

[54] Ibid., pp. 16-18.

[55] Sulayman Faydi, *Mudhakarāt Sulaymān Fayḍī, Min Ruwwād al-Nahḍā al-ʿArabiyya fī al-ʿIrāq*, Basil Sulayman al-Faydi (ed. & intro.) (Beirut: Dar al-Saqi, 1998). The memoir is an expanded and editorialized edition of a 1952 memoir dictated to his daughter while Sulayman was ill.

[56] al-Rawi, pp. 78-80.

The Conundrums of Citizenship

The Iraq that emerged after the War had a new ruling elite, many of them with no historical roots in the communities they governed. At the same time, the state was now undertaking the project officially defining Iraqiness. The law of nationality often became a bargaining tool between the state and different communities, not particularly supportive of the neo-colonial nature of the newly independent Iraq and the policies of its new elites.[57]

While we have no access to the experiences and memories of ordinary Iraqis during this period, a popular form of short stories, a modern version of the traditional Baghdadi *maqāmāt*, a literary genre in which traditional popular figures dispense satirical wisdom and social commentary, might give us an inkling of the meaning of the War to ordinary Iraqis. These became the most effective outlet for Iraqi citizens to express their frustration outside the highly homogenized discourse of the political press.[58] The vagaries of the new life in Iraq was captured in a Baghdadi humorous fictional confrontation between a *chawush* of the municipality of Baghdad (the Ottoman term for low-level Ottoman functionary) and a returning Iraqi prisoner of war, published in 1934 under the pseudonym Nouri Thabit, in an Iraqi newspaper.

Titled *Shāwush al-Baladiyya wa-Azyā al-Muwāṭana* [*Chawush* of the Municipality and the Fashion of Citizenship], it is the story of Jadʿun ibn Jawad, a Baghdadi everyman who returned from his prison camp in Russia in 1925.[59] Being absent from Iraq at the time of its official creation, he had trouble proving that he was a citizen. As a result, he had difficulty finding work in the government. When he went to be interviewed by the government functionary, he was asked if he was Iraqi. What followed was:

> Jadʿun: Yes, from father to grandfather.
>
> *Chawush*: Do you know how to speak Arabic?
>
> Jadʿun with sarcasm and in Baghdadi vernacular: Do you think I am speaking to you in Banyani (a generic term that denotes languages spoken by Indian merchants who had been historically part of Iraqi commercial life)?
>
> *Chawush*: Get out, you are without manners (*adabsiz* in Turkish/Ottoman).

The author then contrasts Jadʿun's situation with that of the British and Indians who easily find work in companies that are supposed to be national companies. One such foreigner hired a lawyer who advised him that the best way to obtain citizenship was to go to one of the popular quarters of Baghdad, find himself a wife, marry her, and obtain a certificate of this marriage from the chief of the quarter. Henry Sank, the imaginary Englishman, does precisely that and then goes to the Chawush:

> *Chawush*: When did you come to Iraq?
>
> Sank: With the occupation army.
>
> *Chawush*: Are you Iraqi?
>
> Sank in English: Yes sir, this document is from the chief of the quarter. I have a bibi khatun who is Iraqi.
>
> *Chawush*: Good, here are your citizenship papers.

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57 Zubaida.

58 Salim Abd al-Qadir al-Samiraʾi, *Qaṣāṣūn min al-ʿIrāq: Dirāsah wa-Mukhtārāt* (Baghdad: Wazarat al-Iʿlam, 1977). Samiraʾi reproduces many of those published in the 1930s.

59 al-Zabidi, pp. 360-362.

With economy and irony, these two narratives capture the contradictions of the new Iraq. An ordinary citizen who had been conscripted to fight one imperial war and had endured long imprisonment finds himself subject to new laws administered by the old Ottoman functionaries working for a new empire.

The figure of the corrupt and dim Ottoman *chawush* who uses the Turkish expression "*abadsiz*" to dismiss the hapless Iraqi, is an old one in the popular literature of Iraq. What distinguishes him at present was his position as a functionary with the right to grant an official identity to someone whose claims on it are ancient and not grounded in an official definition of citizenship. Jadʿun's cynical response that he was not speaking the language of Indians was a challenge to the presence of a new class of Indian officials who were helping run the Iraqi state. Iraq was now a modern nation, with all the accoutrements of modernity, hence the ironic title of the story. Yet it was also a new India, its women reduced to bibi khatuns, the metaphor for nations feminized and subjugated by colonial powers whose entitlement to citizenship was gained through the barrel of the gun. Therein lies the reality of the great Iraqi march to nationhood for ordinary Iraqis, the author seems to suggest.

A National Memory of WWI

I have argued thus far that no collective memory of the WWI developed in Iraq despite attempts by the ruling elite to incorporate it into a national narrative. The whole origin myth of the Iraqi state and its troubled association with the Iraqi nationhood that the Hashemites sought to create remained highly suspect to various political, ethnic, and religious communities and was belied by individual remembrance of the War. Sami Zubaida has argued that the Iraqi state, despite its colonial beginnings, had become a fact around which Iraq's various fragments hammered out their definition of national identity by the end of the Monarchy. I would add that while the state might have helped shape a brittle and contested sense of Iraqi identity, the colonial origin of the state and its elite's participation in a project that drew very little loyalty from Iraqis during the War, made it almost impossible to create a collective Iraqi memory of the War as one of renewal.[60] Until the 1960s, the remembrance of the 1914 to 1920 period was a referendum on the nature of the Iraqi state and only tangentially on Iraqi identity.

Several political and cultural developments marked the 1960s and 1970s as particularly ripe decades for the reworking of Iraqi memories of the War and its integration into a national narrative. The Revolution of 1958 saved the state from the Monarchy and its colonial beginnings. The regimes that came in its aftermath deployed an anti-imperialist and pan-Arab rhetoric. At the same time, the liminal generation that had lived through the late Ottoman Empire and became founders and citizens of the Iraqi nation-state was marginalized. The field was now open for the study of the period by a younger generation whose memories of the War came second hand.

The prominence in the cultural domain of a new secular intelligentsia, both Sunni and Shiʿi, who were products of the expansion of social science departments funded by a strongly anti-imperialist state allowed this generation to recast much of the diverse memories of the War in strongly anti-imperialist garb. Finally, the expansion of both a state and privately funded print culture, allowed for the proliferation of books in which the War experience of Iraqis became discursively part of a linear narrative of Iraqi nation formation from the late Ottoman to the Baʿth period. The emergence of a collective national memory of the War meant the modification of some memories and the elision of others in ways distinctly different from the Monarchical period.

60 Zubaida, p. 214.

I focus briefly here on this process of remoulding as it manifests in the memoirs authored by the War generation and by the works, often polemical or panegyric, penned by a younger generation of Iraqis about the role of communal leaders in the War.

Two kinds of memoirs were published after the fall of the Monarchy: those written by the political elite who had joined the Sharifian cause and followed Faisal into Iraq, and those written by individuals who had lived through the War but had fought on the side of the Ottomans or had been victims of the vicissitudes of the disintegration of the Islamic Empire and the formation of the Iraqi colonial state.

What they shared was a sense of their being a transitional generation. Those who had no political axe to grind simply saw their memoirs as acts of witnessing and individual commemoration of lives marked by seismic changes. But their very act of witnessing had an air of inevitability because they recorded their experience against the background of the development of the modern state of Iraq and their role in the new nation. They took their Iraqiness for granted although there remained some debate as to what this identity meant, Arab, Baghdadi, Sunni, or Shiʿi. Thus, even someone like Talib Mushtaq, who withdrew from the Ottoman army after the fall of Baghdad in 1917 and eventually spent all of the War in Anatolia, came back to join the state apparatus as a diplomat. For him, it was his anti-colonial activity against the British in 1920 that helped his transition from Ottoman to Iraqi.[61]

The most openly political and formulaic of the memoirs were those written by the elite who had been disenfranchised by the 1958 Revolution. Many of them wrote from exile and their narrative of the War was often similar to al-Rawi's. They wrote to record their legacy in the creation of the modern Iraqi nation, in freeing it from the yoke of the Turkish Ottomans and allowing it to relive its Arab past.[62] The new political class of Iraq, they seemed to be saying, had no experience and no memory of the great struggle that underlay the creation of the nation.

Other memoirs offered alternatives to the Hashemite version of the creation of Iraq. Sulayman Faydi's memoir, written in the 1950s, and cited frequently in the 1960s, records the War experience of an Iraqi who, by his own reckoning, was active during the War in creating a program for Iraq independent of the Hashemites. He was a supporter of Talib al-Naqib, the notable from Basra who made claims on the Iraqi throne before the British chose Faisal for that position. According to Faydi's narrative, one disputed by British records, Talib al-Naqib had proposed to create a republic or constitutional monarchy in Iraq in exchange for his support for the British in the War.[63] For those who wrote these personal memoirs, the contest over the formation of the state before 1920 became central to the definition of the Iraqi narrative of the War.

The flurry in the publication of memoirs that offered personal but divergent narratives of the formation of the Iraqi nation was paralleled by the publication of biographies about communal personalities who played an important part in the War and in the 1920 revolt. In such biographies they were cast as nationalist heroes. These seem to have been designed for popular consumption as well as a means of reclaiming the communal past for a national collective memory of the War. Thus, a biography of al-Sayyid Mahdi al-Haydari, the Shiʿi cleric who had mobilized tribesmen for the War against the British, recast him as a revolutionary anti-imperialist. The author introduced his subject by stressing that the anti-imperialist fight of al-Haydari was known among the Shiʿi community of Iraq, but that he wanted it known by all Iraqis. The vocabulary of the biography is grounded in the hagiographic literature of Shiʿi figures and infused with religious imagery. However, the author makes it clear that Haydari was an anti-imperialist.

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61 Mushtaq.

62 However, even these officers were wary of the "mistakes" of the Monarchy. al-Rawi and Shawkat, for example, supported the 1941 Gailani coup.

63 Faydi.

The same process of writing community into a national memory of the War took place with some tribal communities in Iraq. We have already encountered the attempt by the leader of the Fatlah tribe to portray his tribe's position in the War as anti-imperialist and nationalist. The most lionized of tribal heroes was Shaykh Dhari Mahmud, the head of the Zawbaʿ tribe, a branch of the Shammar tribe, who lived in the Dulaym region between Baghdad and Fallujah. Shaykh Dhari had murdered Colonel Gerard Leachman, assigned to the security of the mid-Euphrates region during the 1920 revolt. He had escaped but was eventually captured and tried in 1928. He died in prison and his funeral became a rallying cry for anti-colonial demonstrations. In the inter-war period, his name was often invoked in popular tribal songs known as *hawsa*, and his tribal virtues of honour and courage extolled. The process of his canonization as a national hero imbued with the tribal virtues now conflated with the national identity of Iraqis began in the 1960s and continues to the present.[64]

In 1968, on the 40th anniversary of Shaykh Dhari's death, Abd al-Hamid al-Uluji and Aziz Jasim al-Hajiyya published his biography. Their narrative was a clear attempt to integrate the Shammar tribe in particular into a national Iraqi memory of the War that preceded the creation of the Iraqi state. Shaykh Dhari was singled out as an educated tribal leader, who was acquainted with the venerable *salafī* scholar and modernist Mahmud Shukri al-Alusi. He and his tribe fought fiercely against the British and oversaw the transfer of British prisoners to Baghdad after their defeat at the hands of the Ottomans in Kut.[65] Thus, the battle of Kut, which had hitherto been remembered as an Ottoman and not Iraqi victory, acquired an anti-imperialist colouring, those who participated in it were incorporated as heroes in the anti-imperialist struggle.

The memory of the War was now an open field in which each community reclaimed a role for itself in the formation of the Iraqi state, particularly before the Monarchy. Against such communal and individual remembrance of the War, a younger and secular generation of social scientists and popular historians produced historical memories of the War based on the mining of European as well as national sources. Popular historians like Mahmud Shabibi, sought in his 1977 book to illuminate aspects of the period that had been little known by Iraqis. Citing, in some instances verbatim, British and German sources, he singled out the early tribal and political collaborators with British rule.[66] Certain tribes were branded as unpatriotic while others were assigned a nationalist role.

Rauf al-Waʿiz, in a study of nationalist poetry in Iraq, included in his volume the poetry written to commemorate the tribal "anti-imperialist" stance against the British during the WWI.[67] When sociologist Ali al-Wardi attempted a corrective of this misreading of history by publishing a whole volume on the social history of the War, he was branded a reactionary. His reading of the complexity of the War, his insistence on recording the various remembrances of the War generation, and his refusal to accept the simple division of collaborator vs. anti-imperialist was, viewed in the context of the radical politics of the 1970s, highly controversial.[68]

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[64] Abd al-Hamid al-Uluji & Aziz Jasim al-Hajiyya, *al-Shaykh Ẓārī al-Maḥmūd Raʾīs Qabīlat Zawbaʿ, Qātil al-Kulunil Lītshman fī Khān al-Naqṭa* (London: Dar al-Hikma, 2002). The book is a reprint of a 1968 edition.

[65] Ibid., pp. 49-50.

[66] Mahmud Shabib, *Jawānib Muthīra min Tārīkh al-ʿIrāq al-Muʿāṣir, 1914-1921* (Baghdad: Dar al-Kitab al-Jadid, 1977). See also the more balanced: Khayri al-Umari, *Ḥikāyāt Siyāsiyya min Tārīkh al-ʿIrāq al-Ḥadīth* (Cairo: Dar al-Hilal, 1969).

[67] Rauf al-Waʿiz, *al-Ittijāhāt al-Waṭaniyyah fī al-Shiʿr al-ʿIrāqī al-Ḥadīth, 1914-1941* (Baghdad: Dar al-Huriyyah lil-Tibaʿah, 1974).

[68] al-Wardi, vol. 4. For a critique of al-Wardi, see: Sattar Jabr Nasir, *Hawāmish ʿalā Kitāb ʿAlī al-Wardī* (Baghdad: Matbaʿat Ufsit al-Minaa, 1978).

Conclusion

The literature on the WWI marked the first attempts to deal with it as part of the national memory. What had been a fragmentary rendering of the War during the Monarchy was now recast as a memory in which various actors in Iraq served in the creation of the Iraqi national project to build a state. Faisal I was accepted willy-nilly as the founder of the state, but it was his Arab nationalist credentials and his tortured relationship with the British that marked his initiation into the memory of the War. At the same time, the revisionist history of the War and the memories of various individuals who had presented alternatives to Faisal served to strengthen the view that there had been an Iraqi project for an independent state that predated Faisal's Arab project. This explains my interest in studying the 1914-1921 period in which all these alternatives developed. The transformation of the memory of the War from a jihadi to an anti-imperialist to an imperialist one secularized it and allowed various communities to integrate it into the Baʿthist program. The Ottomans, in so far as they existed in the collective memory of the War, were simply foils for the emergence of the nation's struggle against the imperialists. They were successfully integrated into the nationalist memory of the War.

The first and second Gulf Wars have again opened the gates to a re-examination of the collective memory of the Great War. Part of this re-examination has to do with the failed modern Baʿth state project and the reassertion of imperial designs on Iraq in the wake of this failure. The collective memory that had developed under the Baʿth regime in the 1970s had accepted the colonial origins of the state now that it had been liberated from its founders, but it inscribed the memories of its different communities into a narrative of Iraqi nation continuously engaged in an anti-imperialist struggle. Those that did not fit that memory of the War were marginalized either through elision or through homogenization.

Munif's call to remember, despite his opposition to the Ba'th policies, is based on this kind of historical memory of the War. It is, however, also a call to look again at the origins and history of the first Iraqi state, a call that is being considered again by others in and outside Iraq. However, some Iraqi intellectuals are making a case for an alternative remembrance of the War and the formation of the Iraqi nation state.

In his book*Shāriʿ al-Rashīd: ʿAyn al-Madīna wa-Nāẓim al-Naṣṣ* [Rashid Street, The Eye of the City and the Composer of Text], Yasin al-Nasir, attempts to recover not one memory, but a multiplicity of memories. A literary critic who, at the time of his writing, had lived through the Iran-Iraq War and the First Gulf War, he creates an imaginative rendering of Rashid Street, the first modern thoroughfare in Baghdad, built by Khalil Pasha the governor of the city and commander of the Ottoman Sixth Army during WWI. al-Nasir wants to unscramble a homogenized nationalist memory of the formation of modern Iraq and introduce into his narrative an alternative reading of what he believes to be a memory plagued by militarism and distorted modernity. Rashid Street, paved as it was in 1916 to transport Ottoman troops and provisions from the northern part of the city near the Ottoman military barracks to the southern part and from there to the front, was a clear symbol of such a difficult marriage between the imperatives of the modern state and the cultural and physical space of its citizens with their accumulated lived experiences.

In evoking the sense of place and avoiding political personalities and historical narrative, al-Nasir reads Rashid Street as a text peopled by ordinary Iraqis whose memories of the encounter with modernity and the nation state have been at times tortured and at others ambiguous but never homogenous. For al-Nasir, the historical narrative of nation formation and the vocabulary of identity have been hijacked by a militarism that has robbed them of their meaning. The only way to recover an "authentic" memory is to write not of nation but of place and of "common" people as they interacted and shaped their physical environment.[69] Whether what al-Nasir and his cohorts project is possible is difficult to say, but it bespeaks a sense of coming full circle, from the early remembrance of the War as fragmentary to the attempt to dismantle the memory of the whole project that it created at the beginning of the twentieth century.

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[69] Yasin al-Nasir, *Shāriʿ al-Rashīd, ʿAyn al-Madīna wa-Nāẓim al-Nāṣṣ* (Damascus: Dar al-Mada, 2003).

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