Remaking Iraq: Neoliberalism and a System of Violence after the US invasion, 2003-2011

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Abstract
After the invasion of Iraq and the destruction of Saddam regime in 2003, the US administration undertook the complete remaking of Iraq as a national-state. The initial steps of the US administration were the quasi eradication of the old Iraqi State. Then, this nation-building endeavor has been based on a federal constitution promoting an Ethno-sectarian power sharing and the attempt to transform what was once a centralized economy into a comprehensive market driven society. However, the post-2003 period had been marked by the rising of identity politics, the constant delegitimisation of the new political order and successive episode of massive violence. Obviously, the question of violence and its apex in 2006-2007, is central to understand the post-2003 period in Iraq. For the first time in Iraqi history, waves of ethno-sectarian violence seriously challenged the possibility of a common life for all the diverse components of the Iraqi society. The Iraqi nation seemed to have been consumed in an existential conflict between components and communal identifications once relatively integrated. Therefore, there is a need to render an analytical account of the aggressive rise of identity politics, the outbreak of violence and finally the episodes of civil war in 2005-2007 in Iraq.

This study aims to answer these questions by tracking the different political and social processes that have been at play during the American occupation of Iraq and that lead to the events of 2005-2007. In order to do so, I will consider the dynamical relations that link political institutions, violence and self-identifications in regard to the Iraqi society and Iraq as a National State. This research is built as a case study based mostly on qualitative analysis and the collection of empirical data, interviews, and fieldwork observations as well as primary and secondary sources. I set out to identify actors and processes and determine a complex chain of reactions (a trajectory) that led to the current state of affairs in Iraq. This trajectory could be summarized in few sentences:

The destruction of the old Iraqi State and the brutal implementation of Neo-liberal rationality and re-regulations policies by the US occupation ended into a dystopian economy and the creation of an "absent state" (Davis, 2011). Since its very first day, this US lead nation-building endeavor has been flawed by a complete lack of legitimacy and its substitution with coercion by the US and the New Iraqi "State" security apparatus. Meanwhile, the imposition and the institutionalization of Ethno-sectarian affiliations as a principle of political legitimacy contributed to transform the different communities of Iraq into main avenues for access and control of scarce economic and political resources. In a way, US occupation and new Iraqi elites were deflecting the political question of right following a movement similar to what Mamdani and Brown describe as a "Culturalisation of Politics" (2004, 2006). The result was a failure to establish a legitimate and functional political and economic order. This led to the rise of a System of Violence, organized around networks of violence. Within the System of Violence, Culturalisation of Politics would be translated into Culturalisation of Violence. This would contribute to the sectarianisation of space in Baghdad and other localities of Iraq, as well as "manufacturing" (Gregory, 2008) and essentialising sectarian representations and identifications within the society.

Keywords: Iraq, US, Civil War, Neoliberalism, Neoliberal Rationality, Muhasasah, Sectarian Cleansing, Culturalisation of Politics, Depoliticisation, Space, Market State, Sectarianism, Identity Politics, Essentialisation, Ritualised Violence, State Building.

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Introduction

After having invaded Iraq in 2003 and destroyed the Ba'athist dictatorship, the United States (US) Administration undertook the complete refounding of Iraq as a nation and a state. The initial steps of the US-led Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) was the eradication of the old regime’s security apparatus as well as an important part of the remaining structures of the Iraqi State. Since then, this nation-building endeavour has been based on a consociational, federal constitution promoting an ethno-sectarian power sharing or muhasasah, and the attempt to transform what was once a centralised national state into a comprehensive, maybe idealised, market-driven democracy. The American occupation of Iraq and the attempt to remake Iraq has turned into a nightmare. For more than a decade now, Iraq has been engulfed in general, multiform violence that between 2005-2007 culminated into an ethno-sectarian civil war and episodes of ethno-sectarian cleansing in the main cities of the country.

The ebb and flow of the violence has resulted in hundreds of thousands of victims and millions of refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). At the same time, the reconstruction of the state never delivered the predicted outcomes, and the country remains marred with endemic corruption, economic crises, lack of basic public services, a fragmented state and sectarian militia. Hence, it is not surprising that Iraq never left the top ten list of the most fragile states in the world since the beginning of such compilations in 2005 (Fragile State Index 2015). Even worse, the violent explosion of ethno-sectarian conflict that started in Iraq during the American occupation has reached important areas of the Middle East. Iraq is now part of multiple wars and regional conflicts that go all the way from Aden in Yemen to Diyarbakir in Turkey. As such, the year 2014 saw Iraq losing about a third of its territory within the Al Anbar, Ninawa, Salah ed Din and Kirkuk provinces to the proclaimed Sunni caliphate of the Islamic State that now stretches over Syria and Iraq. In fact, one could summarise the plight of the country in two sentences:

In 2015, the Al Abadi government conducted a rambling alliance of Shi'a militia, Sunni tribal fighters and what remained of the state security apparatus to battle its way back to the lost provinces in the central and northern regions. Meanwhile, the south of the country and Baghdad, the capital, were shaken all summer long by street protests held by Iraqi citizens enraged by the abject corruption among the religious and political elites, the complete impotence of the state and the continuous electricity shortages.
Certainly, the last 35 years of Iraqi history are particularly sad to look into, and it is quite difficult to make sense of the terrible extent of pain and destruction that the Iraqi society has had to endure until now. From 1979 to 2003, the Iraqi people had to live under the Saddam dictatorship, one of the bloodiest regimes of the region. They had to endure the Iraq-Iran war, the longest conventional war of the 20th century, from 1980 to 1988. Soon after, in 1991 they faced a US-led international coalition during the First Gulf War, which was immediately followed by the terrible crushing of the Sha’aban Intifada by the Saddam regime. The Iraqi people were then punished by one of the most severe, destructive and longest international embargoes from 1991 to 2003, which put a devastating strain on Iraqi society. Finally, they plunged into the last hellish decade of invasion, occupation and civil war. Within the last thirty-five years, Iraqis have never experienced more than three years of peace. If anything should surprise us, it should be the capacity for resilience displayed by an Iraqi society that has more or less held together during all these years.

Yet, considering the developments of the last decade, one cannot help but wonder if and when this capacity for resilience would reach its limits. Obviously, the general violence, and particularly its apex in 2006-2007, is central to understanding the post-2003 period in Iraq. This is notable because the extreme forms of violence, the sectarian cleansing, the outbreak of sectarian militia, and the massive displacement of the population all over the country were, for the first time, seriously putting into question the existence of an Iraqi society capable of creating the conditions for an integrated communal life. In other words, the Iraqi nation seemed to have been consumed in an existential conflict between its different communities and identifications that were once relatively integrated. Not only have the outcomes of such conflict been tremendous and its victims countless, but this incredible upheaval is without precedent in the history of the country. Therefore, there is a need to render an analytical account of the violent rise of identity politics, the outbreak of violence, and finally the episodes of civil war in 2005-2007 after the American invasion of the country. This can be divided into a few sets of interlinked questions:

What is the relationship between the US policies in Iraq and the failure to establish a viable transitional process and the reconstruction of the country?

What have been the mechanisms that led to the salience and politicisation of ethnic and sectarian relations in Iraq since the launch of the "democratisation" process?
What has been the role of violence in the new dysfunctional political and economic order, and the effects it has had on sectarian and ethnic representations and identifications?

This study aims to answer these questions by tracking the different political and social processes that have been at play during the American occupation of Iraq (2003-2011) that led to the ethno-sectarian civil war of 2005-2007. At the same time, and taking inspiration from Charles Tilly, this thesis seeks to de-naturalise both the ethnic/sectarian conflict and violence and understand how these factors intersect and relate to the social and political field. In order to do so, I will consider the dynamic relations that link the question of violence with the political institutions and self-identification – with regard to Iraqi society and Iraq as a national state – that were in construction at that time. This research is built as a case study based mostly on qualitative analysis and the collection of empirical data, interviews, fieldwork observations and primary and secondary sources. By triangulating the historical perspective with theoretical frameworks and empirical data, I set out to identify actors and processes and determine a complex chain of reactions (a trajectory) that led to the current state of affairs in Iraq. This trajectory could be summarised in a few sentences:

The destruction of the old Iraqi State (not only Saddam’s regime) and the Kinetic Neoliberalisation of the country by the US occupation ended with a dystopian economy and the creation of an “absent state”. Since its very first day, this US-led nation-building endeavour has been flawed by a complete lack of legitimacy and its substitution with coercion and violence. The result was a complete failure to establish a legitimate political and economic centre that was able to realise politics and negotiate plurality. This gave rise to a System of Violence as a main tool to resolve conflict. The imposition and the institutionalisation of ethno-sectarian affiliations as a (failed) principle of political legitimacy contributed to the transformation of the different communities of Iraq into the main avenues for access and control of scarce economic and political resources. Ultimately, the merging of the ethno-sectarian coordinates and the System of Violence led the way to ethno-sectarian civil wars.

Therefore, the main arguments of this study are counter-intuitive. First, political and economic goals are the main drivers of the internal conflict in Iraq, where ethno-sectarian identifications and relations are apparatus of mo-

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1 I borrow the concepts of Kinetic Neoliberalisation and absent state respectively from Dodge (2010) and Davis (2011).
2 I will provide a short definition in the theoretical Chapter 1.4 and a lengthy description of it in the Chapter 3.2.
bilisation and legitimisation. Second, the Iraqi society was not massively engaged in violence; on the contrary, violence and in particular the ethno-sectarian violence has occurred against Iraqi society, mainly by *Specialists in Violence* in relation or opposition to the new political system.

Before going further, two comments should be made around the construction of my thesis:

_First, if the US Administration bears a heavy responsibility in the unfolding of the Iraqi crisis, it was not the sole actor. As I show in this study, Iraqi elites and Political Entrepreneurs, Iraqi networks of violence have also played a critical part in the post-2003 period. Yet, other actors, mainly regional powers like Iran, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Turkey had played important roles as well. They are mentioned in different parts of this thesis but their involvement should deserve a systematic and comprehensive study, which was beyond the scope of my work. Since the beginning of the post-2003 period, these neighbouring countries developed direct relations with the Iraqi State and non-state actors, Iraqi elites and networks of violence, but they also benefitted from the depth of long-standing social, religious and tribal networks that need to be mapped and should be the object of specific studies. In particular, within the Shi'a community in Iraq, some of these networks have been powerfully deployed to the benefit of Iran. However, as Laurence Louër warns us, it would be wrong to think of such a transnational network as a rigid organisation and as an implacable tool in the hands of the Iran State (2012). Hence, to understand Iran’s extensive penetration of Iraqi politics and society, it must be viewed from within the complex context of transnational Shi’a social (commercial, patrimonial, etc.) and religious networks and their actors, the *Marjaiyya*, the different *Hawza*, notably Najaf and Qom, the *effendis*, political movements, patrons and businessmen._3

_Second, this study is not tackling the Kurdish national phenomenon or the Kurdish national struggle. Therefore, the questions of national identification and self-identifications of Kurds in Iraq are left aside. The complexity of the Kurdish question in Iraq, and by extension in the region, is beyond the scope of this study. Yet, as Kurdish political parties are involved in the Iraqi politics of the post-2003 period, they will be mentioned here and there, and their role highlighted when necessary in my thesis. In the same vein, between 2003 and 2011, one will observe episodes of ethnic cleansing between Arabs and Kurds in the north of the country—albeit in a lesser degree than between Arabs Sunni and Shi’i in the rest of country. The perpetrators would be mostly Arab armed

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groups and Kurdish militia. In a sense, these relations between Kurdish political parties and militia and their Arab counterparts are from the ethnic side of the ethno-sectarianisation of the Iraqi political and social life.4

The presentation of my research will be structured around three blocks. First, I will detail the methodology I used to conduct this research. Then, I will discuss the theoretical framework that will be mobilised in order to build my thesis. This will be done with regard to Iraqi historiography and previous studies and a discussion on the relation between violence and politics. Finally, I will give a rather extensive overview of political events and periods of violence as they appear around the American occupation period, from 2003-2012. Here, specialists or scholars of the Iraqi post-2003 period may not learn something new, yet it forms the contextual frame of events and situations on which I will draw my analysis. The second block will be focused on the institutional process set up by the US-led occupation; what has been called "the application of kinetic neoliberalism to Iraq" by Dodge and the failed attempt to build a "market-state" (Bobbitt, 2002), which would remain fragmented and sectarianised. It will also examine the process of the ethno-sectarianisation of political space and the "Culturalisation of Politics" (Mamdani, 2007; Brown, 2008). Finally, the third block of this study will concentrate on the question of violence. Notably, it will examine the emergence of what I call a System of Violence. I will show that the System of Violence as a social process is reproducing the fragmentation and the sectarianisation of the new political system and the new state into the social space. As such it is the main factor of the transformation of a social fiction, the sectarian "Myth-Symbol Complex" (Haddad, 2011), into social reality. In order to examine the different elements and the different kinds of actors of this System of Violence, I will use the Tilly’s theories and considerations on collective violence. I will also approach the issue of cruelty and the ritualisation of violence and its profound effects in the creation of a traumatic frame and the dramatisation and the essentialisation of sectarian representations and identifications in Iraq after 2003.

Part 1 Methodology, Theory and Context
1.1 Methodology

It may seem trite to speak about a thesis being a long or a strenuous project. However, I have to acknowledge that this one was particularly long and sinuous, with many turns back and forth. I think that I ought to retrace here briefly the journey, as well as some parts of my life within it, because I firmly believe in the necessity to reflect on the specific position of the researcher within his field of knowledge vis à vis its object of research. The questions of the objectification of the production of scientific culture, and the necessity of a reflexive work from the social agents of the academic field, have been long treated by Bourdieu and Wacquant. Although I am only writing a modest doctor of philosophy (PhD) thesis, the inaugural mark of recognition within an academic career, it remains nonetheless framed by the “structure of objective relations” within the academic field, and constitutes a stand within the struggle concerning the modes of production of scientific knowledge and the diverse representations of the reality. Therefore, I hope that the following lines would inform the reader not only on the method that I tried to employ in the development of my research but also of my “self-interest(ed) vision of the social world” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 66). In a sense, I hope that one would see and understand “from where I speak”. I will then address the different topics i.e. Epiphany, Case Study, Abduction, Fieldworks, Data Analysis and Ethics, that form the methodological core of this study.

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6The mode of production of scientific knowledge could be understood as encompassing the positions, practices and struggles within the autonomous field of knowledge, where what is at stake remains the acquisition of scientific and academic (temporal) capital. In this field of force, the elaboration of a cultural production by its social agents remains constrained by the “structure of objectives relations” (“rapports de force”, capital concentration and domination within the academic field). See for instance, Bourdieu, Pierre. “l’illusion biographique”, Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales, 1986, Persee.fr and Bourdieu, Pierre. *Les usages sociaux de la science: Pour une sociologie clinique du champ scientifique*. Editions Quæ, Cairn.info, 1997
1.1.1 Reflections on a long thesis journey

In a sense, my thesis began 13 years ago in Iraq on the road leading to Baghdad. At that time, I had recently joined a pool of associations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs)\(^7\) that had decided to monitor the invasion and occupation of Iraq by a western power, a critical event after decades of decolonisation and independence. After spending nearly six months in Iraq from December 2003 to May 2004, we had to flee a country that was drowning in generalised violence. I left Iraq after being shocked by the violence I saw, and frightened by the rise of identity politics, and a reconstruction process that seemed to be a complete failure. A few months after, I began a Maîtrise in Political Science. My work focused on the political process leading up to the first National Assembly in January 2005. This political and constitutional process was supposed to be the core element of the remaking of the Iraqi nation under US patronage. I was analysing how it could permit a democratic transition and national reconciliation after the fall of the Saddam regime. This work drew a great deal on the interviews and field notes that I collected the year before in Iraq, and also on many phone discussions that I would have with Iraqis in Iraq. My conclusion was as bleak as the title of my thesis: *The elections of the 30th January 2005, toward a torn nation.* The following year, I did a masters degree focusing on the different movements that were opposing the constitutional process and the US occupation of Iraq. In that study, my aim was to re-situate such movements within an Iraqi political field that had been historically structured around three major currents—communist, nationalist and Islamic—as well as address a fundamental question: the relation between Iraq and the Arab nation. It was also an examination of the historical construction of the Iraqi State, and how contradictions lying within Iraqi society were translated into the political field. To accomplish this research, I went back to Syria, Jordan and Lebanon for a few months in 2006, to conduct interviews of militants and representatives of diverse Iraqi political and religious movements.

At the end of 2006, Iraq entered the peak period of the ethno-sectarian violence and hundreds of thousands of Iraqis were fleeing a ravaged country. I began the fieldwork mostly based in Syria, but did some work in Lebanon and Jordan\(^8\). I also joined, as a research associate, the Institut Français du Proche

\(^7\) Among which, CCIPPP, Focus on the Global South, Un Punte Per or CorpWatch
Orient. In total, I would spend two and a half years conducting interviews and engaging in participant observation in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. This time, I was willing to investigate national and sectarian identifications among ordinary Iraqis who had fled their country. I was looking for discourses or aggressive practices among Iraqi refugees that would show how sectarian identifications and relations within Iraqi society had changed before the occupation, and prepared the way for the explosion of violence. However, this was a dead end. During these nearly three years of fieldwork, I was constantly stumbling on two problems:

First, for the vast majority of my Iraqi informants, whatever their sectarian affiliation, there was a gap, inexplicable, insurmountable, in terms of sectarian relations and representations between the post-2003 period and any earlier epoch anyone could remember.

Second, they were describing violence as a central element in the transformation of sectarian relations in their life, and not the opposite.

In the autumn of 2009, I decided to quit the fieldwork in Syria. I was out of funds and frustrated with research that seemed to go nowhere. I re-joined the NGO I had been collaborating with previously, and for the next two and a half years I would participate in different campaigns of solidarity and mobilizations in Asia and the Middle East. Yet, I was still tormented by the fact that my research about Iraqi refugees had been a failure. Also, I had hundreds of pages of interviews and discussion notes with Iraqis that were saved on my hard drive. In 2012, I got the opportunity to enroll in a 4-year PhD scholarship programme at Stockholm University. It was a good chance to restart my research anew, and extend my work in Sweden where an important Iraqi community had resettled.

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9 This way I was trying to follow Eric Hobsbawn’s postulate that the nation is a double phenomenon, principally constructed from above by political and intellectual elites but that needs also to be understood from below, from the hopes, needs and interests of ordinary people. See Eric Hobsbawm, Nations et nationalisme depuis 1870. Édition Française. Saint-Amand: Gallimard, Folio Histoire, 1992. p 29
I think that this introduction has shown that I do not consider this thesis as an isolated or a completely original project vis a vis my previous undergraduate or graduate research and work. On the contrary, I think this thesis exists as the continuation of that work. In a sense, I did not stop to try and analyse the political and social upheavals provoked by the US occupation, and the dynamic relations between social contradictions and the political field in Iraq. Besides, all of the research has been framed by the same epistemological paradigms of hermeneutic/interpretative science:

“At both the micro and macro level, the interpretative paradigm is characterized by a special emphasis: 1) a focus upon the interaction of unique contextual factors which places constraints upon attempts to generalize with (2) the meaning that actions have for relevant actors being among the more important of those contextual factors and, accordingly, (3) a concern with humans as active subjects of action as well as passive recipients of predetermined forces.” (Sallach, 1973:134)

But of course, there are also important differences between my preceding work about Iraq and this thesis. Most notably, the general methodology employed to conduct this research thesis differs from my preceding work. Hence, I elaborated on my master’s thesis, navigating between cultural studies and Bourdieu’s conception of symbolic capital fields and *habitus*. I had been approaching my different sets of fieldwork with this theoretical baggage and a research question; how at the social level, can one identify and retrace changes within sectarian and communal affiliations and representations that had allowed for the rise of sectarian violence in the post-2003 period in Iraq? Therefore, during my three years’ fieldwork in Syria, and afterwards when I began the fieldwork in Sweden, I was recollecting the discourses and practices of Iraqi refugees abroad. With regard to the period before the exit or escape from Iraq, I was focusing on the narrative, mainly biographical, of their life in Iraq. In particular, I was looking for dramatic or specific events in the narratives of my informants that would highlight a change in sectarian relations and representations before the unfolding of violence in the post-2003 period. In a sense, I was looking for negative epiphanic moments in the life of these Iraqis, moments of crisis or breaks in the narratives of my informants that would be directly linked with sectarian relations. Denzin describes epiphany in this way:
“The epiphany occurs in those problematic interactional situations where the individual confronts and experiences a crisis. Often a personal trouble erupts into a public issue, … Epiphanies occur within the larger historical, institutional, and cultural arenas that surround an individual’s life. Troubles are always biographical. Public issues are always historical and structural. Biography and history thus join in the interpretive process. This process always connects an individual life and its troubles to a public historical social structure. Personal troubles erupt in moments of individual and collective crisis. They are illuminated, often in frightening detail, in the epiphanies of a person’s life. These existential crises and turning-point encounters thrust the person into the public arena.” (Denzin, 2001:37)

However, I could not find such movements in the narratives of my informants, nor retrace a cumulative change in sectarian relations. If anything, the data from the vast majority of my interviews and discussions was pointing to the violence that occurred after 2003. In 2009, I had written an article about sectarian relations among Iraqi refugees in which the post-2003 violence was an important element. But I was still persuaded that the violence was a symptom of a long process of stratification and aggravation of sectarian contradictions within Iraqi society and that had been hidden under the Saddam dictatorship (Sommer-Houdeville, 2009:48). Thus, it was with this perspective in mind that I began my thesis and my fieldwork in Sweden in 2012/2013. However, two different events would change radically the way I would approach these questions.

It first happened during a discussion with a school teacher in Stockholm. My informant, who became a friend, defines herself as an “Iraqi Swede”[sic], and has dual nationality. Both her parents, but in particular her father, had been political opponents of the Saddam regime, and were at that time close to the Iraqi Communist Party. In the mid-eighties, they fled Iraq and settled first in Hungary. Thus, Amal had lived nearly all her life outside Iraq, in Hungary for the first seven years of her life and then in Sweden. At the time of the discussion, she was teaching in a suburb of Stockholm where an important segment of her students was young Iraqi-Arabs, the majority of whom had arrived in Sweden after 2003. She noted with consternation that her students were now relating to each other according to their sectarian ascriptions, and that these sectarian relations were changing in an aggressive way. In her own words “it was worse and worse” since 2003 and especially since the period 2005/2007.

As we pursued the discussion, she noted how much these kinds of relations were absent during her own childhood. Her family was Shi’a with relatives in Baghdad and in the South, around Basra. However, she grew up in a liberal household where religion was not an important marker in their life. Nonetheless, her family remained politically active. For example, during the 1991 Intifada in the South of Iraq, her father was part of the mobilisation and solidarity of the diaspora toward the insurgents against Saddam. In Sweden, Amal
grew up with some Iraqi and Arab friends. All the Iraqis she knew belonged to families that had fled the Saddam regime. However, the sectarian affiliations of these young people were not important for them. If they may have acknowledged it, it was not a subject of discussion. They had debates about the Saddam regime, the question of Palestine, the Arab nation and so on, but not about Shi’a, Sunni or Christian affiliations and relations. Although it was this conversation that struck me, in fact all the interviews that I made with people from Iraqi origins who lived in Sweden before the post-2003 period, around a dozen, were quite similar. Most of them acknowledged a radical change in sectarian relations and affiliations after 2003, not before.

The people I had interviewed were not victims of the Saddam regime’s coercion, they were living abroad and were maintaining some contacts with Iraq. If sectarian relations had aggravated so much during the eighties and nineties, how is it that they did not have repercussions on their lives and on their relations with other Iraqis and other Arabs abroad? According to my informants in Sweden, sectarian relations and representations were changing now. Why did it not change previously? In fact, these interviews and narratives were adding a new layer of information that was going in the same direction as that of all the interviews and narratives I got from my previous fieldwork. In my view, this was seriously challenging the different assumptions—that sectarian relations had aggravated before 2003 and served as the combustible on which Iraq would explode after 2003—that were common in my academic milieu and with which I had begun this research.

A second insight came when reading different studies about the Yugoslav conflict for a mandatory course on Ethnic Relations when I began the PhD programme in Stockholm. In particular, one article written by Oberschall was striking (2000). In a nutshell, Oberschall shows that local political elites, taking advantage of the collapse of the Federal communist regime, had been able to manipulate and instrumentalise latent nationalism at the grassroots level by reactivating a dormant crisis frame anchored in the Yugoslav population. Once in power, these elites suppressed moderate voices, and organised or supported militia that perpetrated ethnic violence (Oberschall, 2000). More compelling, in his article Oberschall quotes different interviews of ordinary citizens of Ex-Yugoslavia about ethnic and confessional relations before the war. These interviews were quasi-identical, nearly word for word, with the ones I did with Iraqis decades later and thousands of kilometres apart. They highlight a similar kind of gap, the impossibility for the informants to understand why ethnic mixing and relations changed so radically, and the impossibility to understand the violence that they encountered. Oberschall wrote: “Most ordinary people were stunned by the violence that descended upon them, unexpectedly” (2000:988). I could have written the same about the overwhelming majority of my Iraqi informants.

As a teenager in the nineties, I had grown up with the mainstream media depiction of the Yugoslav conflict as the violent return of old hatreds and
grievances between people that have been held together by a dictatorship. Once the dictatorship was gone, these people went back to killing each other. However, many scholars demonstrated that the explosion of Yugoslavia was the result of complex social engineering and that ethnic violence was one of the outcomes and not the root of the conflict. Woodward for example states that: “to explain the Yugoslav crisis as the result of ethnic hatred is to turn the story upside down and begin at the end.” (Woodward, 1995:18). Hence, different scholars demonstrated that it was first, years of economic crisis, and secondly reforms imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that exacerbated an already dire political crisis until the explosion. They show that Political Entrepreneurs and elites were not able or willing to frame alternative policies to the neoliberal paradigm. Then, Yugoslavia broke into pieces as ethnic and religious rivalries were reasserted in an attempt to control the rapidly shrinking pool of resources (Samary, 1995; Woodward, 1995; Mirkovic, 1996; Pratt, 2000; Komel, 2011). I also read with great interest scholars who, drawing from studies of Orientalism and inspired by Edward Said, were precisely dissecting Western discourses on the Balkans and Ex-Yugoslavia conflict (Bakic-Hayden, 1995; Bjelić & Savić, 2002). In particular, they were denouncing the essentialisation of Balkan society and the naturalisation of violence in western discourses. Hence, Bakic-Hayden, noted that “…violence in the Balkans has been not only a description of a social condition but considered inherent in the nature of its people.” (1995:918). Decades later, other scholars would denounce the same kind of naturalisation of violence and essentialisation of Iraqi society in the mainstream media, but also in the academic world (Al Rachid & Méténier, 2008).

In fact, I had fallen into the same trap and, in particular, I had been taking violence in Iraq for granted all along. It was perhaps too much of a familiar thing. Hence, during my stay in Iraq in 2003-2004, I had been directly confronted with elements of violence—not sectarian violence—from the rising militia and the US military. Violence was also overwhelmingly present in the vast majority of the interviews and narratives of the Iraqis I met during all these years. However, I was afraid that this looming presence was a reflection of the extreme trauma that these people had to endure in Iraq. Besides, Iraqi society had been extremely brutalised by decades of wars, embargo and dictatorship (Bozarslan, 2008). Thus, it was reinforcing the idea that the violence of the post-2003 period was a quasi-natural phenomenon, a reproduction of the violence that Iraqi society had to endure during the Saddam regime. Therefore, I had considered the question of violence in Iraq with wariness. Even though or maybe because it was overwhelmingly present, I thought that this contextual frame had to be set aside, as if it was some kind of screen that interposed itself between the researcher and a deeper Iraqi reality.

However, the round of interviews in Sweden and my readings about the Yugoslav conflict made me realise that I had been approaching this research from the wrong perspective. Therefore, I decided to radically change the way
I would approach the study. Instead of setting it aside, I decided to begin by focusing on the phenomenon of violence on the basis of the interviews and the narratives of my informants. And I realised that the epiphanies that I was seeking since the beginning of my fieldwork were there, in the narratives and interviews of the people I met in Syria and elsewhere. Most of the time it took the form of a dramatic encounter with the violence of militia or armed groups, and it radically changed the life of my informants as well as their sectarian representations and relations.

1.1.3 Case study

As a whole, this effort to interpret and re-order a multiplicity of complex factors and events that ultimately ended in ethno-sectarian violence, took the form of a case study and more precisely a process tracking. It intends to render an explanatory account of a trajectory producing the rise of identity politics, the outbreak of violence, and finally the episodes of civil war in 2005-2007 in Iraq after the American invasion of the country. In a sense, the starting point of this trajectory is a violent regime change by an external force, i.e. the invasion of Iraq by the US army and the removal of the Saddam regime. However, this is an extreme case. As I demonstrate in the following chapters, the US Administration did not simply intend to topple a dictator and introduce a new political authority. They intended to radically redesign and reconstruct the form of the Iraqi National State and its political foundation. In terms of scale and scope, but not in substance, the model was the German or the Japanese post-World War II occupation. Therefore, in this instance it is a case study of the radical neoliberalisation of Iraq by force, or to recall Dodge, of a Kinetic Neoliberalism applied to Iraq (2009, 2010). In this frame, I intend to decipher the complex chain reaction, a trajectory and a period, the American occupation of Iraq, that produced the ethno-sectarian civil war between 2005 and 2007. As described by Khon, to understand such complex systems, one should consider factors such as:

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10 For a research model that inspired my research and its case study methodology, see Eric Klinenberg, Heatwave: A Social Autopsy of a Disaster in Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2002

11 I am using here the term identity politics not as a category of analysis but as a category of practice. Hence, designing here the use of rhetoric or acts by religious or political elites that aim to divide and build constituency on the base of ethnic or sectarian affiliations. On the question of Identity, Identification and Self-identification as categories of analysis and practice see Brubacker and Cooper (2000).
“Identifying the actors and the roles or functions they perform in the system ("actors" could be people or institutions, and one actor may perform multiple functions);

- The actions, strategies or behaviors of the actors, and the forces driving those behaviors;
- Interactions among the actors.” (Khon, 1997: 4)

This explanatory research allows me to track the different political and social processes that have been at play during the American occupation of Iraq (2003-2011). On a more theoretical level, I will try to analyse the dynamic mechanisms and relations that link neoliberalisation, ethno-sectarian Boundary Making and nation-building on one side, and violence, self-identification and space on the other. It intends to:

- Identify the main actors of the Iraqi conflict: the US Administration, the new Iraqi political establishment, the militia and armed groups, the new state security apparatus, the Iraqi society
- Analyse the processes in which they interact: the destruction of the “old” Iraqi State, the liberalisation of Iraq, the construction of an ethno-sectarian political system, the generalisation of violence
- Outline the outcomes of these processes on social levels.

As such this study is constructed as: “...an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution or system in a 'real-life' context. It is research based, inclusive of different methods and is evidence-led.” (Simons, 2009:21). Presented here is an in-depth description and analysis of a diachronic trajectory of the Iraqi occupation, the rise of identity politics, and the outbreak of violence leading to the 2005-2007 civil war, which allow some key “causal mechanisms” (“pattern matching” and “process tracking”) (Gerring, 2004) to emerge. As the study unfolds, the reader will notice that three important sets of causal mechanisms interact together and constitute the principal articulations of the complex reaction chain that I am describing: the destruction and reconfiguration of the political and economic systems, the movement to a Culturalisation of Politics and Boundary Making, and finally the rise of a System of Violence and a process of essentialisation. Furthermore, all of these inter-related mechanisms produce their own intermediate effects that are described and analysed in this research.

I obviously had my own reasons to choose Iraq and the specific period of the US occupation as a subject of research. I have been there, and it has been part of my formative years. Because of my connection to this country, I lived for some years in the Middle East and built personal and social relations, that remain until this day. But beyond this personal drive, I think that the post-2003 period in Iraq has real intrinsic interests. This study is about a country
that has been nearly destroyed, and the unleashing of a series of destabilising and violent waves all around the region. These facts in themselves, and many others, should push us to return to Iraq again and again for a better understanding of what happened and what is happening to the country and its society. Yet, I also think that the post-2003 period in Iraq can give important and more general insights into the relationship between violence, politics and the state-building process, and on the devastating effects of neoliberal rationality on such a process. Therefore, there is also an “instrumental” agenda in this study. In a certain way, while doing this case study I find myself exactly in the situation described by Stake:

“We simultaneously have several interests, particularly and general. There is no hard-and-fast line distinguishing intrinsic case study from instrumental, but rather a zone of combined purpose.” (2005:445)

This study primarily uses qualitative methods, although some elements of quantitative data (polls, statistics, etc.) have been used when available and relevant, since these were the most appropriate methods and tools available with the data to conduct this study.

1.1.4 Abductive Logic

In order to facilitate the reading and to illustrate a trajectory that leads to ethno-sectarian violence, this study is presented in a way that respects the chronology of events from the invasion of Iraq to the civil war in 2005-2007 and beyond. It presents the construction of a new political and economic order in Iraq and its consequences at a social level. Then, in a second phase, it focuses on the question of violence and its evolutions during the same period. However, my research was in actual fact conducted the other way around, in reverse order to the way it is presented here. Its bedrock constitutes the interpretation and the close study of the narratives and interviews of informants in my different fieldwork sessions. In fact, the starting point of this study is precisely the attempt to understand the gap in the descriptions of sectarian relations by the majority of my informants between the occupation period and before, and its direct relation with the violence that they had to endure during the post-2003 period. I try to understand how the violence has been reshaping the country physically and socially at the societal level.

Notably, in this study I illustrate how the violence of the post-2003 period had been radically transforming sectarian relations and representations in Iraq. Then, I expand my focus to understand how violence had evolved around different phases from 2003 to 2011, how it has been structured around the new political and economic order and its actors but also the foreign powers, with
the US forces being the most important. At this point, I made a leap in my understanding of how the new political order and the new Iraqi ‘State’ had been re-built by the US Administration and the new Iraqi political elites. I perceived how they have been based on a neoliberal federal constitution promoting an ethno-sectarian power sharing, a political space and a new state that would be fragmented and sectarianised. Finally, I made a last leap to situate the ideological framework that animated the US Administration with regard to the planning of the invasion and the occupation of Iraq. And further how the occupation and the rebuilding of the Iraqi economy and institutions had been based on neoliberal rationality, and what the consequences have been on the social level. In this sense, this research is following a process of abduction:

“When faced with surprising facts, abduction leads us to look for meaning-creating rules, for a possibly valid or fitting explanation that eliminates what is surprising about the facts. The end-point of this search is a (verbal) hypothesis. Once this is found, a multi-stage process of checking begins. If the first step in the process of scientific discovery consists of the finding of a hypothesis by means of abduction, then the second step consists of the derivation of predictions from the hypothesis, which is deduction, and the third step consists of the search for facts that will 'verify' the assumptions, which is induction. If the facts cannot be found the process begins again, and this is repeated as often as necessary until 'fitting' facts are reached. With this definition Peirce designed a three-stage discovery procedure consisting of abduction, deduction, and induction.” (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007:222)

Hence, from the discovery of an anomaly, a surprising phenomenon, represented here by the gap in the descriptions of sectarian relations by Iraqi informants, I intend to elaborate a preliminary hypothesis where organised violence played a primordial role. Therefore, I reworked and reinterpreted all my fieldwork data through this lens. Also, I decided to gather a different set of secondary data, (testimonies, interviews and narratives collected and published by other researchers or institutions) in order to see if they could corroborate, and how they were corroborating, my hypothesis. As described by Timmermans and Savory (2012), I intend to revisit my fieldwork experiences and use a process of de-familiarisation in order to re-evaluate my data and fieldwork. I am also leaning on the research done on the Yugoslav conflict on these questions, to have as a basis with which I can compare and understand similarities and differences. This research is not a comparative study between the Yugoslav conflict and the Iraqi crisis12, but to be precise, the research available on Ex-Yugoslavia has helped me to situate and understand the unfolding violence in Iraq.

12 One would find here the confirmation of Gerring: “Case studies are not immaculately conceived; additional units always loom in the background.” (2004:344).
“In other words, abduction is the form of reasoning through which we perceive the phenomenon as related to other observations either in the sense that there is a cause and effect hidden from view, in the sense that the phenomenon is seen as similar to other phenomena already experienced and explained in other situations, or in the sense of creating new general descriptions.” (Timmermans and Savory, 2012:171)

1.1.5 Data collection

For this thesis, I gathered primary and secondary data sources. The primary sources consist of data gathered directly by me with the different fieldwork and using different methods. Hence, I organised and recorded semi-open interviews and conversations from a vast range of informants. During my first fieldwork in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan in 2006, I recorded 16 Iraqi intellectuals and political militants from different organisations and political currents. From 2007 to 2009, I recorded and listened to around 50 Iraqi refugees, mostly individuals but in some instances families, mainly in Syria but also in Lebanon and Jordan. The vast majority of these informants were ordinary people, very few had been involved in politics or in social movements in Iraq, and they were coming from different social, religious and regional backgrounds. Then, in Sweden in 2013, I recorded 12 Swedes of Iraqi origin or Iraqis who did not yet have residency and were officially refugees. The majority of the interviews were recorded (with the consent of my informants) and transcribed verbatim. In situ notes and excerpts of non-recorded interviews and conversations have been incorporated into the data. All interviews and quotations had been anonymised. Although, I never asked for written consent from my informants, I always asked for their oral consent and explained to them the objectives of my research and use of the data gathered.

An important number of the interviews were semi-structured around the same set of guidelines. They are comprised of my interviews with Iraqi refugees during the years 2007-2009, mainly in Syria but also in Lebanon and Jordan, and most of the interviews I did in Sweden were during the autumn of 2012 and during the year 2013. In these interviews, I would begin by asking how and why they left their homes in Iraq, and why and how they chose the accommodations they were in when we did the interview. Then, I would follow up by asking how life was like in Iraq after 2003 until they left. Then I would ask biographical details of their life before 2003. How they were raised, what they could tell me about their family, their work, their schools and their neighbourhoods. Then I would follow this with questions about their life as refugees, their relations with locals and Iraqis in the new place. Finally, the interview would end with questions about Iraq’s current political situation but also its history and how my informants would see their future or the future of
their children in the new country. During the interview, I also focused on sec-
tarian relations and representations, in particular how each informant related
to Iraqis of different sects, in the present as well as in the past. When looking
at the material I brought from my participative observation and fieldwork, in
particular in Syria between 2007-2009 and in Sweden in 2013, the corpus of
data bears quite a resemblance with resources created by oral history tech-
niques such as described by Janesick (2010, 2014). During these interviews, I
was trying to maintain empathy and a “deliberate naïveté” (Kvale, 1996:33)
in order to give my informants as much room as possible to express them-
selves and describe their life world (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2008).13 Yet, the
form of the interviews depended greatly on the interviewees and their will and
capacity to express themselves. On some occasions, with particularly loqua-
cious informants, interviews were leaning toward a narrative form (Flick et al.
2004:206-207), with scarce interventions from my side. An important segment
of these interviews were conducted over several sessions. Hence I would ar-
rive and we would conduct a first interview for an hour or more and then I
would come back days or weeks later to pursue it.

The interviews conducted with Iraqi political actors and intellectuals during
the year 2006 in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan were based on different guidelines
which focused on the Iraqi political field at that time. In particular, I was trying
to understand how these actors were relating to other movements and organi-
sations outside and inside the political process launched by the US occupation
authorities. Therefore, I organised the interviews around different themes,
such as national reconciliation, the constitutional process, the relation of the
political field with violence, the ideological background of the different move-
ments, and their relation with Iraqi political history. As such, these interviews
were structured differently to the ones conducted with ordinary Iraqi citizens,
and they yielded bare biographical information.

There is also what I call conversations, in the sense that these interactions
between different informants and myself were not constructed as interviews
at all, but as ordinary chats. In reality, such interactions were not planned, and
no dates or locations were set. I did not prepare for it, nor established guide-
lines or themes.14 A second major difference, was that most of such conversa-
tions happened with people that were more than informants, as they were
friends with whom I had more or less a long history of relationship and trust.
Hence, these conversations were happening in very different settings and at
very different times - they could be one on one, but often involving meeting

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13 See also Wengraft about receptive strategy for semi-structured interviews: “It empowers the
informant, enabling them to have a large measure of control in the way in which they answer
the relatively few and relatively open questions they are asked.” (2001:155)

14 On the question of unstructured interviews, in-depth interviewing and participant observa-
tions see Fontana and Frey: “The Interview”, The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research,
with more than one person. For example, I had such conversations with groups of young Iraqi artists and friends in Damascus in a bar in Bab Touma, and in a billiard club in Jaramana. It happened sometimes during a dinner with an old Iraqi friend, journalist and intellectual, in Latakia in Syria. Or, for example, the discussion I recalled with my friend Amal in the section above on epiphany, happened in the streets of Södermalm in Stockholm as we were walking back from a demonstration in the Spring of 2013. On three different occasions, once in a bar in Bab Touma, the Christian part of the old city in Damascus, and twice in the house of my friend in Latakia, I was able to record part or the whole of the ongoing discussion, because my friends would agree for me to bring the recorder and turn it on at the beginning of our activity. But the majority of the conversations, maybe a dozen, were not recorded and I would take notes and transcribe excerpts right then or right after, back at home. With these kinds of conversations, although my own role as a researcher on Iraq was not forgotten by the participants, I would engage with my friends and informants not only by asking questions but also being asked for my own opinions or reflections on the topic we were approaching. Obviously, these conversations were the result of the trust and the friendship that had been established between me and my informants. This could have not happened without engagement in the field and participant observation.

Concerning participant observation, the reader of this thesis may be surprised not to find detailed accounts of my fieldwork. This study is not an ethnographic study although it employs some ethnographic procedures (Lüders, 2004:226). Therefore, I do not intend to provide long descriptions of the fieldwork or much evidence of it. Even so, they were primordial elements of this study. As I note above, without participant observation, I would not have obtained the trust or even the friendship of some of my informants. In reality, a majority of the interviews would not have happened without being engaged with the Iraqi diaspora. Hence, it is because I was part of an informal association providing English lessons for children, that I could access poor refugee families in Saida Zainab. In a similar manner, it was through organising small cinema festivals in Damascus and Italy in 2008-2009 that I could build relationships and trust with young Iraqi artists and filmmakers for my fieldwork in Syria. Beyond the access to people in the field, it was through observant participation that I could understand and contextualise the knowledge that was emerging from the discussions and interviews with my informants. This refers to what De Sardan designates as a process of impregnation, producing effects that would influence or even structure the way the researcher conceptualises,

15 In a certain way, this discussion and others that I obtained while travelling or walking with informants is close to the “going along” method proposed by Kusembach, “Street phenomenology: the go along as ethnographic research tool”. Ethnography, 4(3), pp455-485. See also Harris, J., “Utilizing the Walking Interview to Explore Campus Climate for Students of Color.” Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice, 53 (4), 2016: 365–377
analyses and interprets the data of its fieldwork (De Sardan, 1995:23). As echoed by different authors, it is "by the lasting co-presence of observer and events" as Lüders quotes Amann and and Hirshauer, 2004:225) that one can access complex and situational life-worlds. Hence, by sharing time and social activities, by eating and walking with my informants, I was able to grasp a deeper awareness of their world.

Finally, there is the data that I brought from my stay in Iraq from December 2003 to May 2004. This data is used with precaution for the evident reason that all these observations, reports, and interviews were not undertaken with a research purpose, but for the benefit of the organisations that sent me there. They remained, nonetheless, very informative. Therefore, they were not submitted for coding but used to illustrate the context of the direct post-2003 period in Iraq, and to indicate different trends concerning social and political

16 To give one example of such contextualisation, I was present in Damascus during the Asian 2007 Football cup won by the Iraqi National team. For the final game, I joined a large group of Iraqi youngsters in the centre of Damascus in a cafe that had been booked for the occasion. It was incredible to see the level of emotions and enthusiasm that was projected toward a national football team that was embodying the realities and contradictions of the whole country. Hence, in the peak of the civil war, the Iraqi National Football team was multi-confessional and multi-ethnic, with Kurds, Arabs, Assyrian, Sunni, Shi’i and Christians players who had to train in Jordan because of the violence in Iraq. The youngest, men and women, in the coffee shop around me were painted with national colors on their faces, wearing t-shirts of “the lions of Mesopotamia”. In the crowd, there were Iraqis from all backgrounds and sects, all shivering and shouting to support their team. When the final whistle was blown and the “Lions” became sacred champions of Asia, the crowd erupted in joy. And for the first and only time during my entire stay in Syria, I participated in a popular demonstration, without any kind of authorisation from Syrian authorities, in the streets of central Damascus. We went out marching and chanting behind a huge Iraqi flag for a few hundred metres in the street, while Syrian bystanders were looking at us in awe, until Syrian police and the Mukhabarat (Syrian State Security) arrived to let us know that we had to disperse. In Saida Zainab, Iraqi youngsters were less obedient and the party turned into riots against the Syrian police. In Qodsiea, huge fireworks were lit all night long. Later on, we went with some friends to party in Jaramana for the rest of the day and the night. Some of my friends who had still relatives in Iraq were calling them and telling us about how the whole country from Basra to Mosul and even in Kurdistan, was celebrating. People were dancing in the streets of Iraq despite the violence, the bomb attacks and the threats of armed groups. In retrospect, what is striking is that at that moment the Iraqi national football team represented the symbolic narrative of Iraq as a multi-confessional and multi-ethnic nation in a positive and successful way. Expressing the joy of the victory was also a way to express the attachment to the nation and the country. And at that moment Iraqis in Iraq and outside were embracing it. Obviously, these few days of common joy and celebrations were a symbolic parenthesis in a bleaker and destructive period. Interestingly enough, the discussions and interviews that I realised days after were showing that Iraqis knew perfectly that this enchanted break from civil war and sectarian violence was not sufficient enough to change the realities of a country on the verge of implosion. For some videos of Iraqis partying in the streets of Iraq and abroad on the day of the final, see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Y_-bF57mLk; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8zgmmzyczXc
mobilisation and the evolution of violence, that were already discernible at that time.

I also gathered a pool of data from secondary sources drawn from different materials and which have been used for a different part of this study, but most importantly for the first part concerning the Kinetic Neoliberalisation of Iraq, state-building and ethno-sectarian Boundary Making. An important part comes directly from journalists’ articles written during the period I am studying. Another pool comes from different US Congressional documents, and field reports produced by institutions or associations such as Human Right Watch, Amnesty International, or International Crisis Group. Another part comes from academic studies of Iraq, in particular from PhD theses partly covering my subject such as Ali Ali’s thesis on displacement in Iraq after 2003, or Fanar Haddad’s thesis on sectarianism in Iraq. Finally, there remain

17 As noted by Strauss and Corbin: “The literature can be used as secondary sources of data. Research publications often include quoted materials from interviews and field notes and these quotations can be used as secondary sources of data for your own purposes. The publications

Figure 1 Fieldworks and Interviews: Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Sweden
miscellaneous parts, which include biographical accounts of the period by US or Iraqi actors, but also from ordinary Iraqi citizens, and Internet blogs from Iraqis inside Iraq or abroad.

Figure 2 Data Types

1.1.6 Sampling strategy, snowballing and gatekeepers

Although I did not intend to build a data set that would have any kind of statistical relevance, I was looking for a diversity of samples that would allow me to have a broad and in-depth picture of my case study. Here, what was intended was the possibility to represent the case “with as many facets as possible” (Merkens, 2004:167). In terms of primary sources, the multiple sites and fieldwork, and the different periods on which this study relies contributed greatly to access heterogeneous and diverse factions of the Iraqi population. Hence, I encountered artists, intellectuals, political militants and leaders, but also ordinary citizens. These Iraqis were originating from different regions of Iraq: the North, Centre, South and the Capital. They belonged to different sects and ethnicities: Sunni, Shi‘i, Christians, Mandaeans, Shabaks, Assyrians, Kurds, Arabs; and were from different social classes and educational backgrounds. However, an important segment, if not the majority, of the people I have been involved with and interviewed were men and the majority of them were from an educated middle class background. This should not be surprising.
as it relates to the weight of patriarchal traditions within the Iraqi society on one side, and on the other the fact that among refugee populations, the people of middle class and educational background were the ones who had the most available means and resources to flee Iraq and live abroad. In fact, most of the gathering of primary data was achieved through clustered samples and snowballing (Patton, 1990), directly linked to specific fieldwork and locations. Sometimes, gatekeepers would present me one informant and from then on it would snowball from one informant contact to another, in a kind of *itération concrète* (concrete iteration) process described by De Sardan (1995:60-61).

In other situations, all informants would be encountered through the direct contact of the gatekeeper. Here, I am not hesitant to state that the “*informateurs privilégiés*” or gatekeepers (De Sardan, 1995:76-79) were very important in term of gaining access to the field and to understanding situational scenes. On this question, gatekeepers were also important as mediators and conveyors of trust during the initial contact with informants. In some encounters, the weight and authority transferred to me by the gatekeepers may have altered the relationship between me and my informants (Cohen, 2010). It may have been especially true for the fieldwork in Qodseia and Sednayah, because of the position of authority of the gatekeepers in those locations - a political activist in Qodseia and some priests in Sednayah. However, I think this was mitigated for three reasons. First, these gatekeepers were not always present during the encounters. Second, in particular in Qodseia, the gatekeeper did not always have a position of authority towards the informants he put me in contact with.

Thus, some of the interviews were the result of several encounters with the informants, therefore allowing us to develop a better relationship and knowledge of each other. In any case, considering the fact that there was a multiplicity of them, coming from different backgrounds, different places and at different periods, I think that I avoided falling into the trap of “*enclichege*” (factionalism) and of “*une stratégie de recherche paresseuse*” (lackadaisical research strategy) (De Sardan, 1995:76-81). Therefore, the fieldwork with intellectuals and political actors were accomplished in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon in 2006 through three different gatekeepers who gave me access to three different clusters of samples. These three gatekeepers were Iraqi friends, one intellectual figure who was living between Iraq and Lebanon who gave me the contacts of different related Iraqi intellectuals in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. The Sheikh Medhi al Khalissy from the Iraqi National Foundation Congress, introduced me to different political actors who were living or partly living in Syria and Jordan in 2006. And finally, one Iraqi intellectual and Marxist militant, who was a long time exile in Syria, gave me access to different political actors and militants in Lebanon, Jordan and Syria. For the period 2007-2009 and especially concerning the fieldwork in Syria, I have five different clusters with several gatekeepers:
In Qodseia, an acquaintance introduced me to some of his friends and relatives that were living there. Abu Ahmed, was an ex-pilot who had fled the Saddam Regime during the 1970s and was a close advisor of the Iraqi political figure, Sheikh Medhi al Khalissy from the Iraqi National Foundation Congress. All the individuals and families that I met in Qodseia were Sunni, but more specifically all these families were from a similar military background. All of them had left Iraq after 2003. Most of the interviews I did there took place in the apartments of these Iraqi refugees, and most of the time in the presence of a few family members.

In Sednayah, I had a Syrian friend who was returning back there every weekend to visit her family. As a native of Sednayah and a Syrian Greek Orthodox she had regular contact with the different Christian church institutions in the town. She put me in touch with priests and sisters who were helping Iraqi Christian refugees there. They permitted me to conduct my research in their churches and different charitable places housing refugees. Sometimes they would present me directly to Iraqi families, but most of the time I waited for the end of religious services to approach them.

In Jaramana I had a circle of friends; young Iraqi intellectuals and artists, refugees themselves with whom I organised a small indie film festival about Iraq, OfflineBaghdad, during the years 2007-2008. Through them, I could access other refugees, families or individuals that were living in Jaramana and who represented different sects and regions of Iraq.

In Saida Zainab, for nearly a year I took part in a small semi-informal association led by a Syrian friend of mine, that was focusing on Iraqi children. Basically, we would go to the families and teach Iraqi children topics related to their school work and help them with their homework. Personally, I taught English nearly once a week to a total of six children belonging to three different families coming from a Shi'i background. Access through these lessons enabled me to interview the three families and some relatives and friends that they presented to me later on.

And finally the fifth cluster comprises the Iraqi refugees I encountered in other circumstances and locations in Damascus. For instance, I met Iraqi refugees through acquaintances at the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, which was providing a part of the international aid to Iraqi refugees all over the country. I also met Iraqi refugees through my Arabic teacher, Mazen, in the Palestinian neighborhood of Yarmouk. Mazen was regularly organising movie nights and parties with Palestinians, Iraqis, Syrians intellectuals and youth as well as his foreign students and friends in his house in Yarmouk. Through these events, I was able to meet different Iraqis, mainly young Iraqis in their twenties, who were prepared to be interviewed.
During my stay in the region, I also interviewed four refugee families, two in Beirut and two in Amman through random contact, at a mosque that was providing help for Iraqis in Amman and at a church that was organising similar activities in Beirut. The interviews and encounters conducted in Sweden between the Fall of 2012 and the Spring of 2013 were also completed in quite a random fashion. Four interviews were performed with Iraqi people I met in the street close to my house in Farsta and then in Rissne, two suburbs of Stockholm. Three interviews were rendered with Swedish friends from Iraqi origins. Finally, some were made through contact with different associations related to Iraq, for instance the Iraqi Cultural Center in Stockholm. However, at the end of the spring 2013, I decided to stop the fieldwork and the collection of more interviews and primary data, considering that I had reached a certain degree of saturation where more interviews would not add more knowledge (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009:113). As I recall in the section on epiphany, I realised that my interviews were all pointing in the same direction, namely the radical change of sectarian relations through the post-2003 violence.

1.1.7 Important fieldworks:


In a sense, this period represents my main fieldwork done principally around Damascus in Syria, but also in Jordan and Lebanon. During this period, as a research associate with the Institut Français du Proche Orient in Damascus, I was also part of a research project coordinated by Geraldine Chatelard and Philip Marfleet, focusing on the migratory decision-making process of Iraqi refugees. Altogether, these two and a half years in the field enabled me to assemble a significant amount of material including more than 50 semi-open interviews, conversations and narratives and tens of hours of participatory observation. When I began the fieldwork in 2007, 4 years after the invasion of Iraq by the US-led coalition, more than 4 million Iraqis were considered refugees, immigrants or displaced by the United Nations (UN), which represented around a sixth of the whole Iraqi population. More than 2 million had fled Iraq mainly in the direction of Syria and Jordan. In 2009 in Syria, they were estimated as around 1.2 million by the Syrian government and the Office of the
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR). In any case, the greatest part of this immigration into Syria and Jordan had occurred between the years 2005 and 2007 with a peak during the year 2006. At the time when I undertook this fieldwork, the revolution in Syria had not happened and the authoritarian regime of Al Assad was in full control of the country. The Syrian State was calling the Iraqi refugees “Arab guests,” giving them resident permits but without official authorisation to work, yet the few that had enough money could establish a business. Through some agreement with the UNHCR, Iraqi refugees had certain access to health care and a significant segment of Iraqi children were enrolled within the Syrian school system. Of course, the hundreds of thousands of Iraqi refugees were under State and security apparatus scrutiny, yet they were not compelled to settle in places or camps designated by the state or the UNCHR. Obviously, Iraqis were still facing a dictatorship regime, a corrupt bureaucracy and a fearful apparatus of coercion in Syria.

In comparison, in Jordan the cost of living was much higher, and Iraqis did not benefit neither from minimum health care access nor the possibility to enroll children into the school system for free. Yet, in Jordan they were also facing corruption and a police that had no better reputation than in Syria. Lebanon was considered even worse by Iraqi refugees, and only the affluent were able to survive there. Overall, Syria appeared to many Iraqis as the most affordable, and in some sense the ‘friendliest’ place to settle for those that were escaping chaos in their country. In other words, Syria represented a place of security for the majority of Iraqi refugees who had escaped Iraq. Yet many of these refugees were in limbo. An important element, maybe for the majority of the Iraqis I met in Syria, but also elsewhere, was waiting and dreaming of leaving, for most of them to Europe or the US, and for yet a smaller group, to go back to Iraq if and when possible.

In Syria, in particular, the fact that there were no governmental settlement policies for Iraqis, meant that Iraqi refugees retained some agency to choose where they would settle. In fact a vast number, if not the majority, of Iraqi refugees chose to settle among Iraqis around four main places — Saida Zeinab, Qodsia and Jaramana, situated in suburbs of Damascus, and Sednaya

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19 In reality, they were no refugee camps for Iraqis in Syria. Only Palestinians coming from Iraq would be officially forced to settle in two Refugee Camps, in Al Tanf and Al Walid, at the border between Syria and Iraq.
in the countryside. This massive influx of refugees changed the physiognomy of these places but also the representations and perceptions of these places for Syrians and Iraqis. In particular, the three suburbs of Damascus, Saida Zeinab, Qodseia and Jaramana, were considered in the period 2006-2010 to have become ‘Iraqized’ places, where one had a good chance to hear people speaking the Iraqi colloquial version of Arabic more than the Syro-Palestinian spoken by Syrians. In these places, mural and street advertisements of shops and restaurants selling Iraqi kebabs, Iraqi tea, the Iraqi national dish masgouf, Iraqi bread and even the Iraqi national flag, were everywhere to be seen.

However, these places represented quite different segments of the Iraqi refugee population. Saida Zenab is first and foremost a place of religious pilgrimage for Shi’a all over the world, and many Iraqis that settled there were supposed to be Shi’a. However, this was also one of the cheapest places to settle in Damascus in that period, and naturally many Iraqis from other religious sects found themselves constrained to settle in Saida Zeinab for economic reasons. Quite the opposite, Qodseia, was considered a place largely populated by Sunni Iraqis, yet it was those who had the economic means needed to pay higher rents than in Saida Zeinab or in other areas. Jaramana, for its part, was seen as the cultural and entertainment hub for Iraqis in Damascus, with a large number of coffee places, restaurants, clubs, and a few Iraqi art galleries. In 2008-2009, there was even a project for building a theatre. Walking in the streets of Jaramana, one would encounter Iraqis from all sects and backgrounds. Yet, the Iraqis who settled there were the refugees able to afford the relatively high rental prices. Finally, Sednaya, in the countryside, is the site of a Christian holy site, the convent of Our Lady Sednaya, but also other churches and monasteries from different Christians creeds, such as Orthodox Catholic, Syriac Catholic, Orthodox and so on. The Iraqi refugees who settled there were supposed to be quasi exclusively Christians. Although Iraqi refugees had settled there in important numbers, their presence was much less visible than in the other areas. There was no visible sign of Iraqi cultural presence such as restaurants or coffee houses advertising Iraqi food.

In any case, the strategies for the settlement of Iraqi refugees in these different areas were very interesting to study per se. One could see how factors of class or relational networks were coupled with sectarian, or multi-sectarian, collaborations, discourses and practices, which as a whole contributed to the different choices of settlement in these different areas. For me, it was a very good point of entry for this study about sectarian relations and self-identification.

There were other areas, such as Murayam Yarmouk, the old Palestinian settlement area, also in a suburb, that had seen an important influx of Iraqi refugees. Or Massaken Birze, on the other side of Damascus, close to the road toward Lebanon. Yet, it was not in the same proportions and these places were not seen by Iraqis or Syrians as an “Iraqi” place.
Iraq 2003-2004

As I said previously, my presence in Iraq was not due to a research project but as a member of NGOs that were carrying out a monitoring project of the US occupation of Iraq. Our objectives were threefold: trying to understand the sweeping changes within a political field emerging under foreign occupation, after decades of dictatorship; monitoring the respect of Human Rights by the occupying force and the new institutions in construction; and finally trying to map and identify the impacts on the Iraqi economy and society through a reconstruction process led by foreign multinationals. Another side of our work was the attempt to build bridges between the nascent Iraqi social movement, trade unions and associations and their counterparts in Europe and US among unions, social movement and the anti-war movement. My part of this programme focused on the political field and its evolution. Therefore, I did mul-
tiple interviews of a large range of political Iraqi organisations within and outside the political process initiated by the US Administration.\textsuperscript{21} I was also giving a hand or just following other colleagues that were working on the two other fields. This had very little to do with a PhD formal research fieldwork, but it would nonetheless prove to be very formative.

For six months, I lived in Baghdad and travelled in the rest of the country, notably in Samara, Kufa, Najaf and Kerbala. I was in contact with political, religious and community leaders belonging to the Hawza of Najaf or the Associations of Muslims Scholars, and intellectuals but also with ordinary people, in order to grasp an understanding of the changes that were taking place in the political and social fields in Iraq.\textsuperscript{22} Being in Iraq at that time was an incredible experience that not only allowed me to see the important upheavals happening at that time, but also made me grasp an insight of the country, its culture, its food, the topology of Baghdad, its streets, neighbourhoods and monuments. I could see the beautiful landscape of the Euphrates-Tigris valley toward the South and I could walk in the Wadi as Salam around Najaf. A few weeks later, this cemetery, the biggest and maybe the most amazing in the world, would be the theatre of violent confrontations between Jeish al Madhi militia and the US army. I was invited to different celebrations, notably to watch the Ashura celebrations during the month of remembrance of Muharram, commemorating the death of Huseyn ibn Ali in Kerbala. For the first time, millions of Shi'i from Iraq and all over the world made the pilgrimage toward Kerbala and the other Shi'i holy shrines. However, month after month, we could see the rise of militia and armed groups, the surge of kidnapping and bombings and a generalisation of massive violence, from the US forces and Iraqi counterparts, being insurgents or Security apparatus, and the rise of general insecurity. This was materialised, for instance, by the closing of more and more streets and neighbourhoods with makeshift fences and barricades by the inhabitants themselves. In 2004, the violence had not yet taken an ethno-sectarian turn, still centred between occupation and anti-occupation sides and forces. Yet, the polarisation and political competition between community representatives, political or religious actors, were already growing.

\textsuperscript{21}Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI/SCIRI), Iraqi Communist Party, Worker Communist Party, Movement Al Sadr II, Iraqi Islamist Party, Islamic Dawa Party, Association of Muslims Scholars, Nasserite Socialist Party, Iraqi National Accord, National Democratic Party, etc...

\textsuperscript{22}For different accounts of my presence in Iraq at that time in this thesis, see chapter 1.6 Context: Iraq 2003-2012, 2.4 Failures and Dystopian Economics, 2.6 Reconfiguration of Political Space and Culturalisation of Politics.
1.1.8 Data analysis

In order to discern the different patterns that relate specifically to the sectarian representations and identifications at a social level, and their relations with different factors such as violence or socio-economic conditions, and political identifications, I have established a thematic analysis of an important part of the data. There are many definitions of the methods of thematic analysis, but I think Aguinaldo's simple and concise definition is the better:

“The goal of thematic analysis is simply to paraphrase and summarize the dataset as a whole or in part in relation to particular research questions. Analysis typically involves steps that a) identify the content of the data, b) reduce redundancy, and c) group data into representative categories that articulate or describe a particular social phenomenon.” (Aguinaldo, 2012)

In particular, I carried out a within-case analysis and a cross-case thematic analysis of all the interviews and different narratives of my informants, and some secondary data coming from interviews undertaken by other researchers. I have established a thematic framework with eight main themes: Ethnic Identification; National Identification; Sectarian Identification; Ethno-sectarianism; Plurality/Separation; Socio-economics; Violence; Religion. Each of the main themes may regroup sub-themes. For example, the Ethno-sectarianism theme would regroup sub-codes like Sectarian aggressive Sunni versus Shia, Sectarian aggressive Shia versus Sunni, etc., National Identification would regroup sub-codes like Iraq, State. The Violence theme, would regroup sub-codes like Fear/Absence of security, Militia/Armed groups violence. Socio-economics would regroup sub-themes like Class, Employment, Unemployment. The theme of Religion would illustrate a particular positive or negative focus on religious practice or belief. One of the aims was to see the recurrence of such themes in the discourses and narratives of my informants but above all to seek how the articulation of these themes and sub-themes was evolving during the period of the US occupation. In order to do so, I used a qualitative software, Dedoose, that helped me to organise and visualise thematic recurrences, co-occurrences and articulations before dealing with the analysis.
As I was reworking my data following the abductive logic, I also had to revisit and extend my theoretical corpus about violence based on the specific study of violence in the Middle East by Bozarslan, different reflections and studies around René Girard's works, a Françoise Héritier seminar, and finally Tilly and Arendt's own theories about violence. Basically, Tilly and Arendt's contrasting, and I believe complementary, works on Violence form the theoretical foundations around which the others are articulated, and helps to analyse the violence phenomenon in Iraq for the post-2003 period. By isolating
and focusing on the violence phenomenon per se, I was also following Brubaker and Laitin’s advice when trying to examine ethnic conflict. They state that:

“Violence has generally been conceptualized—if only tacitly—as a degree of conflict rather than as a form of conflict, or indeed as a form of social or political action in its own right. ... Violence is not a quantitative degree of conflict but a qualitative form of conflict, with its own dynamic. ... The study of violence should be emancipated from the study of conflict and treated as an autonomous phenomenon in its own right.” (Brubaker & Laitin, 1998: 426-7)

Insofar as the study of the violence phenomenon was the primary focus of this research, it however abutted against the conditions around which violence structured, and which allow it to deploy. This directly engaged the question of the new political and economic order in Iraq and its institutions, the new state, and how all of these have been re-built by the US occupational forces. Here again, I tried to triangulate the data coming from my fieldwork in Iraq in 2003-2004 and after in Syria in 2007-2009 with secondary data in order to understand how the state and nation-building, as well as the reconstruction process, had been realised by the US Administration and the new Iraqi elites and what had been its impact on political and social levels. And here again, the Yugoslav precedent had been important for me in order to grasp the rise and consolidation of identity politics, and its direct relation with the stiff competition that existed between community leaders in the struggle to appropriate shrinking resources. At a theoretical level, I have been leaning a lot on Brown's analyses of neoliberal rationality and Bobbitt's description of market-state to understand the ideological framework that animated the US Administration in the first years of occupation, and the impact of the implementation of neoliberal principles at political and social levels in Iraq. As for the focus on violence, the analysis of the US state-building process has been undertaken by going back and forth between theories and data so as not “to force categories on the data” (Glazer, 1992), but to involve a “recursive process of double-fitting data and theories” (Timmermans and Savory, 2012:179).

Finally, two areas of study emerged, the unfolding of the phenomenon of violence on one side and the US-led state and nation-building process on the other, with both being deeply interlinked. However, in real life these two processes had been engaged quasi-simultaneously in Iraq. Therefore, the final step of my research was to reconcile these two processes or, in other words, to re-order the unfolding of violence and the state and nation-building process in a way that illustrates the trajectory that led Iraq to the ethno-sectarian civil war in 2005-2007, and explain the rise of sectarian violence. As noted by Bryant and Charmaz:
“Abductive efforts seek some (new) order, but they do not aim at the construction of any order, but at the discovery of an order which fits the surprising facts; or, more precisely, which solves the practical problems that arise from these.” (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007:222)

Obviously, following a case study built on qualitative, mixed methods is not without pitfalls and possible bias. Nevertheless, following the work of other researchers, I think that the qualitative approach produces knowledge within a context, and also gives the point of view of the actors as well as about their representations and practices (Schwartz, 1990; Mathey, 2005). This is not to diminish the various difficulties that may affect the validity of qualitative research (subjectivity of the researcher, representativeness of the actors studied, monopolisation of the data, etc.), but I intended to minimise these, by using principles like saturation, triangulation, iteration, as defined and developed by different researchers (Denzin, 1989; De Sardan, 1995). Hence, the reader will find examples of saturation in this research in Chapter 3.4: “Centrifugation, Fragmentation and Sectarianisation” where I show the repetitions of common discourse and attitudes on sectarian relations before the occupation period. Similarly, in the same chapter, saturation is also used to illustrate the effects of violence in terms of breaking social bonds and relations. As described by the De Sardan the process of abstract iteration involves:

“A backward and forward movement between a problem and the data, between interpretations and results...The production phase of data may be analysed as a constant restructuration of the problem on contact with them, and as a permanent revisiting/re-development of the interpretative frame as the empirical elements accumulate.” (1995:62. Translation is mine)

This method also connects very well with the Creswell Data Analysis Spiral method where the researcher is moving “in analytic circles” between data and the account (2013:143). On the question of triangulation in particular, I used multi-data and between-methods triangulation as described by Denzin and later on Flick (1989; 1992). I am aware of Denzin’s redefinition of the concept of triangulation, leaning closer to earlier critics such as Fielding & Fielding who notably pointed out the risk of objectivation of the subject (1986). Hence, since 1989, Denzin defines the objectives of triangulation as such:

“The concept of hypothesis testing must be abandoned. The interactionist seeks to build interpretations not test hypothesis...The goal of multiple triangulation is a fully grounded interpretive research. Objective reality will never be captured. In-depth understanding, not validity, is sought in any interpretive study. Multiple triangulation should never be eclectic. It cannot, however, be meaningfully compared to correlation in analysis in statistical studies.” (Denzil, 1989: 244-246)
Although, I began this study with a hypothesis, the centrality of Violence in the radical change of sectarian representations, the purpose of this study was not to fact check this hypothesis. However, I am using the question of Violence as a starting point and a frame in order to be able to stem the tide of the multiple patterns that converged to form the Iraqi trajectory toward sectarian civil war in 2005-2007. I am triangulating a large diversity of points of view, points that are located in space and time, in order to understand and illustrate what their convergences and also divergences are. In this sense, I am trying to contrast my different sources and data, primary or secondary, with each other in order to obtain this diversity of point of views. This should be apparent, for instance, in the second part of this thesis, which relies heavily on official US sources that are contrasted with my own data and experiences. It should be also apparent in the analysis of the discourses and attitudes of Iraqis concerning sectarian representations and violence in the Chapter 3.5: Sectarian Violence, Sectarian Discourses and attitudes. In this chapter, for instance, I am trying to show divergences and convergences of attitudes and discourses toward sectarian relations, their articulations with class contradictions, and how finally the violence as a process of essentialisation is framing a trajectory of discourses and attitudes.

1.1.9 Research, ethic and quality

To conclude this chapter on methodology, I wish to approach the question of the means and ends of this research (Tracy, 2010). I hope that this chapter will offer the reader the transparency necessary to retrace and understand how this research has been built. And also to see its strengths and weakness. When I began my second set of fieldwork in Syria in 2007, I was particularly influenced by Critical Sociology theories and I would have hoped to situate this research, and my practice in general, within a critical and empowering sociology in the neo-Marxist or Freirian sense. Patti Lather defined decades ago the guidelines for establishing the rigour and validity of such praxis: “triangulation”, “construct validity”, “face validity” and “catalytic validity” (1986). Unfortunately, the possibilities of face validity, that is “recycling analysis back through at least a subsample of respondents,” (Lather, 1986:67) have been scarce. This is because I am writing this thesis more than 10 years after having carried out the main fieldwork, and I am only still in contact with a

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handful of the people, compared to the dozens I met and interacted with between 2006 and 2009. However, whenever possible, I have either sent partial accounts or analyses of this study to the Iraqis I am still in contact with, or I have discussed it with them when the opportunity arose. With regard to catalytic validity, “the reality-altering impact of the research process” and its channeling toward “self-determination” (Lather, ibid), or in other words helping with the empowerment of the informants involved in the research, it is somehow even less successful. I am not sure how much this work, as good as I hope it is, would practically help and empower the many people, in particular the Iraqi refugees I was living with, who have seen their lives radically changed and their country torn apart by occupation and civil war. However, what remains here, and I hope the reader will also see throughout this thesis, is the voices of the people, men and women, who spoke to me. I consider as my first and biggest duty to reproduce them as faithfully and as comprehensively as possible. In a sense I am trying to render a multivocal account (as in the sense of Tracy’s Multivocality) of this experience (Tracy, 2010:844).

If I wrote earlier that participant observation was of primary importance for this work, it was not only for a question of methodology, for impregnation and access to informants, but also for moral and ethical reasons. Although, I do think that such questions are considerably linked. In that sense, I have been extremely lucky. Having spent months in Iraq and then years in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon, I had a great deal of time to build relationships with people and simply to live, at least partially, with them. I did not want only to be a researcher asking questions and getting answers from people. I wanted to be a part of their lives and them part of mine. Obviously, this was not possible with all but a fraction of the Iraqis I met during these years. However, I think the fact that I was a member of networks of solidarity with Iraq, that I was part of associations helping Iraqi refugees, all of this helped many of the people I was interacting with to understand who I was and what I was seeking. The people I met knew that I cared for Iraq as a country, that I cared for their situation as refugees. Yet, they knew very well that I was helpless to really change anything as I was neither part of the United Nations nor a journalist. What I could offer was simple solidarity, some reciprocity and empathy.

In fact, I was trying to take an ethical stance “in favor of the individual or the group being studied” (Fontana and Frey, 2005:696). It did not work with all, but when such relations were built, I think that it helped to reduce my positional power and to build an “asymmetrical reciprocity” between me and my informants. That is: “a dialogue that enables each subject to understand each other across differences without reversing perspectives or identifying with each other” (Edwards and Mauthner, 2002:27). In relation to this, that is why I refer to all the persons I interacted with, during these years of research, as informants. Yet, some were more than that, they were participants and we were participating in the same activities. Others just accepted being interviewed by me. However, all did more than simply answer my questions. They
entrusted me with their voices, their life stories and opened many paths for me.

Of course, the pitfalls of participant observation are already well discussed among qualitative researchers, and include the loss of neutrality and distance *vis a vis* the object (Jorgensen, 1989, Cohen, 2010). Nevertheless, I reclaim for myself what Burgat names as “empathie participante” concerning his own studies about Islamism and Islamic actors (Burgat, 2003). Besides, as recalled at length by Cohen, when one enters the field, the assumption of neutrality is just an assumption, and which fades away not only because of our own “theoretical and emotional baggage,” but also because of the fluid social and political position we occupy while doing the fieldwork (Cohen, 2010). However, I think the fact that my fieldwork was conducted in different locations and periods mitigated the risk of being caught in the kind of community factionalism as in the field experience described by Cohen (ibid), although in some areas and for some people I met in Syria and abroad, such factionalism and mistrust or fear between communities were certainly present. Besides, the fact that I conducted this analysis more than ten years after the first fieldwork re-introduced, *de facto*, a temporal and material distance with my object of study. One can say that it is this distance that permitted me to re-think and restructure my research.

On the question of my own neutrality *vis a vis* my object of research I should answer sincerely. I am not neutral and I have never been. It was not by chance that I ended in Iraq in December 2003. I thought that the invasion and occupation of Iraq by a western country was illegal and immoral, and this beyond any deliberation about the bloody reality of the Saddam dictatorship—and by any means, his dictatorship was one of the bloodiest of all time. Therefore, I went there to express solidarity and at least be a witness of the situation in Iraq. Later on, when I did my fieldwork in Syria and that region, I did not hide this perspective, nor about my visit to Iraq years earlier. Interestingly enough, in Iraq in 2003, one could still find people that were still genuinely grateful towards the US for the removal of Saddam, as well as some others who were hoping that the US would seriously reconstruct their country. In 2007 in Syria, however, the Iraqi refugees no longer felt any kind of gratitude towards the US State, or had hope for positive change in the country or in their lives. In reality, many of these people at that time had other, bigger problems than the US occupation. They identified these problems as the militias, Al Qaeda, Jeish el Madhi, the sectarian problem, the corruption, the impotent Iraqi government and corrupted politicians, etc.

To those reading this and being inclined to think that there is a fundamental bias here, I would implore them to read this study for itself. Besides, one of my main contentions in this study concerns the substance of the reforms imposed by the US Administration more than the US itself. Namely, the neoliberalisation of Iraq. As I say in Chapter 2.2 Violent Liberalisation of Iraq, if the international community, the UN or another international body, would have
been put in charge of the occupation of the country and of its transition, chances are that they would have followed the same kinds of policies. Therefore, producing, at least partially, the same effects. Like everyone else producing academic work, I am aiming for a certain level of quality (Tracy, 2010). I hope that I have reached it and I let the reader be the judge of the rigour of my argumentation, the multiplicity of my sources, the credibility of my accounts and analysis, and the significance of this contribution.
1.2 The ‘Ancient Hatreds’ Theory:

There are many different roads to take in order to seek an explicative framework for the Iraqi crisis that followed the removal of Saddam’s dictatorship. Perhaps what seemed quite straightforward would be to jump to the most striking phenomena of the period: the ethno-sectarian violence. If people were killed massively, and are still currently killed because of their ethnic or sectarian affiliations—and there is no doubt that that they died because of those grounds—then for many analysts and academics, the main question to resolve was the ethno-sectarian relations among Iraqis. In short, if the civil war in Iraq is based on ethno-sectarianism, then the main problem of Iraq should be this.
1.2.1 The ‘ancient hatreds’ and the artificial state

Many commentators and scholars saw in the tragic episodes of ethno-sectarian wars between 2005-2007 the confirmation of a perennialist narrative that was already beginning to be raised as an explanation the fall into general violence in Iraq since 2003.24 This is the story of population and communities that had been fighting against each other for decades or even centuries due to ethnic or sectarian primordial identities and the grievances and fears that were attached to them.25 These as such have been held together by authoritarian regimes. Interestingly enough, a very similar narrative, named the ‘ancient hatreds’, had been raised during the Yugoslavian conflicts in the 1990s, before being discarded by a wide range of academics and witnesses after the fog of war had dissipated. Similarly, the implosion of Iraq—torn between Arabs and Kurds, Shi’a and Sunni—was seen as the violent return to a reality that had been veiled by successive dictatorships (especially the terrible years of the Saddam regime). It was the reality of a predatory state that has always been the place of a deep and persistent ethno-sectarian struggle in which Sunni elites were hegemonic and more or less supported by the Sunni community against Shi’i and others.26 Moreover, it was the reality of a country artificially created by British imperialism in 1916. Once the US removed Saddam and his dictatorship—seen as a sectarian Sunni dictatorship—from power and introduced democracy, it opened the way for the Iraqi people to express grievances, settle scores and kill each other. This, for example, is the exact discourse of the former head of the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) for the Middle East, South Asia and Terrorism, ret. Colonel Paul W. Lang:

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24 Some scholars and commentators are also going beyond the perennialist narrative by bringing more polemical considerations. They are trying to re-sell older essentialist or orientalist discourses about Iraq and the Arab or Islamic world in general. Hence, they consider the deep mentality or social structures of Arab society in general (Ajami, 1998; Hajji, 2010) as well as the Islamic roots of the Arab world as the central explanations for a predisposition for violence and/or a fundamental estrangement toward democracy and the institutions of the modern state (Kedourie, 1992; Kelidar 1993; Lewis, 1998). However, considering the poor analytical values of these kinds of arguments, I will not engage them.


26 This “image” of Iraq, deemed simplistic by Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, was already popular in the US defense establishment after the Second Gulf War in 1991 (1991: 1414).
“One of the problems is Iraq is not a nation state. It is a state or government with territory that includes several different nations [of people] who think of themselves as belonging to these ethno-religious groups rather than primarily to the state. Iraq has been held together since 1921 by coercion. We unscrewed the lid on that bottle, and you see the fruits of that process in the streets of Iraq today.” (Quoted in Beehner, 2006)

This view, more or less nuanced or refined, was and remains shared by a wide array of scholars, journalists, military experts and influential people among Western intellectuals, academic circles and government administrations. For most of these, Iraqi society is cursed by an irreducible rift between the three main communities of Iraq, which make it impossible to keep them within a unified nation state. Many are consequently calling for the partition or at least the division of Iraq into three ‘ethno-religious’ autonomous entities that would hopefully overlap the three main communities (Kurd, Shi'a and Sunni) of the country. In 2003, O'Leary was making the case for the creation of a multinational federation within Iraqi territory. His argument was based on the question of the fundamental heterogeneity of the Iraqi society:

“It may be contiguously connected on maps, but it has not had a united people, i.e. a people who think of themselves as descended from the same ancestors, who speak the same language, or who profess the same religion – Islam has, after all, divided them as much as it has united them. They neither flow from a common stock, nor are they united by a common immigrant or assimilationist experience. “(O'Leary, 2003)

That has been also the view of Vice President Joe Biden, who made his position public in the New York Times in 2006 (Biden, 2006). In addition, different calls for the partition of Iraq were raised publicly from the first months of the US-led occupation. Thus, Dr. Leslie Galber, the former Assistant Secretary of State, and President Emeritus of Foreign Council Relations, was advocating a “Three-State solution” as early as November 2003 (Galber, 2003). This would be echoed a few years later, in the midst of the sectarian civil war, by the call for the “dismemberment” of Iraq by former ambassador Peter Galbraith27 in the French newspaper le Monde, as well as in his book The End of Iraq (2006; 2007). The same year, the influential and non-partisan think-tank, The Brookings Institution, published a report detailing a plan for a so-called “soft partition” of Iraq that was supposed to lie between the complete partition of the country and Biden’s advocacy of three autonomous entities within a loose federal State. Although the authors were reckoning that Iraq’s tribes and sects were not inherently incompatible, they nonetheless judged that “clear identities and long standing group grievances were part and parcel of a self-

27 Galbraith was also a special advisor for the two main Kurdish political organisations during the years 2003-2005.
sustaining civil war” (Joseph & O'Hanlon, 2007: 2). As such, the authors were advocating the partition of Iraq with “voluntary population movement” in order to solve the Iraqi crisis.

In main academic circles, although calls for the partition of Iraq remain seldom,28 many scholars share a similar diagnostic about the failure of Iraq to exist as a unified country and a nation state. In his thesis about state survival in the Middle East, Saouli considers that beside regional and international factors, Iraq’s cultural heterogeneity and Iraqi nation state externality29 have been the original constraints that provoked the emergence of an “authoritarian violent regime” (Saouli, 2009: 223-224). In this sense, violence in Iraq was not only the result of decades of successive dictatorships, in particular the devastating role of Saddam’s authoritarian regime, but the very legacy of the failed realisation of a nation state.

Hence, Anderson and Stansfield write that the Iraqi State was an artificial state that has always been dominated by Sunni elites to the detriment of the others—the Shi’a and the Kurds—since its origin under British occupation (2004: 186). They found here the explanation for the constant instability and the succession of dictatorships in Iraq and the reason why violence had always been the “key currency of governance in Iraq” (2004: 187). Underneath the struggle for the monopolisation of state resources and the legitimisation of dictatorship lay the principal rift that structured Iraqi society: its ethno-sectarian composition. This was a rift that could always erupt and be suppressed by dictatorship (Stansfield, 2007: 3). In his renewed plea for an Iraqi ethnofederalism, Danilovich makes similar arguments (2015). Thus, he considers the former centralised Iraqi State as an artificial creation: the product of British colonialism. Therefore, the Iraqi State was characterised by a “severe mismatch of identity and territory” and was competing for loyalty against both sub-state and supra-state identities (Danilovich, 2015: 5). As happened in Yugoslavia, these [national] identities came back in force when the authoritarian regimes that suppressed them were removed (ibid).30

Khan and Kirmanj, who advocate a new confederalist system for Iraq, reproduce the same arguments regarding the artificiality and sectarianism of the

29 About the externality of the state in Iraq, Saouli writes: “As an externally engineered state, regime formation in Iraq brought to power a weak monarch with no social base. As opposed to the Saudi case, the monopoly mechanism in Iraq started after the emergence of state boundaries. As an externally engineered state, the Iraqi regime did not rise from Iraqi society but was in its turn externally installed by the British.” (Saouli, 2009: 223)
30 Yet in the conclusion of his book, Danilovich surprisingly contrasts this focus on primordial identities as a source of crisis in favour of a focus on foreign intervention as the source of Iraq disunity: “Iraq’s [new] constitution was adopted not only during a major domestic crisis, but also during a foreign invasion that had pulverised Iraqi statehood and caused the country’s utter disunity”. (Danilovich, 2014: 171)
former state and the original ethno-sectarian division of the society (Khan & Kirmanj, 2015). In a widely quoted article published in 2003, Wimmer predicted that: “democratic politics would likely lead to a radicalisation of Ethno-nationalist parties” and ethnic trouble (Wimmer, 2003). This was due to the absence of “trans-ethnic” civic society networks and the presence of a weak state in conjunction with an ethnically heterogeneous society. For Wimmer, the pervasive and conflictual nature of this ethnic heterogeneity could be traced to the establishment of the Iraqi State. In particular, the forced Arabisation of the state launched under British rule, which did not cease until the Saddam regime, contributed to the distrust and disfranchisement of the Shi’a community and a clear sense of nationhood for the Kurdish population (2003: 119).

For Kirmanj, despite a short period where there was an attempt at national integration, the current conflict in Iraq is the continuation of a persistent competition, more or less violent, between three nationalisms (Iraqi patriotism for the Shi’a, Arab nationalism for the Sunni and Kurdish nationalism for the Kurds) that reflect the ethnic and sectarian division of the country (Kirmanj, 2013)\(^3\). Hence, the “…failure of national integration in Iraq is a direct result of the clash of identities and competing nationalisms, be they ethnic, secular, or religious…” (2013: 16). In his erudite thesis, Osman argues that the resurgence of primordial sectarian affiliations in Iraq, albeit radicalised by the CPA’s first decisions during the occupation of Iraq\(^3\) and the institutionalisation of an ethno-sectarian power sharing system, reveals the deeper failure of the construction in Iraq of a unifying nation state since the end of the Ottoman empire. Despite official and elite discourses about the modern Iraqi State during the 80 years of its construction, “Sectarianism was embedded in the body politic of the secular Iraqi State” (Osman, 2012: 354). In spite of decades of hegemony, Pan-Arab ideology could not produce a sense of overarching collective identity. In fact, the modern state of Iraq remains fractured by three fault lines: a state-society line, that is, the autonomy/externality of the state from the society; a state-religion/sect line, that is, the entrenchment of sectarianism within the failed secularisation of the state; and finally, a primordial identity fault line, that is, the failure of the nation state to integrate and curtail the centrifugal tendencies (ethnic, sectarian) of society (Osman, 2013: 362).

For his part, Haddad analyses with finesse the activation and crystallisation of Myth-Symbol Complexes\(^3\) based on sectarian affiliation among Iraqi Ar-

\(^3\) Obviously, there is a Kurdish nationalism, and a long struggle for national emancipation by, at least, different sectors of the Kurdish population in Iraq. My contention here is with the existence of competitive Sunni nationalism and Shi’i nationalism.

\(^3\) Notably, the disbanding of the army and the De-Ba’athification policy.

\(^3\) Haddad incorporates the definition formulated by Kaufman: “The core of the ethnic identity is the ‘myth-symbol complex’ – the combination of myths, memories, values and symbols that
abs (mainly between Shi’a and Sunni) (Haddad, 2011). For Haddad, the transformation of sectarian relations from “banalisation” and “state nationalism” toward “assertive” and even “aggressive sectarianism” is due first and foremost to the reconfiguration of Shi’a and Sunni Myth-Symbol Complexes (2011: 15). Therefore, the author considers that it is the policies of the Saddam regime after the Second Gulf War and the formalisation of sectarian politics after 2003 in particular, that paved the way for a violent competition for the cultural ownership of the nation between the Shi’a and Sunni communities.

Despite all the differences of analyses and epistemologies, all these academic demonstrations share common features. They may differ about the perennialist or constructivist nature of the ethno-sectarian identities. Or they may differ about the level of autonomy of the Iraqi modern state, and about the “embedded sectarianism of the body politic”. Besides, they may also differ about the importance of the Saddam era or the Pan-Arab ideology as a vector of cultural and political entrenchment of Iraqi communities. However, they concur that sectarian affiliations and identifications are the primordial causes of the current conflict in Iraq. Moreover, most of them consider that not only was the Iraqi modern state the core of an ethno-sectarian competition for the cultural and political ownership of the nation, but that its true characteristic was its externality and predatory nature vis-à-vis the Iraqi society at large.34 In a sense, Saddam’s dictatorship was only the most destructive and divisive regime of those 80 years. Besides, some consider that after the 1990s, decades of war, embargo and violent survival strategies of Saddam’s regime, Iraqi society was traumatised and on the verge of general anomie (Williams, 2009). Therefore, in light of most of these studies, it seems that Iraq was bound to explode on ethno-sectarian bases one day or another. In this frame, the US-led invasion and occupation of the country, with its succession of mistakes and failures, could be considered as a facilitator (or more aptly, a revealer) of the inherent “divided and divisive” nature of Iraqi society (Stansfield, 2007). Although I think that such a framework is misleading, this explanatory set has the potential to be powerful and bear many truths.

34 Here Haddad may be an exception. Despite an Iraqi state nationalism that had often been Sunni-oriented and the chauvinistic characteristic of Pan-Arabism, he considers that it is only after the 1990s that state nationalism (i.e. the attachment and identification of the modern state) was receding (Haddad, 2011: 46).
1.2.2 Historical perspective

This ethno-sectarian framework is also grounded in a long historical perspective that one cannot just sweep aside. For instance, Luisard describes the creation of Iraq at the beginning of the 20th century as the juxtaposition of ethnicities, confessions, languages, rural and urban spaces, yet centred around three poles—the Shi’a Arabs, the Sunni Arabs and the Kurds—the whole being characterised by “a culture of division” *(une culture de la division)* (Luisard, 1991: 34). For their part, Sluglett and then Dodge demonstrated the profound flaws of the British policies, privileging the Iraq of tribes and sheikhs, dominated by powerful Sunni tribes, during their occupation and mandate over Iraq in the 1920s. This contributed to the creation of a fragile state, incapable of reaching society (Sluglett, 1976; Dodge, 2003). However, this historical perspective becomes increasingly complex as one approaches the present and tries to characterise the evolution of the Iraqi nation state and Iraqi society during the last 80 years. I will not pretend to present here a historiography of modern Iraq35. Instead, I will try to pose some key questions in order to illustrate the complexity and the interconnections of different factors, classes, relations, pre-modern identification (sectarian, tribes) and urbanisation processes, that were all at play in the context of nation state-building during the modern period.

For instance, Ali Al Wardi, who was studying Iraqi society in the 1950s, considered Iraq’s structure as centering around a prevalent conflict between nomadic and urban culture (Wardi, 2008). Moreover, for the sociologist, the movement of urbanisation was increasing the conflict between members of Iraqi society, driving newcomers from the desert into a cultural collision course within the city settings (2008: 79). However, the author considers that, despite the vivid nature of the conflict, the nomadic culture and tribal loyalty *(asabiyah)* that had been predominant in Iraqi society was weakening (2008: 5). In a different vein, Batatu and other scholars show how much the political explosiveness of the revolutionary period was the result of the profound upheavals and structural changes that were affecting Iraqi society, since the period opened with the end of the Ottoman Empire (2004). It is pertinent to consider factors that converged to dilute social relations and identifications that were attached to the old order. The modernisation and rapid urbanisation of the country and the development of the state capacity was already underway

in the last period of the monarchy (Dawisha, 2008). Add to this “...the attachment of the country into the world market” (Batatu, 1979), which induced the structuring of ‘rapports de forces’ between emergent classes and the “dislocation of old local economies”. In this frame, the picture of a modern Iraq from the 1960s to the 1980s as particularly divided along ethnic and sectarian lines as sketched by Kedourie (1987), is strongly contradicted by the different descriptions of a country suffering under authoritarian regimes with its different components and communities in a process of integration (Farouk Sluglett & Sluglettt, 1990, 1991; Batatu, 1991; Dawisha 2013, Khadim, 2012).

1.2.3 An artificial national state?

Much has been written concerning the autonomisation of the state from the society, a trend characterised by the exponential rise and concentration of economic and coercive power funded with oil rent. Precisely, as recalled by different scholars, between the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1980s, this autonomisation and concentration of the power system was occurring side by side with the massive improvement of social and economic conditions for the Iraqi society at large (Batatu, 1979; Farouk Sluglett & Sluglett, 1990; Al Khafaji, 1986, 2004; Marr, 2011). Hence, Farouk-Sluglett & Sluglett show that per capita income rose ten-fold while GDP increased six-fold between 1967 and 1982 (1990:232). Despite uneven development among the Iraqi regions and mixed results in different sectors, the industrialisation, land reforms, expansion of health services, and the massive improvement in education were reaching all parts of the country (Marr, 2011: 160-162). Notwithstanding the coercive and violent nature of the different regimes that followed the 1958 revolution, these radical changes of conditions for the Iraqis were the very achievements of the Iraqi Modern State. This period coincides with the emergence of the middle class (Marr, 2011: 164), or middle classes to follow Batatu’s broad definition, whose “interests permeate the State” (Batatu, 1979:240). They also note the rise of an urban working class, whose conditions improved greatly (Batatu, 1979; Marr, 2011).

On the topic of the state, economic development and class formation during this period, the debate in the late 1980s between Batatu and Al Khafaji is enlightening. Al Khafaji remained skeptical about the emergence of a middle

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36 Batatu’s definition of middle class: “... that composite part of society which is plural in its functions but has in common an intermediate status or occupies a middle position between the propertyless and the big proprietors and which includes, among elements, army officers, civil servants, members of professions merchants, tradesmen, and landowners.” (Batatu, 1979:240)
class and contested Batatu’s categorisation of the Ba'athist regime of the late 1960s and 1970s as a “middle class regime”. Yet, they seemed to agree about the categorisation of the economic model of Iraq as state capitalism, corresponding to its integration into the world market, where the state sector remained the umpire of all economic relations. Under the shadow of the state sector and linked with the Ba'ath regime of the 1970s, a “new upper strata” for Batatu, or a bourgeoisie for al Khafaji, was rising and accumulating capital, thanks in particular to the flourishing and often corrupt contracting business with the state (Batatu, 1986; Al Khafaji 1986). Hence, Tripp describes the acceleration and concentration of a patrimonial system in the agricultural and business sectors under the Ba'ath regime during the 1970s (Tripp, 2007: 197-199).

In a same vein, the study about oil rent and concentration of power by Farouk-Sluglett (1991) illuminates the historical development of the relations between state, economic and social development, and the different movements of accumulation and concentration of economic and political power by the elites in Iraq. Despite an absence of consensus and a social base, the last decade of the monarchy, from 1940-1950, saw the expansion of state structures due to the increasing revenues extracted from oil production. Certainly, that would continue to remain the fundamental characteristic of the nation state, that is, the “progressive transformation of the country in a rentier State”37 (Farouk-Sluglett, 1991:5).

Another important point is that since that period the state was “...considered the natural vector of reforms and development” toward, at least in the minds of many Iraqis, social justice and equality (ibid.). The different regimes that followed the revolution of 1958 would only accelerate the reforms and nationalisation, increasingly reinforcing the state as both the prime agent of the whole economic sphere and socio-economic development. Despite such evolution, the successive regimes remained fragile, based on military support on one side and popular consent on the other. They were unable to institutionalise the popular base or enable the development of civil society.

Obviously, the rise of the Ba'ath to power in 1968 did not change the centrality of the state either in the economic and social development of the country or in leading development policies. On the contrary, the political history of the country, the incentive of the Ba'ath ‘progressive’ rhetoric and the need to acquire popular consent, all contributed to the continuation of development policies until the 1980s. In fact, these development policies were primarily organised in order to consolidate the Ba'ath regime's control and legitimacy over society, often without regard for the “rationality” of such programmes (Farouk-Sluglett, 1991:8). Moreover, the ruling elite would prioritise the development and expansion of numerous security apparatuses and military capacities over productive sectors in order to elevate Iraq as a regional military

37 Unless noted otherwise, all translations are mine.
power and suppress any possibility of threats to the Ba'ath regime. Hence, the result was an ever-growing control of the economy by the state and the explosion in the size of the state workforce and military personnel.

Here again, the surge of resources provided by the oil rent after the nationalisation of oil production in 1972 and the oil crisis of 1973, explains how the Ba'ath regime was able to pursue social and economic development programmes without undermining the accumulation and growth of private capital and the economic sector. At the same time, it achieved the complete control of all state structures, institutions and the army via the elevation of the Ba'ath as a ‘State instrument’ and the proliferation of the concurrent security apparatuses. Therefore, it would be a mistake to compare the central role of the state in Iraq with the socialist economies of Eastern European countries. 38

Here Farouk-Sluglett joins al Khafaji, Batatu and others analysts, by saying that the Iraqi State never impeded the development of the private sector and that allowed private capital (local and even in some areas foreign capital) to flourish during this period. Nevertheless, the private sector would remain firmly dependent on the state, and more and more to the narrow stratum of elites that controlled it. This dependency would not change despite the turn to “liberalisation” (Al Intifah) and the privatisation of certain economic sectors in the mid-1980s (Farouk-Sluggett, 1991; Al Khafaji, 1986; Springborg, 1986). The Intifah did not enable the emergence of an independent capitalist sector but allowed the enrichment of a part of the bourgeois or new bourgeois class that had links to the narrowing networks (kinships, assabyah, communal or friendly relations) that had the power to unlock access to these new markets. The Intifah also allowed the Saddam regime to cynically disengage from economic programmes turned toward social development and integration when the enormous economic cost of the Iraq-Iran war and the drop in oil rent literally dried up state resources.

After Saddam’s rise in the late 1970s and the outbreak of war with Iran in the 1980s, the post-revolution period perceived by many as the “Golden era” would abruptly cease. In a sense, the “rente contraignante” (Harling, 2007), of a welfare system in exchange for societal obedience, resembled a Faustian bargain with a political and economic system in a process of privatisation, centered around narrowing tribal and Sunni kinship circles. This was a power system that was becoming increasingly coercive and intolerant. However, as important as the economic growth and social development of the country was, it never succeeded in eradicating abject poverty in which a significant segment of the population was living (Al Khafaji, 1986; Batatu, 1986). This notably concerned the rural exodus to high density settlements in the cities such as Baghdad in the last fifty years or so. Many of these came from southern prov-

38 See also Socialist Iraq 1963-1978: Towards a Reappraisal (1987) by the same author. For a counter point of view see Marr, 2011 :173-175.
inces and were mainly from the Shi'a community. The sustained overrepresentation of the Sunni and the marginalisation of Shi'a and Kurds in the political sphere and in the state structures were also never addressed. Obviously, the promises of national emancipation, social justice and equality were never kept by the successive regimes. Despite the ‘socialist’ and ‘progressive’ rhetoric of the Ba'ath in the 1970s, regime policies had always favoured owners of capital and real estate over redistribution in terms of wages or salaries (Rohde, 2010:26; Al Khafaji, 1986). In fact, the ‘liberalisation’ turn in the 1980s, reversed the decades-old land reforms that promoted small landowners and public farms over big landowners and sheikhs (Rohde, 2012; Springborg, 1986). Therefore, important parts of the country and society would remain in a state of underdevelopment and dire poverty.

Finally, it could be worthwhile to read again Al Khafaji’s analysis that nullified the opposing ‘myths’ of an ‘artificial’ or, on the contrary, an ‘exceptional’ Iraqi nation state (2000). In short, Al Khafaji considered Iraq's revolutions and different republican regimes successful in the dismantling of pre-modern socio-economic structures, with a series of economic and social reforms, that had notably encouraged the dilution of tribal, regional and religious affiliations (2000). However, the coercive and predatory nature of successive dictatorships, the fundamental question of the oil rent and the destructive embargo period, had resulted in a greater atomisation of the Iraqi population, who remained individually linked to the state apparatus. In Al Khafaji own words:

“The republicans regimes “constructive” role of laying the groundwork for social and economic development and new forms of social groupings and stratification proved disastrous.” (2000:65)

On a different point, I think that the historical debate about the ‘externality’, the ‘artificiality’ of the old Iraqi State and even about Iraq as a nation state, before the post-2003 period, remains problematic on many aspects. For example, there is a tendency, often implicit, to contrast non-European and especially ex-colonised countries with European and Western countries which are seen as stable, strong and effective nation states—in full possession of the concepts and categories that they ‘created’, such as nationalism, nation state and so on. Another mistake in my view, resides in this common idea of nation state as, to recall Tilly, “...a state whose people share strong linguistic, religious and symbolic identity” (Tilly, 1992:3). Here, I fully agree with Tilly that, apart from very few exceptions, such a thing does not exist anywhere on the planet. In any case, France, Britain or Germany have never been a nation state, despite the historical elite's propaganda, state manipulation and crafting
of a national history. Instead, we should speak of national states, that is: “...State governing multiple contiguous regions and their cities by means of centralised, differentiated, and autonomous structures.” (Tilly, 1992:2)

Moreover, on the question of culture, we may keep some distance from a conception of a nation state as the result of a long—if not natural and linear—historical process of political unification, that was grounded on a territorial and cultural homogeneity. It had been best provided by Gellner with a cultural-functionalist theory based on the transition to industrialisation which in turn, induced cultural homogenisation—"The standardisation of High Culture"— (Gellner, 2008). For Gellner, it is this cultural homogenisation that permits the “congruence” between the state and the nation (Gellner, 2008). Although he insists on the constructed, even mythical, nature of nation, the main problem resides with too rigid an understanding of such a theory. There is the risk of considering cultural homogeneity in fixed terms, and from here arises the tendency to look for pre-nation state communities that, supposedly, would have already genuine or more suitable dispositions for cultural homogeneity and consequently for nation state formation. In this framework, weak or failed nation states are doomed to fail because of a lack of such dispositions for cultural homogeneity. I think that by taking such a road, one takes the great risk of essentialising cultures, communities and nations alike and to miss essential socio-political factors that may explain the rise or the failure of a nation state.

Hence, I prefer to adhere to a vision of a nation as a continually contested and socially constructed phenomenon. In other words, as an “imagined political community”. Of course, Benedict Anderson acknowledges the importance of culture to understand the ‘nation’ phenomenon and the rise of nationalism. He then points to the joint development of the nation state and the modern industrialisation processes (‘the print capitalism’), instead of industrialisation processes and cultural homogeneity, as the condition of nationalism. However, he defined the nation as follows: “...an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.” (Anderson, 2006:6).


41 For a Gellner inspired vision of Iraq’s national construction, see the conclusion of Liora Lukits’ study about Iraqi national identity. Considering the lack of a “uniform culture” the author states that “Iraq's experiment was doomed to failure from the outset.” Liora Lukitz, Iraq, the search for national identity. p145
Obviously, the critical term is “imagined”. Not only does it imply that a nation is socially constructed, but it also indicates that this construction (as a “cultural artefact”) does not have the type of fixity implied by Gellner’s theory.\footnote{Which is precisely how Anderson critiques Gellner’s theory. The author explains: “With a certain ferocity Gellner makes a comparable point when he rules that Nationalism, is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist(16). The drawback to this formulation, however, is that Gellner is so anxious to show that nationalism masquerades under false pretenses that he assimilates ‘invention’ to ‘fabrication’ and ‘falsity’, rather than to ‘imagining’ and ‘creation’. In this way, he implies that ‘true’ communities exist which can be advantageously juxtaposed to nations. In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” \textit{ibid.} p6} In a sense, there is a continuous construction and negotiation of a mythical origin, a belief of a common and shared present and destiny.\footnote{See in particular the last chapter of Anderson, \textit{ibid.}} Of course, there is an element of cultural fixity and notably the imposition and the diffusion of standardised language, a “secularised” language, opposed to the sacred languages of the religions that is at the same time a unified field of exchanges and a communication and an instrument of power (Anderson, 2006). Regarding Iraq, different authors\footnote{See for example, Franzén, Johan. “The problem of Iraqi nationalism.” National Identities 13.3 (2011): 217-234.} have been able to use Anderson’s theoretical frame in order to grasp the ‘nation’ phenomenon. Perhaps one of the clearest articles on nation state formation in Iraq has been written by Zubaida. In “The Fragments Imagine the Nation: The Case of Iraq”, the author recalls how the nascent modern political field in Iraq was a field of struggle between different conceptions related to different interests (communal, regional and class) (Zubaida, 2002). Then he shows how:

“In Iraq (as in many other countries) it is the state that made the nation.\footnote{As noted by the author, it is a clear upheaval of Gellner's theory of the nation, where homogenisation “becomes the products, not the condition, of nation-state formation”.} This nation is a territorial, economic, and social reality, buttressed by a highly totalitarian and, for a while, very wealthy state.” (Zubaida, 2002:214)

More germane, in Iraq the rise of the nation state relied on a “material basis” regarding the functions it fulfilled as umpire of the economic order and allocator of resources and employment. It was also the institution that created the frame of a “…national education system and a cultural field of media operating in a standardised national language.” (Zubaida, 2002:206; Zubaida, 1993). However, as the author notes, this national reality does not always command solidarity or loyalty at any time. On the contrary, its Iraqi members may fight against it in favour of divergent ideologies or conceptions of national entities. However, the “facticity” (military, economic and fiscal, education...) of the state is “…compelling the cognition and the imagination”, tracing boundaries
within which even dissidents or opponents of the state must evolve (Zubaida, 2002). As we will see in the further developments of the present study, I think that Zubaida’s consideration of Iraq as a country, where it is the state that made the nation, is critical. This greatly reinforces one of the main arguments of my thesis, namely the destruction of the Iraqi State and then the failed attempt to reconstruct a market state by the US-led occupation and the new Iraqi elites led to violence and in particular to sectarian violence.

1.2.4 The Ba'ath regime, Saddam regime, the “Family Party State” (dawlat hizb al-usra)46

Another important debate concerns the characterisation of the decades under Saddam’s regime. Here again there is a strong discrepancy between Makiya’s description of a totalitarian, even Nazi-like state under the Saddam regime (1998), and the crippled and relatively impotent, yet cruel and bloody regime of the years of the embargo, as described by Baran (2004). In different works, Rohde reiterated the difficulties that arose when trying to apply roughly the theoretical frames of totalitarian, fascist and Nazi studies in order to characterise the Ba’ath and Saddam dictatorships (Rohde, 2010). Among them, one of the major problems is that it often turns the question into a moral and polemical debate instead of an analytical account of the period (Rohde, 2012:165). A second problem identified by Rohde is the tendency to analyse the decades of dictatorship under the register of exceptionality, with the effect of constructing an image of a regime that was completely external to its society and its regional background. Rohde, among others, argues that in order to render a proper account of the decades of the Ba’ath and Saddam regimes, one needs to go beyond the rigid intentionalist and structuralist paradigms in order to understand the terror machine, as well as the capacity of the regime to produce legitimacy. There is as well the need to consider the “ambiguous” and fluid relations and interactions between the ruling elites, Saddam first among them, the state and Iraqi society at large (Rohde, 2010:159).

As stated by different scholars, it should be possible to distinguish different periods within the 34 years of the Ba’ath and Saddam dictatorships (Bozarslan, 2012; Marr 2011).47 In this sense, the first decade of the Ba’ath regime, 1968-1979, corresponded to the rapid development of a bureaucratic and authoritarian regime that elevated “...brutality into political code and syntax”

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46 I borrow here, the quote reported by Eric Davis (2005:234)
47 Putting aside the nine terrible months of the first Ba’ath accession to power after the nationalist coup against Qassem in 1963, which corresponded to the massive and bloody repression of thousands of communist militants and sympathisers. On this topic see (Batatu, 2004; Dawisha 2013:185-186);
Ba'athism was institutionalised and transformed into a state instrument of control and mobilisation of all the country’s institutions. This most notably concerned the “Ba'athification” of the army but also mass mobilisation organisations, such as trade unions and associations (Farouk-Sluglett & Sluglett, 1987). Behind the ideological creed of Socialism and Pan-Arabism, the regime intended to transform Iraqi society, rewrite and redefine “Iraqi political history, the relationship of the citizen to the State, [and] its relation to its national heritage” (Davis, 2005:148).

As noted by Al Khafaji, Iraqi Ba'athist Pan-Arabism emphasised the special character of Iraq as the defender of the whole Arab nation and developed a reified vision of the Iraqi nation (Al Khafaji, 2000). Within the Ba’ath Party, and at the head of the Iraqi State, a small clique organised and concentrated power mainly around kinships and tribal relations drawn from around the area of Tikrit (Farouk-Sluglett & Sluglett, 1987; Batatu, 2004). As recalled by Davis, this was the period of the “Takriti Ba'ath” (Davis, 2005:148). Yet, within the Takriti Ba'ath, Saddam Hussein would be able to gradually concentrate power in such a way that at the end of the 1970s, his rise seemed irreversible: “...the apparently irreversible concentration and accumulation of power in the hands of Saddam Hussein and a few trusted subordinates” (Farouk-Sluglett & Sluglett, 1987:111). The second period, from 1979 to 1991, has been characterised as the proper “totalitarian” period of the Saddam dictatorship (Bozarslan 2012; Marr, 2011; Rohde, 2012). It encompasses a set of effective mechanisms and events that may be briefly summarised here. First, the period saw the demise of the old Takriti clique and the total concentration of the power into the hands of Saddam Hussein. This went hand in hand with the staging of the invasive cult of personality of Saddam as the omnipotent leader of the nation. In the political field, the One State Party rule of the Ba'ath was definitely enforced. One could also see the extension of the terror machine that was directed towards society at large but also within the State and the Ba'ath Party, of which the purges of 1979 could be considered a symbol (Bozarslan,2012:143-148). Moreover, one should add on top of this the infamous genocidal episode, the “Anfal” campaign against the Kurds between 1986 and 1989.

Furthermore, all these elements have to be put in the context of the “hyper-militarisation” of society (Al Khafaji, 2000) and the tremendous efforts needed to sustain the war against Iran. However, it is also in this context that the different circles of power around Saddam saw the rise of Shi’i personnel into the Ba’ath government, even as commanders in the army (Baram, 1989). Although Shi’i were still a minority in Saddam’s corridors of powers, it was a clear reversal compared with the rise to power of the Ba’ath in 1968. Moreover, the rhetoric of the regime would alternate between gestures of integration towards the Shi’i, and a discourse of suspicion and polarisation toward the
Shi’a community. Hence, on one hand Saddam’s regime would name battalions after Shi’i religious figures, or claim Saddam Hussein to be a direct descendent of Imam Ali. It would also officially sponsor birthday ceremonies for the Imam Ali and the Imam Husayn, among other initiatives. On the other hand, the regime would continually spread a discourse of suspicion towards the Shi’a community and the existence of a 5th column that was alien to the values of the Iraqi Arabic society. Hence, the reactivation of the ‘Shu’ubiyah’ complex\(^{48}\) as the main frame of explanation for the war by the Saddam regime, if not openly sectarian, consequently singled out the Shi’a community (Davis, 2005). Of course, this was done according to the fluctuant needs of the internal and merciless repression against the Shia Islamic movement and clergy, and to the needs of the war against the Shi’a Islamic regime of Iran.

The third period, from 1991 to 2003, illustrates a very different trend within the regime. As noted by Harling, Saddam’s dictatorship, muted into a “regime of crisis”, only focused on strategies concerning the survival of Saddam and his family rule (2007). This was done ferociously against the intifada following the debacle of the Kuwait invasion in 1991. The regime at that time enforced a sectarian narrative of the revolt, blaming a ‘Shi’a treason’, despite a much more complex and fluid reality where opposition or support for the revolt against the regime was structured among a large range of cleavages (secular versus religious, urban versus rural, etc.) inside society. Such cleavages were skillfully exploited by the regime to crush the intifada (Harling, 2007; Khoury, 2010). Moreover, the imposition of the international embargo against Iraq had devastating effects on society (Ismael & Haddad, 2003; Halliday, 1999).

In this context, the Saddam regime was able to substitute the oil rent with a “rent of suffering” (rente de souffrance), where the regime was freed from any kind of social or economic commitments towards the population (Harling, 2007: 172-173). Instead, the regime was continuously staging its resistance to a supposed vast world plot against Iraq, of which the embargo was the symbol. Moreover, it was also manipulating and playing with the frustrations of the population, by according or removing the right to access minimal resources. Although the regime was holding a paranoiac rhetoric against surrounding enemies – Arab traitors, the Persian enemy, the West – it abandoned the functioning characteristics of a totalitarian state (Harling, 2007; Rohde, 2010). Hence, one could see the autonomisation of important areas outside of what

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is normally considered to belong to the state power, as long as it was not endangering Saddam’s survival and that was devoid of political potential. For example, traditional tribal justice and rules in some areas were accepted and acknowledged by the regime. Small scale corruption in all state bodies was largely acknowledged and permitted. The state was dysfunctional as was necessary for Saddam’s power circle to buy up a needed fraction of the population, yet remain functional enough as a state to barely sustain the rest and provide a fragile sense of normality. As demonstrated by Baran, during this period the Ba’ath Party had become a bureaucratic machine devoid of real political content, and whose prime role became the staging of theatrical mobilisations of the population corresponding to the rhetorical need of the hour. In reality, all these mass demonstrations, gatherings and other popular meetings were staged by the regime, concealing a “mass demobilisation” of the population and of the important structures of the regime, the Iraqi Army, the Ba’ath Party itself, etc. (Baran, 2004:73-74).

Notwithstanding his brutality, Saddam and his inner circle of power (the family party state) had a deep and refined sense of Iraqi society, and he was able to turn upside down and oppose all sectors of the society in order to keep power. But this survival strategy had been constructed against all forms of Iraqi institutions. It was done against the Iraqi State, against the Ba’ath party and its socialist and Pan-Arab ideology, against the army, and against the tribes. Harling describes a regime that was not Ba’athist, not Sunni, and not assaby’ā. On the contrary, “…the personal power of Saddam was constructed against all these institutions” (Harling, 2007:32). The same goes with the 1980s and 1990s regime policies of ‘tribalisation’ and ‘Islamisation’. These were in fact policies of instrumentalisation and denaturation of tribal relations and religious practices and institutions, and conceived as part of survival and re-legitimisation strategies for the benefit of Saddam’s rule (Harling, 2007). In a certain way, what Baran, Haling and others demonstrate is that the weakening of the state (and not only Saddam’s regime) really started after the Second Gulf War in 1991. The succession of shocks, the defeat against the international coalition, the bloody repression of the popular uprising (Sha’aban Intifada) in the south and the following period of international embargo against the country, in addition to Saddam’s policies, would continuously grind state capacity and authority in favour of emergent local centres of power, often built on tribal relations. These were sometimes also built on regional or even clan-based solidarities, as in Basra, for instance. Interestingly enough, it is precisely this kind of local centre of power that would expand during the period of civil war between 2005 and 2007.
1.2.5 ‘Pre-modern’ attachments, religions and ideologies.

It seems to me that modern history shows complex relations between modern state construction and the profound changes within Iraqi society on the one hand, and the rise of ideological trends crossing over Iraqi society and what has been considered as pre-modern attachments (such as Assaby’a, religious affiliations, etc.). These relations should not be understood in fixed terms but as fluid phenomena. I will briefly present a few examples that could counter this narrative of fixed identities and institutions.

The first example concerns the question of tribes and tribal relations in Iraq. Many analysts look at tribes in Iraq and consider it one of the few strong structures of Iraqi social life, commanding rigid legitimacy and solidarities. However, they do not consider how much the world of tribes had been affected—Farouk Sluglett and Sluglett speak of a process of “detribalisation”—by the Tanzimat reforms under the late Ottoman Empire (1983). Moreover, the social engineering of the British occupation transformed the tribes from a communal structure into a quasi-feudal one at the beginning of the 20th century (Batatu, 2004; Farouk Sluglett & Sluglett, 1983; Luisard, 1991). They do not reflect then on how it had been affected and weakened by the long process of modernisation and the urbanisation of life during the course of the 20th century (Al Wardi, 2008; Batatu, 2004). Neither do they take into account that most of the tribes’ confederations (qabila) such as the Shammar, Muntafiaq, Dulaim and Bani Tamim and many others are mixed with Sunni and Shi’a branches, and which relates mainly to the history of conversion of entire tribes to Shiism in the late 18th century (Batatu, 2004; Nakash, 1994,2003). In fact, as recalled by Benraad, it is an “extremely diverse and segmented phenomenon” (2009: 97). Indeed, it is an everlasting structure born centuries ago, formed around a constellation of practices, norms and values. Yet, at the same time it is very weak when it comes to translating such practices into social institutions and political power (Ziedel, 2006). If it is a refuge of sociability and solidarity for many Iraqi laymen, acting with and for the tribe is the object of a constant negotiation between the sheikhs, the different clans of the tribes (buyut) and the individuals. Not only is the authority of sheikhs seen with much reluctance by lay member of tribes, but on many occasions their authority depends mostly on the resources they can garner and provide for the tribe. However, sheikhs have some leeway to deal with political powers. Considering these evolutions helps to understand why political actors and regimes in Iraq, from
the British occupation and Saddam Hussein to the Al Malaki government, Al Qaeda and the US, were more or less successful instrumentalising tribes and tribal federations in Iraq as a medium in the handling of power (Baram, 1997, 2006; Benraad, 2011). It also helps to understand why one could assist in the very rapid change of alliances and reversal of loyalties, as it happened, for example, in 2007 between different Sunni tribes and Al Qaeda (Benraad, 2008, 2011).

On the question of religious militancy, it is interesting to see how the emergence of a religious Shi'a militantism that rose during the 1970s was not simply the result of a religious revival or the affirmation of sectarian affiliations. In fact, it was the result of the conjunction of different factors, some class related, others political, regional and cultural. One of these factors was the ideological remobilisation of the Shi'a Ulama tribe that had been losing their cultural and economic positions during the whole revolutionary period (Jabar, 2003:151-155; Batatu, 1986). This remobilisation began in the holy cities of Najaf and Kerbala in the late 1950s in order to counter the movement of the secularisation of Iraqi masses in general, and against the strong influence of the Iraqi Communist Party vis a vis the Shi'a population in particular (Jabar, 2003; Batatu, 1986). The influence of the then young cleric Mohammed Baqir al Sadr was here fundamental to the establishment of a counter-narrative against what was perceived as a western attack on Islamic civilisation. It was encompassing a different range of issues that were at the heart of political debates of the period. Yet, one of the main elements of the narrative was a staunch attack against communism and a reworking of an Islamic economic doctrine. This was done in order to differentiate Islamic doctrine from capitalism and communism, but also to demonstrate the inscription of social change, economic development and even social justice within the Islamic frame (Jabar, 2003; Batatu, 1986). Moreover, during the 1970s, the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) was in decline losing its capacity to mobilise the masses. This was notably due to the successive violence and repression it faced during the 1960s, but also because of its policy of accommodation with the Ba'ath regime, and as a result the ICP lost its hegemony within some of its previous strongholds. For instance, it concerned the inhabitants of medina Thawra\textsuperscript{49} (the City of Revolution) who had come from the southern provinces of Amarah or Dhi Qar some decades earlier (Batatu, 2004).

One would note that this recently urbanised population, coming from a Bedouin cultural background, had never been characterised by religious zeal nor a particular attachment to the Shi'a clergy (Al Wardi, 2008; Batatu, 1986). They had nonetheless maintained popular forms of Shi'a piety, especially Arbain rituals and Ashura pilgrimages (Jabar, 2003). Eventually, in the 1970s, Shi'a Islamic political organisations (the Da'wa, the Mujahidin) created by the

\textsuperscript{49} Later on, it would take the name of Saddam City and after the fall of the regime, Sadr City.
Shi'a ulamas, were able to fill the void left by the ICP and recover an audience among the youth and the poor. This was possible with a discourse that was in part based on social justice and the politicisation of these popular forms of piety (Batatu, 1986, Jabar 2003). The rise of this distinctly Shi'a movement would be crushed without mercy by the Saddam regime in the 1970s. Yet with the influence of the Islamic revolution in Iran, and the general rise of Islamic militancy in the entire Arab world, the Shi'a Islamic militancy would survive and evolve. As we will see later, the evolution of the different Shi'i Islamic movements and organisations would again depend on the expression of different contradictions (class, regional, urban, rural and so on) and their attempt to tackle them. Accordingly, without integrating class issues and urban-rural divides in the analysis it becomes very difficult to understand the different sociological composition of Shi'a movements, but also the rifts and oppositions that would rise between the Al Sadr Movement and the Da'wa or the SCIRI during the post-2003 period.

In a similar vein, the different scholars that we saw earlier were presenting an Iraqi political field divided among ethnic and sectarian lines since the beginning of the modern state. For example, Kedmanj describes it as three competing nationalisms: Shi'a Iraqi patriotism, Sunni Pan-Arabism and Kurdish nationalism. In this sense, one could explain, for example, that the Shi'i had supported the revolution of Abdul Karim Qasim and, for decades, enrolled in the Iraqi Communist Party, because they were prioritising Iraq as the centre of political development and emancipation. On the opposite side, the Sunni would enroll in Arab nationalist parties and support the Aref brothers’ regimes and later enroll in the Pan-Arab Ba'ath and support the Ba'ath dictatorship. In the view of many analysts, the cause for such different political attitudes would be crudely related to the fact that the Shi'a community is a minority in the Arab world but the majority in Iraq, whereas the Sunni community is a minority in Iraq, but a majority in the Arab world. In fact, the idea lying behind this competing nationalism is that ideological trends, Ba'athism, Communism, and Arab Nationalism were in fact mere vehicles for the expression of sectarian attachments within the violent fight to define the ownership of the Iraqi nation. Leaving the Kurds aside, this opposition between the Shi'a and Sunni conceptions of the Iraqi nation, one being “Iraqist” or “Iraqi Patriotic” (wataniyya) and the other “Arab Nationalist” (qawmiyya), needs to be nuanced for different reasons. To be clear there is no doubt that these two visions of the emancipation and construction of Iraq and of a nation state have been the major poles that have punctuated Iraqi political life from the end of the British mandate until the last decade of the Saddam regime (Davis, 2005; Farouk-Sluglett & Sluglett, 1990; Baram 1994). However, it would a mistake to think that the separation between the poles wataniyya and qawmiyya was definitive and clear cut. In reality, the parties and movements that were situating themselves within the wataniyya or the qawmiyya pole would be able to tap
into the rhetoric and slogans of the other pole, according to the evolution of the political situation in Iraq and regionally in the Arab world. Taking the example of the Iraqi Communist Party and the Regional Iraqi Ba'ath party—who would be the biggest competitors within the Iraqi political field from the revolutionary period until the end of the 1970s—we will briefly see that the reality is much more nuanced.

The Iraqi Communist Party had always been considered as belonging to wataniyya, the ‘Iraqist’ pole of the political spectrum. Nevertheless, the question of Arab unity had almost always been part of the programme of the ICP. Moreover, one can distinguish different periods where the priority and the outlines of the party on the Arab question differ significantly following regional events like the nakbah in 1948 or the rise of Nasser in Egypt in 1956, in addition to its relation with the USSR (Batatu, 2004). Yet, at the end of the 1950s the slogans of the ICP was for a “National Arab Policy” and an “Independent Arab Path” (Batatu, 2004:750; Ismael, 2008). The ICP also recognised that: “The territory inhabited by the Arab people in Iraq is an indivisible part of the Arab homeland...Arabs are one nation.”(Batatu, 2004:750). This allows some room for the recognition of Kurds within Iraq, and the ICP was among the first Iraqi parties to recognise the importance of the Kurdish question and the right for Kurds to ask for independence. Basically, the ICP conceived the problem of Arab unity through a continuous process of rapprochement that must depend each time on the internal conditions of each Arab country, its level of independence, and the social and democratic reforms that are initiated. For instance, the experience of the fusion between Egypt and Syria (the United Arab Republic) under Nasser, for instance, was not considered necessarily determinative, and certainly not reproducible in Iraq. In 2003 and 2004, I had different interviews in Baghdad with lay members of the party as well as Central Committee members, and the line on this question had not really changed:

“The problem of Arab unity cannot be separated from the anti-imperialist struggle or the dialectic advance of the class struggle. For the Communist Party, nothing therefore, is frozen neither in the forms that this movement towards unity of the Arab nation can take nor the centers from which it can advance....”

For the Ba'ath Party, as a Pan Arab (qawmiyya) organisation that strived to reunite the whole Arab nation, the question of Arab Unity was the centre of its programme in Iraq. The party ideology theorised by Michel Aflaq, a Christian, was directly inspired by the theory of Sati al Husri, but with a more essentialised, more romantic, and even prophetic vision of the Arab nation with an ultra-Leninist conception of party (Carré, 2004). For Aflaq, the Arab nation

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50 Interview with one Iraqi Communist Party official, Baghdad December 2003.
is both an end and a very exclusive whole such as defined in Article 15 of the Charter of the Ba'ath Party:

“National link is the only link to the Arab State. It guarantees the harmony between citizens, melted in the crucible of a single nation and fight against all faith, tribal, racial and particularistic fanaticisms...” (Parti Baas Arabe Socialiste, 1947)

In fact, the rebirth of the Arab nation should therefore allow for the end of communal or ethnic differences within the Arab nation:

“... all the differences between the sons of the nation are incidental and false and will vanish with the awakening of the Arab consciousness.” (Parti Baas Arabe Socialiste, 1947)

This, of course, does not allow much room for the recognition of minorities such as the Kurds or the Assyrians in the Arab world, and especially in Iraq. In this context, the Ba'ath Party is conceived as the vanguard of the Arab nation, even better, it is “the projected image of the entire Arab nation”, and the militants of the Ba'ath Party are considered the soldiers of an inherent prophecy of the Arab nation. *Al Ba'ath al Arabyya*, the Arab renaissance, is bringing back the prophetic experience of an Arab nation that has never ceased to exist. In this light, Olivier Carré also notes that Islam is “magnified”. However, it is an Islam conceived as a spiritual and moral experience that belongs to the entire Arab nation, including non-Muslims, wherein the Arab nation is somehow “deified” (Carré, 2004). Also, the Ba'ath Party through its acts and its thoughts must become the incarnation and the projection of this national spirit, as recalled by Batatu “The path of the nation is the Ba'athi path” (Batatu, 2004:741). It is a particularly doctrinaire and martial vision of the Arab nation. However, once the Ba'ath rise to power in Iraq, and under the Saddam regime, decades of dictatorship, the rhetoric of the regime would clearly evolve toward an instrumental and pragmatic stance between *qawmyya*, the Pan-Arab revolution and *watanyya*, Iraqi patriotism. This pragmatic stance would of course fluctuate according to the needs of the regime either locally, in Iraq, or regionally, considering its difficult relations with all actors in the region. In any event, the “Black September” events in 1970 in Jordan marked a turning point in the rhetoric of the regime.

As noted by Baram, the new line of the regime would gradually go towards a fading of the Pan-Arab creed and concentration on a more Iraqi-oriented

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51 Despite its ferocious Pan-Arab and revolutionary pro-Palestinian rhetoric, the Ba'ath regime ordained its 3rd armoured division that was stationed in Jordan to stay idle while the Palestinian Liberation Organisation was being crushed by the Jordanian Army.
political line (1983:193). In the Party’s words, there was the need to under-
stand and define “...the dialectic connection between the local (watani) tasks
with which the party is being confronted whenever it comes to power in no
matter what country, and the...pan-Arab tasks”. 52 This evolution of the politi-
cal rhetoric of the regime would go further in order to stress the singularity
and the primacy of Iraq, compared to other Arab countries, by emphasising its
Mesopotamian heritage. For Davis, this was also done in an attempt to provide
a continuity in Iraqi civilisation and a heritage in which “all Iraqis—Sunni and
Shi'i Arabs, Kurds and other minorities—could unambiguously relate.” How-
ever, this was also an appropriation of the folk culture in the context of the
competition with the ICP (2005:150). As demonstrated by Baram, this en-
deavor to reformulate and craft a national mythology would incorporate the
ancient history of Iraq and coincide with a peak in archeological research on
Mesopotamian history, which led to the creation of popular festivals celebra-
ting its diverse aspects (1994). Obviously, the balance between Pan-Arab rev-
olution as a principle and the new emphasis on the ‘Iraqism’ of the Ba'ath
regime was difficult to hold. Hence, there were regular and ambivalent at-
ttempts by the intellectuals and leaders of the regime to Arabise the Mesopo-
tamian period in order to integrate it within the Pan-Arab creed (Baram, 1994).
What did not change, however, was the tendency of the regime to reify and
‘martialise’ Iraq as a local and patriotic identity in the same way that the Ba'ath
ideology reified the whole Arab nation. Hence, Al Khafaji would note that the
regime promoted “...an aggressive notion of 'Iraqism’” (Al-Khafaji,
2000:270).

The second mistake of the narrative focusing on ethno-sectarian identities
as the primordial and historical factor of the Iraqi crisis is that it forgot a num-
ber of facts. First of all, neither the Iraqi Communist Party nor the Ba'ath Party
had developed a sectarian ideology that would have given incentive to Sunni
or Shi'i to join either party because of their sectarian affiliation. Hence, the
Communist leadership in the first decades of the Party was predominantly
Sunni, while the leadership of the Ba'ath Party was Shi'a until 1963. Further-
more, in Syria, the clique ruling the Ba'ath party and the Syrian Arab Republic
is mainly Alawite, a branch of Shiism. Obviously, and as recalled by Batatu,
Davis and many other scholars, a sectarian turn had been operated within the
direction of the Iraqi Ba'ath Party after its first rise to power in 1963 and the
rise of the Tikriti clan within the party (Batatu, 2004; Davis, 2005). However,
as we mentioned earlier, it did not prevent the Saddam regime promoting Shi'i
figures to the heads of different ministries, in the army and in the party. De-
spite the ambivalent and sometimes clearly sectarian practices and rhetoric of
the regime toward the Shi'a community, Shi'i were not prevented from joining

Al Thawrat, 17 Tammuz, (the Iraqi Ba’ath party journal) quoted by Baram, “Qawmiyya and
188–200.
the Ba’ath party. On the contrary, they were strongly advised to when not simply coerced to join, and they did by the hundreds of thousands (Baran, 2004; Harling, 2007). Interestingly, at the time of Saddam’s dictatorship there were still an important number of Sunni members in the Iraqi Communist Party (Batatu, 2004:1106-1107).

Finally, it is unconvincing to think that Shi’i should be naturally suspicious of Pan-Arab and Arab nationalist ideologies and movements because of their religious minority status within the Arab world. At worst, it may somehow give credit to the most sectarian discourse of some Iraqi elites since the British mandates, mostly Sunni, who had always questioned, if not refuted, the ‘Arabness’ of the majority of the Shi’i in Iraq. However, since the end of the Ottoman empire, history showed that Shi’i in Iraq are deeply attached to their Arab heritage and affiliations. For instance, already in 1919, the Shi’a holy cities of Kazymayn and Kerbala were sending mazbata-s (petitions) to the British rulers in the name of the “Iraqi Arab Umma” (Luisard, 1991; Al Khâlysî, 2007). Nearly 70 years later, during the war between the Iraqi Republic and the Islamic Republic of Iran, a vast number of Iraqi Shi’i soldiers would prove that their religious affiliation were not sufficient to prevent them from fighting their fellow Iranian believers.

1.2.6 Beyond a deterministic paradigm

This narrative that considers primordial ethnic or sectarian relations, deeply inscribed in the institutions and the psyche of the Iraqi society, as the causal factor for the implosion of Iraq and the violence fails to give an account for the incredible upheavals that, without precedent, just happened in Iraq these last ten years. The dozen or so of confessions, ethnicities, sects, and tribes that are now caught in the cross fire of sectarian violence and civil war have existed for centuries in the area of which an important part was already called Iraq in the 6th Century. If primordial identities, sectarian and ethnic grievances, myths and hatred that slowly sedimented during the last few hundred years are the cause of the recent turmoil in Iraq, why did it happen now and not at the end of the Hashemite monarchy in 1958? For instance, why it did not happen during the nearly twenty years of British occupation at the beginning of the 20th century? Also, how should one explain that these people were living together, inter-marrying, having common tribes, mixing in work, schools, football teams, and so on for so many years? How should one explain that in the midst of the worst violence in Iraq in 2007, Iraqis, Shi’a and Sunni, Christians, Arabs, Assyrians and even Kurds were celebrating by the hundreds of thousands, in and outside Iraq, the victory of the Iraqi national team in the
Asian Football Cup. If such identities and hatreds were so prevalent in Iraqi society since at least the constitution of the Iraqi State in the 1920s, why it is so difficult to find a trace of such hatred and prejudices at a social level before the violence of the post-2003 period?

As I will show later in this thesis, there is, for example, an incredible gap between the new social reality produced by the unfolding of sectarian and ethnic violence in 2005-2007 and how many Iraqis are recalling the life and sectarian relations before the US invasion in 2003. Here again, an explanatory set focusing primordially on sectarian identities cannot help to resolve such a riddle. The main contention that I have here is the unidimensional and somehow deterministic character of such theory. It ignores a series of other contradictions (class, regional, generational) within Iraqi society as well as different cultural and ideological frames (Nationalism, Communism, Political Islam), all of which are important to understand Iraq’s current situation. It also has a tendency to see the characteristics of Iraqi society or the Iraqi modern State in static terms, that is mainly by considering the predatory nature of the modern state, and more than often conflating it with the Saddam regime and the estrangement of Iraqi society at large. In this case, how should one explain that during all the years of the US occupation, not only were the vast majority Iraqis against Federalism but they were asking for a centralised, powerful, social state? What about the victory of the anti-sectarian, state-centred, Al Iraqiyya list in the 2010 election?

The question here is not to say that ethno-sectarian divisions, distinctions and discriminations did not exist in Iraq prior to the American invasion, nor that they did not have any impact before it. Nonetheless, what needs to be acknowledged is that precisely in terms of ethnicity and sectarian relations within Iraqi society, there is a before and after 2003 period, and this rapid, violent evolution of ethno-sectarian relations needs to be explained. This cannot be done without taking into account a combination of social, economic and political factors that had structured this conflict. Hence, there is a need to look for a multi-causal set of explanations in order to render an analytical account of the rise of identity politics, the outbreak of violence and finally the episodes of civil war in 2005-2007 in Iraq after the American invasion of the country. What I would propose is to try to take the three main elements of the set of questions that I asked in the beginning of this thesis. They are of different orders, yet they are completely inter-related in the Iraqi crisis. It is the Iraqi society, the double phenomena of state destruction/market state construction operated by the American ruler and the phenomena of violence. In a sense, it is the dynamic process (the different beams of relations and contradictions that it provoked) set in motion between these three elements that I will track, but first in the next chapter I will establish on which theoretical ground I intend to approach the question of violence and its relation to politics.
1.3 Violence and Politics

In La Violence and le Sacré, Rene Girard attempts to reformulate the fundamental place of Violence in human society, and describes why “...it is the violence that is the real heart and the secret soul of the sacred.” (Girard, 1972). Since the development of the phenomenon of religion and the institution of sacrifice to the difficult development of a judiciary system, any human society, as he recalls, must find ways to prevent violence, to curtail it, and maybe to find curative treatments to it. Otherwise, the worst is certain, because: “…Violence has extraordinary mimetic effects, ... it looks like a flame that devours everything you can throw at it.” (Girard, 1972:5)53

This redefinition of the relationship between Violence and the Sacred from, inter alia, the rereading of Greek myths and tragedies may seem far from what is our concern, namely, the violence of the post-2003 period in Iraq. However, it is clear that this description of a devouring, contagious, even cataclysmic violence could have been written in the light of events that Iraqi society endured since 2003 and at least until 2009, and that is on the rise again after a short period where violence was subdued between 2009 and 2011. Villainous crimes, kidnappings, political assassinations, suicide bombings, pacification campaigns, collateral damage, sectarian cleansing, beheadings, mutilations and rapes, all terrible words describing a situation in Iraq where it seems that no one and nothing has been spared. Following Girard, it seems that the American occupation of Iraq gave birth to a period of “violence généralisée” or widespread violence (Girard, 1972). Of course, numerous commentators and scholars have published studies and books that tackled, in one way or the other, the question of Violence during and after the American occupation of Iraq. An important part concerns the questions of insurgency and counterinsurgency in Iraq after the invasion (Williams, 2009; Cordesman, 2007; Hoffman, 2004; Lindsay & Petersen, 2011; Metz, 2003; Malkasian 2007). Others focused on the different actors of the conflict, for example the Sunni landscape and insurgency (Eisenstadt & White, 2005; Benraad, 2008, 2011; Haddad, 2014; Hashim, 2008; Zeidel 2006) or about the Shi’a landscape (Cole 2003; Jabar 2003; Cockburn, 2008; Cochran 2009; Luizard, 2007; Nasser, 2004; Terril 2004; Visser, 2005, 2008; Rahimi, 2014). Several studies focused on

53 Translation is mine.
the plight of the Iraqi refugees that fled the violence that engulfed the country after the 2003 invasion (Cohen, 2009; Ali Ali, 2012; Sassoon, 2010; Harding & Libal 2012). However, I think we lack an analytical account of the post-2003 period in which violence is taken as a complete element, that is, at the same time a product of the general chain of reaction and also as a vector of social change, with its own dynamic and its own sense.

But for now, there is a need to establish the foundations on which I will be able to analyse how violence is deployed, who its actors were and how it affected Iraqi society. Another central element that needs to be elucidated is the relations within Violence, Politics and state-building.

1.3.1 Violence: What exactly are we talking about?

As noted by Joas and Knöbl in the introduction of their history of social theory about war and violence, *War In Social Thought: Hobbes to the Present*, there is, in general, a real difficulty revolving around these questions. The enduring attachment to a “worldview of liberalism”—including its rebellious child Marxism—envisions a utopian and peaceful future grounded in modernity, rationality, economic competition or the end of capitalism and of social inequality. If anything, the authors consider this, in particular for western social sciences, contributes to obfuscate and “obstruct engagement with the topic of collective violence and will likely continue to do so in the future” (2012: 4). Hence, mainstream currents in social theory did not provide a unified corpus nor a general agreement on what is collective violence, war or civil war, and how it can be analysed. Therefore, I was compelled to rely on various scholars who undertook to elaborate theories and considerations on the question of collective violence. On a general level, I owe a lot to the critical work of Hamid Bozarslan about violence in the Middle East, in particular, *Une histoire de la violence au Moyen-Orient* (2008). In order to examine the different components and mechanisms of this System of Violence, I will lean heavily on Tilly’s theories and considerations on collective violence and state-building but also as a counterpoint, Arendt’s considerations on the relations between Violence and Politics. Finally, on the question of ritualised violence and practices of cruelty, I will build upon the work of Nahoum-Grappe (2005) and Catherine Coquio’s writings about “violence sacrificielles and violence géno-cidaires” (2005).

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Obviously, these different authors belong to different fields of knowledge, social history, social theory, political theory, and so on, each with their own epistemology and methodology. However, if one looks for coherence, one may find it in the way that these authors are inscribing the question of Violence within a relational and interactionist perspective. Moreover, despite serious differences, even a declared opposition of viewpoints in the case of Tilly and Arendt, one can see that there are also important affinities between these authors. For example, Bozarslan, who in his book refuses to give a simple definition of Violence, implies that it should be used as a concept. Even more it should be considered as a relation and a practice, “... a modality of social organisation as well as deregulation” (2008:9). Borrowing from Jean Leca, Bozarslan considers that:

“Violence cannot be understood as a variable, neither independent or depend-ent, but as an element of multiple actions systems where, according to concrete cases and the questions asked, Violence can be desegregated into the violence” (2008: 9)\textsuperscript{55}.

In this frame, coercion is understood as the state or institutional violence which seeks to impose its “plausibility” and its reproduction. However, it would be wrong to underestimate the effects of de-legitimisation that violence can have on political power, as it could also mirror its own impotence. Also, politically-oriented violence, or civil violence, may correspond to strategic choices; it can often be the result of what is perceived as the only possible option in a context of the shrinking of possible forms of actions. In a sense, this is not dissimilar to Tilly’s definition of the relations between the repertoire of contention and the different types of regimes (Tilly, 2003). In any case, Bozarslan invites us to apprehend Violence beyond the single question of its instrumentality and to charge it with sense. Violence need to be understood from the “subjectivities schemes” (régimes de subjectivités) in which it is embedded. These subjectivities schemes are constructed and inscribed in a reality that encompasses a lived experience of “representations and affects,” with which “the suffering” is seen as a social relation. Therefore, to the physical violence corresponds a symbolic violence, seen here as the language construction that would “precede, accompany and legitimise physical violence”. Then, both types of violence form: “...a whole with the 'brutalisation' of a given society and 'the rape' of language.” (Bozarslan, 2008:11). I will later examine this problem of Violence as a language, both physical and symbolic, with Coquio and Nahoum-Grappe on the question of ritualised violence. Finally, in the presentation of his seminar on the sociological history of violence in the Middle-East at l’Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS),

\textsuperscript{55} Translation is mine.
Bozarslan invites us to think with Ibn Khaldun, about the fundamental contradiction on which the political power of the City is established. Bozarslan tells us:

“The city cannot be constituted without violence, but it cannot live with it. Conquered and tamed by a founder power, often brutal, it generates more power ambitions which, if they are not always fatal to it, do put it continuously on the edge. The more the power turns into a system, the more the city produces systemic violence. Even without collapse, it spends most of its time to guard against a violence that the (City) is, volens nolens, producer and victim.” (2012-2013, http://www.ehess.fr/fr/enseignement/enseignements/2012/ue/242/)

It seems to me that such a consideration about violence and Politics, although not quite matching it, comes close to Arendt’s own applications. But I will come to that later on. For his part, Tilly considers collective violence, and that is also my main concern when I speak about violence in Iraq, such as:

“Immediately inflicts physical damage on persons and/or objects …; Involves at least two perpetrators of damage; and results at least in part form coordination among persons who perform the damaging acts.” (2003: 3)

However, as effective and simple as it is, Tilly's definition may be enhanced if one balances it with another definition of violence provided by the anthropologist Françoise Héritier. By adding a psychological dimension, Héritier opens the way to consider symbolic violence and insists on the massive effects it can have on people and society:

“... every physical or psychological infliction which may lead to terror, displacement, misery, suffering, or the death of a living being; all act of intrusion which is voluntary or involuntary leading to the dispossession of someone, to the damaging or the destruction of non-living objects.” (Héritier, 2005: p.17) 56

For Tilly, such violence is seen as a social interaction that relies first on relational mechanisms, “those that operate within interpersonal transactions”, whatever conjunction it can share with environmental or cognitive mechanisms. In this frame, collective violence can be seen as “... a kind of conversation however brutal or one-sided that conversation may be.” (2003:3-5). The second characteristic of collective violence is the great variety of forms, intensity and social organisations it can take. In order to characterise this variety, Tilly develops a typology based on two axes, the level of salience of the violence and the level of coordination it implies. From the lowest levels to the

56 -Translation is mine.
higher, Tilly describes forms of violence, the “brawls, opportunism, scattered attacks, broken negotiation, violent rituals and coordinated destruction” (2003:14-15). These six different types imply, among other mechanisms, different sets and/or different levels of relational mechanisms such as boundary activation (the shifting of boundary previously non-important or critical in the definition of Us-Them) and processes that involve “combinations or sequences of mechanisms”, such as polarisation (the widening of social and political space between different actors). Yet, one would be mistaken to think that these different types are completely exclusive of each other. They often alternate, moving from one to the other and even interweaving in such a way that for example, an episode of coordinated destruction could also contain sequences of opportunism, violent rituals, scattered attacks and so on, which is the distinctive case of the post-2003 Iraq but also of many conflicts that involved high levels of coordination and salience, such as Rwanda or Ex-Yugoslavia, for example (Tilly, 2003). In the development of my study I will present another kind of typology that attempts to differentiate the different goal-oriented types of violence, in order to identify their actors and try to understand their different effects on the Iraqi society. However, I will also partially use Tilly's typology as an analytic frame for the general mechanisms of the violence in post-2003 Iraq. Hence, I will present here the elements of his typology that are especially relevant for my case:

_Opportunism:_ This involves a low or middle level of coordination and a high level of damage (Tilly, 2003: 132). This is the first level of collective violence that I will use in order to make the difference between organised actors, the Specialists in Violence and the unorganised ones, people, “the crowd”. In the chapter on Collective Violence I will argue that beyond their different political agendas, these two different kinds of actors do not share same activated boundaries.

_Coordinated destruction:_ This involves a high level of coordination and a high level of damage. It encompasses a general episode of vast deployment of coercive means, as in the case of war, civil war, genocide, politicide and so on (Tilly, 2003: 119-120; 2003: 447). In fact, this is the general frame within which violence deploys all its varieties in the post-2003 Iraq. It is also within this context of coordinated destruction that I will argue that at the peak of violence between 2005-2007, a system of violence is formed.

_Violent rituals:_ This involves particular coordination and may involve a high level of damage. In the case of Iraq, I consider that a particular extreme case of violent rituals was produced by different Specialists in Violence, in particular by some death squads belonging to the new state apparatus, but also militia and armed groups. It involves execution-style murders and practice of
cruelties. In a sense, they went well beyond the levels of violence encountered within most of the cases that Tilly produced as examples of violent rituals such as blood feuds, gang battles or supporter confrontations. However, the violent rituals performed in Iraq, as extreme as they were, were producing the same effects and mechanism, in particular, activating and dramatising boundaries to an “exceptional degree”, that Tilly describes:

“Violent rituals provide the extreme case of coordination among violent actors. Thus, violent rituals simultaneously exaggerate and discipline features that are visible in other forms of collective violence. ... They give unusually sharp definition to the identities in play: boundaries between the parties, stories about those boundaries, relations across those boundaries, and relations within those boundaries. By the same token, they mute the effects of previously existing relations among participants except where they correspond precisely to the boundaries of identities activated by the rituals. ... To an exceptional degree, those mechanisms activate relevant boundaries, stories, and relations to the exclusion of most others as they incorporate all the relevant actors and social sites into a single connected set of performances. (Tilly, 2003: 84)”

As noted by Tilly, ritualised violence can be “symbol-charged” with the effect of dramatisation of opposition and political hostilities. In a sense, with this particular type of violence, we are back with the problem of the relations between Violence and language. Bozarslan tells us that physical violence, the “brutalisation of societies”, and symbolic violence, “the rape of language (as the language construction of enmity)” form a whole. But it seems to me that in its extreme form, ritualised violence could be seen as a language in itself. A language in the sense that it bypasses words and discourses, it can be combined with words but it does not need them, to produce its own performativity -one that is writing new laws that establish and raise material and symbolic boundaries with the blood and flesh of men. Leaning heavily on the different works of Françoise Héritier, Véronique Nahoum-Grappe and Catherine Coquio, this is what I will explore in the last chapter of this thesis, 3.5 Practices of Cruelties, Ritualisation of Violence and Essentialisation.
1.3.2 Violence as Politics? A discussion between Tilly and Arendt

There is no doubt that for Tilly, collective violence is directly linked with politics. He tells us, collective violence grows out of contentious politics. That is where people make “...discontinuous, public, collective claims on each other” (Tilly, 2003:26). Most of the time, governments are part of these contentious politics either by being “claimants, objects of claims or stakeholders” (2003:26). Here the question of social inequality, generated by the mechanisms of exploitation and opportunity hoarding that allow “category bounded networks” to command and access resources at the exclusion of others, is a critical factor in the development of contentious politics. Therefore, beneficiaries and victims of exploitation and opportunity hoarding struggle to create, defend or challenge these systems of inequality, in other words, they are engaging in political action (2003:11).

If governments are central to Tilly's theory of collective violence, it is because they are mostly affecting the development of contentious politics. Indeed, governments and ruling classes within them are sometimes engaging directly in exploitation and opportunity hoarding and more often than not supporting nongovernmental inequality (2003:10). Moreover, governments control the forms that public claiming is allowed to take; they can categorise claims and claiming networks as legitimate or illegitimate. They can create, maintain or redraw boundaries of social categories (ethnicity, gender, citizenship, classes, etc.) on which exploitation and opportunity hoarding are often based, but also within which political actors are recognised or unrecognised. While political actors also challenge, or engage with social categories formation and boundaries as claim-makers. Therefore, a regime is constituted by the range of transactions between political actors and subjects while public politics within a regime are formed by the “claiming interactions” between governments and political actors (polity members, challengers and outsiders).

Within the public politics arena, networks of political actors more than often define themselves with “collective nouns” that are at the same time supposed to offer a coherent definition of such networks and veil their composite nature. In other words, they create or endorse political identities, yet these always remain fragile and in a state of constant renegotiation, as “public and collective answers to the questions, 'who are you?', 'who are we?', 'who are they?" (2003: 32). Central elements of these political identities are the boundaries separating the “us and them”, the stories shared about those boundaries, and the social relations shared within and outside the boundaries. In this frame,
what is generally called 'identity politics' is the struggle over legitimation and recognition that takes place within and across the boundaries, and in the relations that actors and government share in regard to these boundaries.

As we will see in the first part of this thesis, the post-2003 Iraq situation, the question of access and exploitation of scarce resources, material and symbolic, the redefinition of the political space and of the state with the institutionalisation of ethno-sectarian power sharing, is in every way consistent with Tilly's articulation of bounded categories, political action and government. We will see how, in Iraq, many consider that the post-2003 period has seen a redefinition of social categories and their boundaries, in particular ethno-sectarian boundaries. At that time there, categories such as Shi'i, Sunni, Kurds, Assyrians, and so on, became for the first time full political identities that would provide or, on the contrary, prevent direct and collective access to political legitimation and resources from the state. In order to provide coherent and reinforced boundaries that separate constituencies, as well as to justify the new political ethno-sectarian power sharing system, Political Entrepreneurs and different elites would engage in the partial reconstruction of different episodes of Iraqi collective memories. In the same vein, the entire post-2003 period in Iraq would see the rise of Political Entrepreneurs (Tilly, 2003:34), in particular secular and religious elites, and Specialists in Violence (Tilly, *ibid*), among or outside various Iraqi governments that would occupy central roles in the development of identity politics and of the collective violence. I will, of course, refer to these main actors throughout my study.

Yet, as recounted by Tilly, governments have also an important impact on the emergence and/or the development of collective violence. Hence, “When large-scale collective violence occurs, government forces of one sort or another almost always play significant parts as attackers, objects of attack, competitors, or intervening agents.” (2003:27). Therefore, governments, whatever their types, have at their disposal considerable means of coercion that they are often willing to use in case of contentious politics. Here, Tilly set up a second typology based on two important factors: Governmental capacity and Democracy. The former represents government capacity “to control resources, activities and populations within the government's territory.” The latter represents how well populations “maintain broad and equal relations with governmental agents, exercise collective control over governmental personnel and resources, and enjoy protection from arbitrary action by governmental agents.” (2003: 41). From there he develops four types of regimes — “high-capacity undemocratic, low-capacity undemocratic, high-capacity democratic, low-capacity democratic” — that more or less set different frames for the possible development of collective violence. It is in the zone of *low-capacity undemocratic* regimes that one will find the biggest concentration of modern collective violence, in particular episodes of coordinated destruction (Tilly, 2003). One way to explain such a trend is that undemocratic regimes reduce or cannot
extend the range of prescribed/tolerated repertoire of contention—a set of performances available for public politics—driving political actors toward violent performances. Moreover, as they belong to the low-capacity zone, such regimes are not only unable to control the deployment of violence, but “they have tendency to repress forbidden performances incompletely and unpredictably, for instance, [it] increases the salience of violence in their contentious interaction” (2003:51). I consider that the different post-2003 Iraqi governments, from the direct US occupational period, through the transitional period to the first officially ‘sovereign’ Iraqi government and onward, are situated exactly within the low-capacity undemocratic zone. This is despite the fact that the US occupation introduced formal democracy with a constitution with electoral processes. In fact, the lack of legitimacy of the new political system, the explosion of corruption, the regular massive dereliction of use of force as well as the impunity of government personnel, form a whole that is consistent with Tilly’s definition of undemocratic regime. I will as well argue that the inability of the different Iraqi governments and the US administration to rebuild and provide important state services (health, education, infrastructure, etc.) and more importantly, the incapacity of the different governments to recreate core state structures such as a national army, a national police or justice system, definitely classify the new Iraq in the low-capacity zone. And I will show that there has been a continuum of deployment of collective violence and coercion by the different ruling institutions, the US Administration or Iraqi governments, which never ceased since the first day of the American invasion of Iraq. Facing, accompanying or provoking this institutional collective violence, political challengers and outsiders and non-governmental Specialists in Violence deployed their own programme of collective violence.

In this frame, the extension and intensification of collective violence and the rise of its actors would be a fundamental element driving Iraq towards the position of Fragmented Tyranny where “… in such a regime warlords, bandits, and other political predators typically work their ways in collusion with or in defiance of nominal rulers.” (Tilly, 2003:42). Even worse, one of the unintended but direct consequences of the US attempt to neoliberalise Iraq and its economy, was the intensification of the country’s dependence on the oil rent and the new Iraqi State as the main, if not the only, purveyor of resources. As recalled by Tilly, this situation raises “considerably the opportunities and incentives for exploitation and opportunity hoarding” (2003:67). And in Iraq, we will see that numerous factions combining Political Entrepreneurs and Specialists in Violence will engage in political and violent fights in order to secure and exploit governmental positions in order to access resources and the rent they provided.

However, in the context of post-2003 Iraq, it seems to me that the extension and intensification of collective violence become difficult to analyse...
if one only follows Tilly's conceptual framework. At this point, it is from Hannah Arendt's reflections and works about Violence, Power and Politics that one can begin to solve the complex entanglement between collective violence, state-building and political system that constitute the Iraqi predicament since the US invasion in 2003. I know that it may be surprising to engage authors that seem so far away from each other. Especially when Tilly, himself, challenged the validity of Arendt's distinction between Violence and Politics (2003:438). In my view, the fact that Tilly and Arendt are working on different levels, the former on theoretical and concrete analyses of social phenomena and the latter on conceptual definitions within Political Theory, should not be overlooked. Moreover, the ostensibly irreconcilable contradictions between how Arendt and Tilly understand the relationship between Violence and Politics, can be transcended. Even more, it can help us to better understand what happened in Iraq.

Arendt devoted an important part of her work to the recurring questions of Power, Violence and Politics. As noted by Bernstein, the part of her oeuvre on Violence and Power is centrally connected to the “whole networks of concepts that she elaborated …: action, speech, plurality, natality, public space, isonomy, opinion, persuasion, and public freedom.” (Bernstein, 2011:7). In fact, she builds a constellation of different concepts in order to rehabilitate the existence of Politics as “the cause for freedom versus tyranny,” in other words to re-inscribe Politics as the place and the condition for Freedom of human-kind (Arendt, 1965: 11). Yet, it would be a mistake to see such an endeavor as a form of “romanticism or utopianism”. On the contrary, it is motivated by Arendt’s own experience, “fear” and “dread” (Beiner, 1990:251), of a modern world that has been consumed by a massive irruption of violence into politics, and gave birth to the totalitarian phenomenon. Therefore, in Arendt’s construction of the concepts of Politics and Power, Violence is never afar. It is particularly clear in her books, Qu’est ce que la politique? (Was is politik?), On Revolution, On Violence, and even in some parts of The Human Condition, where one would learn as much about politics and power than about violence. In fact, the reality of the entanglement between politics, power and violence in the modern world, has never been lost to Arendt:

“[N]othing … is more common than the combination of violence and power, nothing less frequent than to find them in their pure and therefore extreme form”. (1969, Harcourt 46-47)

However, for Arendt, Violence and Politics, in their pure form, represent completely different realities. Hence, she establishes a public realm that embraces tightly Power, Politics and Freedom. So much so that in Arendt’s reconstruction they seem to be inseparable. The first phenomenon, Power, Arendt tells us:
“corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together…” (1969:36)

Therefore, the first characteristic of Power is its collective nature. The second linked with the first is its concerted, coordinated nature. Here, Arendt is taking an opposite direction from the mainstream conception of Power. Arendt develops an inter-subjective notion of Power directly connected to the concepts of action and speech (Sintomer, 1994). Hence, Power is not ‘power over’, but ‘power with’. Third, Power is ephemeral. In fact, it cannot be possessed and depends on the will of its constituents. Obviously, the main problem of Power is its sustainability in time. However, Power acts and there is no limit to its potential.

For Arendt, politics is constituted as a relation. It is born of the “Space-that exists-between-men”, where and when the plurality of men can be expressed and Power materialised. Politics belongs to the public space. Yet, for our author, Politics can only endure within a public place that will keep the record of actions, speeches of their actors. The primordial example of such political space is the ancient Polis built first and foremost “for the public space, the public square, the agora where equals, peers can meet” (1995:38). Therefore, public-political space can correspond to the institutionalisation of power in time. Arendt notes:

“All political institutions are manifestations and materializations of power; they petrify and decay as soon as the living power of the people ceases to uphold them.” (1969:41)

In other words, the artificial creation of a political space corresponds to the institutionalisation of political relations. Finally, Freedom is the condition and the expression of Politics. Here again, Arendt goes in the opposite direction from mainstream theories that link Freedom and Politics and where Freedom is supposed to be the aim of Politics. Central to her conception are negative and positive definitions of Freedom. Negatively, it can be defined by the fact that no one governs and none is governed. Positively, it is a space built by the experience of plurality and the possibility of movement among peers (Arendt, 1995:60). Therefore, Freedom, that is to move, to socialise and to experience plurality among peers, as such, is the content and the meaning of Politics. In this sense, Arendt tells us, “Politics and Freedom are identical and anywhere where such kinds of liberty is absent there is literally no political space”. (ibid:74).

Henceforth, it is within this Political space that men exert Power and experience Freedom, both things that became essentially Politics. In a sense the “acting-together” and Power became the product of Politics. Arendt notes that
Political Space can exist, with men acting together within, only if the political space is sheltered behind “walls” that delimit it. This creation and delimitation of Political Space is established by the work of the Law (*nomos*) in the Greek *Polis* or the Contract (*consensus omnium*) in the Roman *Res Publica.* (1995).

However, Violence is not absent in the creation of the Political Space. Hence, the *nomos* produces space and as such, it contains a part of Violence inherent in the process of fabrication (Arendt, 1958”122), which creates and at the same time separates. But after the *nomos* produced the Political Space, it becomes then a place emptied of Violence between men, and remains a place of speech, of persuasion and action (Arendt, 1995). On the contrary, beyond the protective realm of Politics, Violence may be exerted without restraint with the people outside the *Polis* or within the private sphere.

It seems to me that there is a remarkable characteristic of such Political Space, that Arendt does not really emphasise. It is its capacity to thrive on plurality and embrace its expression while at the same time engaging a process of unification. It produces a tendency to unity in the sense that it is within the same Space that Power and Freedom of a plurality of men are exerted and maintained. One can perceive it in Arendt’s discussion of the expansion of the *Res Publica* in *Qu’est-ce que la Politique* (1995:45).

It is against this background that Arendt defines and distinguishes the phenomenon of Violence. Having an “instrumental character”, it is of a different nature than Power or Politics. She tells us, “... the implements of violence, like other tools are designed and used for the purpose of multiplying natural strength” (Arendt, 1969:48). And where Power depends on plurality and “numbers” (*ibid*), Violence on the contrary, can be appropriated by a single man or a small number of men, yet depending on the efficacy of its implements, affect vast numbers. Beyond its physical effects on bodies and minds, Violence has a remarkable characteristic, which is “to interpose its instruments between men's relations” (Arendt, 1995:52). And this is precisely how Violence destroys Power, by restraining the possibility for men to move, to meet and act together.

Interestingly enough, it is practically in these very terms that Iraqi refugees would recall their life in Iraq during the most violent period between 2005 and 2007. As I will show in this thesis, many of them will describe to me how they felt like they were imprisoned in their own houses or neighbourhoods and how everyday life, movement, socialisation and meetings, were nearly impossible or drastically restricted. As their social networks and relational links with their

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58 There is a certain correspondence here with Carl Schmitt’s own conception of the Nomos as the spatial production of the political order. See Carl Schmitt, *Nomos of the Earth.* See in particular Chapter 4, “On the meaning of the word Nomos.”

59 “Outside the walls of the polis, that is, outside the realm of politics in the Greek sense of the word, 'the strong did what they could, and the weak suffered what they must' (Thucydides).” (Arendt, 1965: 12)
friends and peers were broken, they were left alone to confront the violence and the brutal changes within their social lives. Besides, as recalled by Bozarslan, in Iraq, as in many other conflicts, one observed that “a plurality of forms of violence” were happening at the same time (Bozarslan, 2007:225). But whether physical or symbolic or ritualised, all forms of violence converge toward the same range of effects. Violence, among other things, imposes a double principle of separation and restraint by depriving men of the possibility to move, to act and to establish relations. In Iraq, the ritualised violence would contribute to the erection of symbolic boundaries and walls between communities. Meanwhile, the material and physical effects of the violence of the post-2003 period would correspond to a phase of “centrifugation”. That is the general movement towards the isolation of Iraqi individuals or families due to the breaking of social bounds and relations, the quasi-impossibility to move and access public space. And at the same time, Violence was enforcing the fragmentation of space and the consolidation of sectarian and ethnic blocks within this new fragmented social space.

In this frame, people were subjugated by the different Specialists in Violence and the Political Entrepreneurs associated with them, the different militia, the local leaders, the Zaama, that form the networks of violence or coercion. These networks may collude with the Iraqi government or be part of it or, on the contrary, oppose it. The spaces they ruled then would become what Ali Ali, in his thesis about displacement in Iraq after 2003, describes aptly as “coercive landscapes” where: “It refers to a social world in which threat diminishes choice as well as to the physical environment itself” (Ali Ali, 2012:125). Within these spaces, networks of violence will impose a system of extortion and in exchange provide some access to resources and limited forms of protection against their own violence, or the violence of other networks. In a sense, the “rent of suffering” analysed by Harling and which was characteristic of the last years of the Saddam regime, would persist but this time as fragmented replications in every and each of the coercive landscapes under the control of networks of violence. Therefore, within these new spaces (neighbourhoods, parts of cities or rural areas), Power and Politics, in the sense of Arendt, were absent. The Iraqi population encapsulated perfectly the situation with a sentence that one would hear again and again during the whole period: “Before we had one Saddam, now with have thousands of little Saddams.”

Obviously, as a regime this corresponds in all points to what Tilly has described as Fragmented Tyranny (2003:42). A Fragmented Tyranny where there is the devolution of degraded governmental capacities to the local, and at the same time a complete “globalisation” or internationalisation of power and economic structures. In other words, there is no longer such a thing as a political and governmental Centre. Yet, it is with Arendt that we can understand the significance of such a regime and its essential mechanisms, when we
consider the people that suffer its consequences. In the *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt emphasises the entire novelty of the totalitarian phenomenon and contrasts it with the much older regime of Tyranny. By doing so she brings to light two mechanisms of the Tyrannical regime that correspond to the expansion of Violence and fear in public space. The first mechanism that involves the isolation of men and therefore their impotence, corresponds directly to the extension of Violence and fear. I already mention how Iraqis felt imprisoned and left alone to confront the violence and the brutal changes within the social life. Arendt tells us that this isolation and impotence is precisely the characteristic of Tyranny:

“This isolation is, as it were, pre-totalitarian; its hallmark is impotence insofar as power always comes from men acting together, “acting in concert” (Burke); isolated men are powerless by definition. ... Political contacts between men are severed in tyrannical government and the human capacities for action and power are frustrated.” (1973: 474)

The second corresponds to the destruction of Law. If positive laws build fences that protect public space and build communication channels between men, Tyranny demolishes these laws and the very fences and channels of communication they represent. She says:

“To abolish the fences of laws between men -as tyranny does- means to take away man's liberties and destroy freedom as a living political reality; for the space between men as it is hedged in by laws, is the living space of freedom.” (Arendt:1973, p 466).

Instead, Tyranny leaves behind what she calls a “… fenceless wilderness of fear and suspicion” (*ibid*). But contrary to the absolute terror of the totalitarian regime—that abolishes totally the very existence of the Space and with it any kind of possibility for men to move—the wilderness of Tyranny remains a Space. Although not anymore a “living space of freedom”, this Space still contains the “one essential prerequisite of all freedom, which is simply the capacity of motion which cannot exist without space.” (*ibid*). There is no doubt that the period I study in Iraq, the post- Saddam period, does not correspond to an end of Tyranny, but to a transformation of Saddam’s tyrannical regime into a Fragmented Tyranny of international and local predators. Therefore, positive laws did not replace arbitrariness, and “the wilderness of fear and the suspicion” that was existing under Saddam did not disappear, instead they would remain under renewed forms. I will engage with different exam-

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60 “If lawfulness is the essence of non-tyrannical government and lawlessness the essence of tyranny, then terror is the essence of totalitarian domination.” (Arendt, 1973: 464)
ple to prove this all throughout this thesis, but one could cite here the explo-
sion of corruption and predations on an unprecedented scale or the arbitrary
arrests and disappearance of tens of thousands of Iraqis since the very first
months of the American occupation.

But maybe the most striking illustration of such a state of Fragmented Tyr-
anny was the incredible walling off of almost the entire capital city, Baghdad.
There, hundreds of concrete fences were erected to separate neighbourhoods
and prevent the movement of people between them, supposedly to protect peo-
ple from the violence. In reality, these fences were insulating one Baghdadi
from the other. In her book, Walled States, Waning Sovereignty, Wendy
Brown analyses the global movement towards the ejections of walls in nation
states. She describes it, among other things, as a kind of delusional attempt
“...to project an imago of power and protection, an effect of sovereign awe...”
at the very time where neoliberal globalisation is effectively cutting of or even
destroying sovereignty from the Nation State (Brown, 2010:132). Obvi-
ously, Arendt was well-known for her ambiguous considerations about nation
states and her contempt for the concept of Sovereignty, considering it as the
result of the general confusion between Power and coercion (1961:164-165).
Yet, I will not engage this debate now. What I am arguing here, is that the
walling of its own capital, the separation of neighbourhoods on sectarian ba-
eses, the splitting up of the city between green and red zones, all correspond,
among other things, to the desperate attempt of a regime “to ...project an imago
of power and protection...” when in fact it had already abdicated any kind of
pretension to enact law and to establish a centrality of Power and Politics. In
other words, Baghdad, in particular during the civil war or the civil wars be-
tween the years 2005-2007, resembles the exact inverted image of the Polis as
described by Arendt.

Clearly, this brief portrait of the capital of Iraq, Baghdad, —in fact it
symbolised the reality of the whole country—during the peak of the violence,
corresponds to a place deprived of Power and Politics. It was deprived of
Power and Politics to a point where not only Iraqis in general, but the very
institutional political structures, like the Iraqi Government, the National As-
sembly or political parties would not be able to produce politics anymore. In-
stead it was only the violence in the streets that was able to establish ‘facts on
the grounds’. It is in this sense, that one should understand the sentence re-
ported by Cockburn: “...if you don't have militia you're not in politics in Iraq.”
(2008:164). In this thesis, I am arguing that the core of the Fragmented Tyr-
nanny, with the multiplicity of its international and local actors, is composed of

61 “Nation-state walls are modern-day temples housing the ghost of political sovereignty. They
organize deflection from crises of national cultural identity, from colonial domination in a post-
colonial age, and from the discomfort of privilege obtained through superexploitation... They
produce not the future of an illusion, but the illusion of a future aligned with an idealized past.”
(Brown, 2010: p133)
a System of Violence that is based on a process of territorialisation and autonomisation. This system is reproducing and enforcing sectarianisation and fragmentation within Iraqi social life but fundamentally it is absorbing politics and stifling public space. Here again, it is interesting to see that such a system presents also a reverse image of the system of Arendt's polis. Where the Polis in Athens embraced plurality and produced unity, the System of Violence in Iraq produces fragmentation and, by enforcing homogenous sectarian blocks, destroys plurality.

Of course, this terrible predicament did not rise in one day. But within a span of a year or so, from the spring 2004 to the end of 2005, one could see the deepening and accelerating spiral of violence and the proliferation of its actors until it reaches the point where it occupied nearly all of the public space. This expansion of the spiral of violence had concrete effects. For example, being present in Iraq in 2003 and 2004, I could see how the progression of violence would already impede possibilities of mobilisation and expression within the public space. Hence, I followed and partook in many different street demonstrations and gatherings in Baghdad during the autumn of 2003. The situation was already tense, but all these activities and demonstrations, some very political against the occupation, others organised to demand jobs or to reclaim compensations for the Saddam's regime crimes, others purely cultural or religious manifestations, were unarmed manifestations. Already in the spring 2004 it was considered impossible or at least particularly unwise and unsafe to organise something in the public space without the protection of armed men because of the general spread of violence in country. The last massive street demonstration I participated in was in March 2004, where thousands of Iraqis belonging to different political organisations and movements, Sunni, Shi'i and secular, crossed the infamous Al Aaimma bridge between Khadimiyah and Adhamiya to demonstrate their unity against the American occupation. The demonstration was ‘protected’ by dozens of men in arms and snipers that were already belonging to, or would soon belong to, the different militia or armed groups that were emerging at that time. After 2005, the only ones that would mostly be able to occupy the street and public space would be these very armed men, the Specialists in Violence.62 Going back to Tilly, one can see here another case where the repertoire of contention available to express claim is shrinking to the point where non-violence and unarmed mobilisation is not an option. In this frame, it seems to me that the Iraqi case is a very interesting illustration of Arendt’s demonstration about the relations between Power, Politics and Violence. For Arendt, Violence is the opposite of Power, or at worst, a destroyer of Power. Therefore, as recalled by Bernstein, Violence: “...[i]s anti-political. So strictly speaking the very idea of political

62 Yet, there are some exemptions, such as the massive demonstrations that happened after the Samarra bombing. However, these demonstrations would be quickly protected and framed by Shi'i militia and other networks of violence. See chapter on Collective Violence.
violence is self-contradictory” (2011:10). It is an oxymoron, a kind of “dark light”.

1.3.3 State-building, Violence and Politics

Clearly, one reaches here the point where Arendt and Tilly's theories seem irreconcilable. As we have already seen, for Tilly, collective violence is first and foremost a political phenomenon. But even more deeply, for Tilly, there is a direct correlation between nation state formation, as a political entity, and Violence. In fact, in Tilly's theory, the core of the transformation of different kinds of political entities into national states in Europe, was the accumulation and the concentration of coercive means and capital by these emerging states (1992:56). 63 This was done in a context of domestic contest against other holders of violence within their own territories and of international wars against other states. Moreover, this transformation led also to the disarming of the population of these states by the nineteenth century (Tilly, 1992:66). Of course, Tilly’s theory of national state transformation is much less crude and rigid than this brief summary could imply. Thus, it allows for different path dependencies, mainly capital-intensive, coercion-intensive and capitalised-coercion. But it also accounts for periods of dilution of coercive means and capital for certain states, as well as the elimination of others.

This convergence of European political entities toward the form of national state was everything but a linear trajectory and more often a by-product of the rise of military capacities and military pressures. However, as Tilly recalls, at the end of the Millennium, “Eventually European states converged on this form: the national state”. (1995:15). Finally, Tilly shows that the movement of rising military and national state capacities is accompanied by a long, and sometimes violent, process of democratisation of these states. In brief, as the subject populations were the ones providing the bulk of the essential resources (taxes, manpower, etc.) for the growth of the military and national state capacities, they had some room to contain military power inside the state and to bargain for conditions of ruling. Evidently, Tilly insisted that this model was first and foremost built on a European historical context. Therefore, since World War II and the different waves of decolonisation, state-building in the

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63 Somehow this consideration on the role of war within state building is not new in social science. Hence, there is a long chain of scholars establishing such relations from Hintze, Kiernan, to Skocpol, Mann, Giddens and Tilly. For a thorough review and discussion on their different theories, see Joas & Knöbl, (op.cit). In particular chapter 6, “After Modernization Theory”. However, I think that Tilly’s model remains the clearer and at the same time, the most integrative and flexible of all.
global South clearly took a different path than European and North American states. Tilly provides different elements of answers that can account for such discrepancy. Following Tilly’s footsteps, Lustick analyses “the absence of Middle Eastern great powers” (1997). Precisely, he is examining the failure of Middle East countries, such as Egypt, Syria and Iraq, to become great national states in the way European powers had been built, although they had all the characteristics, (large territories, significant population, economical resources, huge military manpower and modernised states) necessary. His main element for the explanation for such a predicament lies in the existence of an international system (post-World War I and World War II, and post-Cold War) led by a “club of pre-existing great powers”, who under the guise of establishing and maintaining interstate norms—“the rule of law”—were intervening and changing the course of the most consistent, if not unique, road to national state-building, which was interstate war. Therefore, it succeeded in preventing the emergence of viable national states in the Arab world and to maintain a divided Middle East (Lustick, 1997).

Looking from this side of social theory, the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and then its occupation by the US provides an example that fits only partially within the Tilly and Lustick models. If anything, the American adventure in Iraq corresponded to a serious breach, if not the final breakdown, of the international system of norms and interstate behaviour. Something that Fukuyama, at that time already a repenting neoconservative, called “the archetypal application of the American unipolar” (2004:58). That does not mean that other external players would not intervene in the Iraqi quagmire, but more concretely the US, at that time the strongest great power on earth, was liberated from the pressure of the international system and had quite a free hand in implementing its project in Iraq. The second difference with past foreign interventions, was that the US aim in Iraq was not the weakening of an emerging hostile state, nor to prevent hostile actors from seizing power or removing them from power, but the total re-founding, the rebuilding of a New Iraqi State.

In a sense, the US administration intended to occupy a foreign country and build upon it a particular form of national state within the span of a year or so. In any event, after having destroyed the old Iraqi State, the US administration engaged this state building endeavour on three levels. They attempted to completely liberalise the Iraqi economy, they more or less succeeded to frame the imposition of a formal democratic system based on consociational federal constitution promoting ethno-sectarian power sharing, and they attempted to rebuild a robust military and security apparatus. I recognize that these three elements, the economic, the political and the coercive, all converged toward the specific trajectory of the ethno-sectarian civil war of 2005-2007. However,

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64 “See Tilly, “…bypass bargaining with their subject populations, large state edifices have grown up in the absence of significant consent or support for citizen.”(1995:208).
what is of interest here are the economic and coercive dimensions. Hence if one follows Tilly, one knows that the core of the state transformation was the converging accumulation and concentration of coercion and capital. Yet, I will show that one of the unintended consequences of the failed economic neoliberalisation of Iraq was a general contraction of resources but also the failure to enable and develop a private sector. The result was that the new Iraqi State appeared to be the sole purveyor of resources, mainly from oil rent, and employment in Iraq during the American occupation. In other words, the new Iraqi State was by default accumulating and concentrating a very important part of the capital available. But even more importantly, the US administration facing at first a relatively fragmented and violent opposition, and then a real insurgency, undertook the rebuilding of the Iraqi State security apparatus at the end of 2003. In fact, it became the most important benchmark of the American occupation of Iraq for the decade to come. It was all about building and rebuilding the Iraqi police and army, big and fast.

In the chapter about the System of Violence, I describe this phenomenal accumulation of means of coercion and Specialists in Violence, in the hand of the new Iraqi State and the US occupation forces. Hence, after a span of a few years, the new Iraqi security apparatus, police and army, represented between 500,000 and 700,0000 men at arms (2006-2008), while the multinational forces led by the US would represent around 200,000 men. On paper, such numbers represented at that time in Iraq, a far more important kinetic power and means of coercion than all the other armed groups, militia and networks of violence combined. Thus, the question must be asked: if the new Iraqi State and the US Administration were concentrating on the most important part of Capital and Coercion, how is then that we did not observe the gradual monopolisation of Violence by the new Iraqi State, but instead the extension of Violence and the intensification of the fragmentation of the national-state? I think that the heart of the problem still lies within the relationship between Violence and Politics. And in the specific case of the Iraqi occupation, it compels us to amend Tilly's model of coercive accumulation and concentration. Here again, it is from Arendt insights that one can begin to solve this question.

As I already said earlier, if Arendt conceived Power and Violence as corresponding to opposite realms, she never lost sight of the fact that Power and Violence have been entangled, and in particular with modernity and the rise of the nation state. She, in fact, identifies and deplores the major, interlinked changes that appeared within the Public-political realm since the emergence of the modern nation state. In particular, this involved the conception of modern government, as a space of action that monopolises Politics and Violence, in which the end-means are supposed to be the preservation of Life

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65 See sub-chapters 2.3.2 “Dystopian economics” and 2.4.1 “Social insecurity” of this thesis.
and/or freedom of society. This has concrete and profound effects within our modern world. It establishes a clear-cut link between Politics and Freedom. If people are supposed to control and limit the authority and the coercion at the disposal of government, they actually remain, most of the time, excluded from Politics and Power. But above all, it imposed the transfer of Violence that was ever present within the private sphere, to a public sphere that was governed before only by “unarmed speech.” In other words, Peace governed society while Violence entered the Public-political realm in the hands of the state. This transformation of the Public-political realm into a space governed by Violence would also deeply transform political action. Thus, converting the political ends—that are guidelines, directions that orient actions, but cannot be reached and that would change constantly—into fixed goals dependent on and determined by their principal mean, Violence. In this sense one could speak of political-goals-oriented violence instead of “political violence”. This alliance between Violence and Power (specifically the infinite potential of plurality) led to an incredible expansion of the potential of Violence (that ultimately may turn against Power). And in fact, all along the development of modernity, with the long rise of the nation state, we have seen the incredible growth of State Violence capacities. This in turn produces the phenomena of “surpuissance de la Violence” (overload Violence) (Arendt, 1995:95), the tendency to eliminate any other political factors, except the deployment of violence, World War I being a historical example of such an effect of overload. Thus, one can understand that, although they departed from completely different shores, Tilly and Arendt finally reached the same observations about the centrality of violence in the conception and the rise of the modern nation state.

However, even within this modern configuration Arendt insists on making Power the primary element of this relation. Not only “Power is the essence of all governments,” but she explains also that no governments have ever ruled only through the means of violence. They all need a Power basis. The best example she provides is the rule of the master over slaves, which rely first on the “...organized solidarity of the masters” (1969:50). In this framework, one can already sketch an image of a modern Political institution, a State as a Space encompassing both Power, at the core and beyond that core, and Violence. Of course, one can find manifold configurations of such space, which

66 Yet, freedom is understood fundamentally as “la libre productivité de la société” (“the liberated productivity of the society”) (Arendt 1995: 88)
67 Freedom is stripped from its political substance: “Il ne s’agit donc pas, en tout cas pas prioritairement, de permettre la liberté d’agir et d’exercer une activité politique ; toutes deux démeurent une prérogative du gouvernement et des professionnels de la politique.” (“It is therefore not, at least not primarily, to allow the freedom to act and engage in political activity; both remain a prerogative of the government and political professionals.”) (Arendt, 1995: 90).
68 Which Annabel Herzog names the “last known form of authoritarian itinerary” (2004: 28).
69 Translation is mine.
can be constituted of, more or less, Power and, more or less, Violence. Yet, the core remains the Power and in the case of the nation state, Violence is in expansion. If one follows Arendt, the Nation State represents a degraded form of political body compared to the Polis or the Res Publica or even to the political body formed by the revolutionary councils and worker’s councils of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956. If Arendt insists on the primacy of Power in the emergence of the modern state, it is precisely because Violence cannot produce Politics nor Power. Arendt tells us Violence is a mute instrument that says nothing and that imposes silence, when Politics and Power remain fundamentally based on speech and expression of plurality (Arendt, 1965). The only things that Violence can do, is to provoke fear and obliterate any possibilities of exerting Power for those who are subject to it. Arendt provides us with a beautiful sentence that illustrates it:

“Violence can always destroy power; out of the barrel of a gun grows the most effective command, resulting in the most instant and perfect obedience. What never can grow out of it is power.” (1969:53)

Yet, one can give another example that rests on the deployment of violence, as common events, even within the modern formal democratic system in Europe or in US. Hence, when a European government, for example France, sends the French State security apparatus in order to evacuate people occupying public space or industrial sites, it resorts to Violence, or in Tilly's words, means of coercion. By doing so, it only prevented these people from exerting Power, and acting in concert, and for an hour, a day, or more, it silenced them. Yet, nothing has been created, and the Power of the French State did not grow, but the Power of the people subjected to Violence decreased or even disappeared. Therefore, one should understand that the extension of the means of coercion, and the expansion of the potential of Violence (whether the amelioration of its efficiency or the accumulation of its instruments) mean only one thing; the widening of the capacity to destroy the Power of other political entities, people, networks, states, etc. Moreover, Arendt shows us that because Violence destroys Power, and when Violence confronts Power, “the outcome is hardly in doubt”, the smaller the Power base is or becomes, the greater the temptation is to use Violence when it is at its disposal (1969:53). But here, when Violence triumphs, it means a double price is paid, first by the vanquished and also by the victor who also loses its own Power.

In Iraq, the bloody crushing of the Intifada in 1991 by Saddam's regime and the years that followed with a relatively impotent or absent state could be an interesting example of such a double price. In a sense, the last decade of the

70 “Where violence rules absolutely, as for instance in the concentration camps of totalitarian regimes; not only the laws - les lois se taissent, as the French Revolution phrased it - but everything and everybody must fall silent.” (Arendt, 1965:18)
Saddam regime looks like a long process of Vampirisation and destruction of the Power of the Iraqi national state in order to maintain Saddam's Tyranny and extend the effects of its Violence. However, the 2003 invasion and occupation of Iraq was not an act of Power either, but a pure act of Violence. And the US effectively destroyed not only Saddam's Tyranny but also the old national state and with it, what remained of its Power centre and the State structures. But from that initial step, US authorities were incapable of building a new Power centre, although they somehow could rely on Iraqi political elites to do this. To re-establish Power and get out of the logic of extensive violence, US authorities in Iraq had to tackle the fundamental question of Legitimacy and the establishment of an integrated political order. But in fact, US authorities were trapped in the after-effects of their own “overload Violence”, that was by essence leading to the extension of violence and means of coercion and the levelling of politics. In reality, the US would always fall short of producing Power and instead would constantly and actively resort to Violence. The US Administration would try and succeed with developing means of coercion, and it would succeed in vastly increasing the numbers of Specialists in Violence, among the new Iraqi security apparatus, among allied armed groups, and among private security forces. And the US occupation would use extensively all the kinetic power at its disposal to impose its domination and that of its allies. But as recalled by Herring & Rangwala, this fundamental choice of extending coercion versus drawing legitimisation would only plunge Iraq into a downward spiral of Violence (2005:172-207).

In reality, Power does not rely on efficiency or instruments to stabilise and grow. Arendt tells us Power relies on Legitimacy and it is always in need of numbers (1969). Specifically, Power draws its legitimacy from the “initial getting together” and from its transformation in a foundational moment as men convene and extend their Power:

“[B]inding and promising, combining and covenanting are the means by which power is kept in existence; where and when men succeed in keeping intact the power which sprang up between them during the course of any particular act or deed, they are already in the process of foundation, of constituting a stable worldly structure to house, as it were, their combined power of action.” (Arendt, 1965: p175)

71 Reading Arendt's book On Violence, written 14 years after the beginning of the Vietnam War, and 44 years before the US invasion of Iraq, one cannot help but remain stuck with these sentences: “The situation, however, is entirely different when we deal with them in their [power and violence] pure states for example, with foreign invasion and occupation. ...In all other cases the difficulties are great indeed, and the occupying invader will try immediately to establish Quisling governments, that is, to find a native power base to support his dominion.” (1969:52)

72 The famous Shock and Awe doctrine. On this topic see more development in Chapter 3.1 Collective Violence.
Power is driving its legitimacy from this foundational moment when people decided to act together and “...legitimacy, when challenged, bases itself on an appeal to the past...”, (Arendt, 1969:52). But more precisely, the Bush Administration, although it saw itself as the liberator of Iraq and therefore having the legitimate right to impose its will, could not draw true Social or International Legitimacy from the initial act of invasion and removal of Saddam’s regime (Arato, 2009). From that point of view, it was the whole “revolutionary” project of the transformation of Iraq, in particular the constitutional re-founding process, that would suffer from this initial default. Ironically, the only event that would inject some “Arendtian” Legitimacy would be the 2004 massive popular mobilisations launched by Grand Ayatollah Sistani. This would oblige US authorities to accept the principle of constitutional elections, instead of the top-down, co-opted, constitutional caucus favoured by them. Yet, this would not suffice to fundamentally reverse the “exclusionary and imposed nature” of the American-led constitutional process (Arato, 2009:197). However, Arendt demonstrates that establishing a transcendent principle, Authority\(^{73}\), is essential for the conservation and the extension of a political order. Precisely, it is the “vitality of the spirit of the foundation”, the fortitude of Authority that allows for the extension of Power (1965:201). Therefore, she recalls that “foundation, conservation and augmentation are intimately interrelated.” (ibid.). It is quite obvious that US authorities and Iraqi elites who would participate in the process would fall short of achieving such a thing. And even more, since the very substance of the constitutional process they created, a federative consociational constitution, would prove to be very confusing and divisive. It would lead to the establishment of an ethno-sectarian quota-sharing power system (Visser, 2009), reinforcing the trajectory towards the Culturalisation of Politics.\(^{74}\)

\(^{73}\)“The fundamental law, the law of the land or the constitution which, from then on, is supposed to incarnate the ‘higher law’ from which all laws ultimately derive their authority.” (Arendt, 1965:184).

Finally, I think that there is another element that Arendt does not investigate but is crucial, at least, to understand the rise of the modern state. 75 Here one needs to again draw closer to Tilly’s model and specifically to what he considers being the by-products of the long process of convergence toward the concentration of capital and coercion of the emerging national states, and that I would call the integrative capacities of national states:

“From the nineteenth century to the recent past, ... all Europeans states involved themselves ... in building social infrastructure, in providing services, in regulating economic activity, in controlling population movements, and in assuring citizens’ welfare; all these activities began as by-products of rulers’ efforts to acquire revenues and compliance from their subject population, but took on lives and rationales of their own.” (Tilly, 1990:30)

In another earlier article, War Making and State Making as Organized Crime, Tilly was nailing down the idea that the emergence of a national state was, fundamentally, a successful enterprise of monopolisation of coercion and exortion on territorial bases in a context of war as internal relations (1985). Here also, Tilly considers that the different organisational forms that national states took during this process, were partly due to popular resistances of the subject population of these states, and mainly to the residual balance of the four major violent activities (War Making, State-making, Protection, Extraction) of the emerging states. Hence national states emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with different State apparatus, bigger or smaller fiscal apparatus, bigger or smaller bureaucracy as well as apparatus of control. Also, they may have had different kinds of alliances with social classes among populations, and in time extend or restrain the State protection of different classes (1985:181-183). But one could depart from Tilly and look to these by-products (state apparatus, social infrastructures, regulation of economic activity, ...
citizens’ welfare, alliance and protection of social classes) precisely not as by-products of the accumulation and concentration of coercion means, but as integrative structures that contribute to the conservation and the extension of the political order such as Legitimacy and Authority, or contributing to reinforcement of Legitimacy and Authority.

In a sense, because of these structures, emerging national states were able to integrate socially, economically and culturally, increasing numbers of their subject population into the new political order. If one looks to Iraqi history, one would find foundational moments, such as the 1920 revolution against the British occupation, the 1958 revolution against the monarchy, on which the emerging Iraqi national state was drawing its Legitimacy. One would also find that the long and tortuous process of the extension of the Power of the Iraqi State was also corresponding to the emergence and extension of State social, cultural and economic structures that were contributing to the integration of its subject population and its different social classes into the national-state political order. However, the democratisation process that Tilly analyses as a result of the resistance and bargaining power of subject populations facing the rising of national state, did not arise in Iraq. Among other things, this was because of the pressure of the international system and the “great powers” as indicated by Tilly. Clearly, one can also understand the weakness of the different Iraqi governments, the succession of military coups and the terrible trajectory toward Saddam's Tyranny as the failure to establish the Authority of the national state order in Iraq. However, the modern history of Iraq, at least until the mid 1980s, indicates a process of emergence of a national state political order with a Power centre, state structures, and means of coercion.

If one looks now to the American adventure in Iraq in 2003 and onward, one would find a really different story. Of course, the US Administration would try to impose and allow for the emergence of a new politico-economic order controlled by different and shifting Iraqi allies. But the problem resides here in the way it would frame the new Iraqi State as a market state based on an ethno-sectarian power sharing constitution. As I will show in the chapters dealing with neoliberalisation and the sectarianisation of the new Iraqi State and its political space, this new politico-economic order will fail to produce a Power center and integrative state structures. Instead it will produce particular and limited ethno-sectarian Power bases and fragmented state structures that would be sectarianised and privatised. At the core of this failed political order, a spiral of violence would grow and transform itself into a System of Violence that would reach its peak during the period of civil wars between 2005-2007. Here, to reframe Tilly, the international system—namely war—is not the external frame contributing to form the national state but is part of the internal failed order. It was the foreign actors (the US first among them) that were fuelling and extending the realm of Violence. In a sense, what the US created

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76 As discussed by Zubaida. See preceding Chapter 1.2.3 An Artificial State?
in Iraq was neither a Polis nor a nation state, but a particular form of a failed or even a non-political order. I provide below three sketches representing, what seems to me, Arendt’s reconstruction of the Greek Polis, with Power occupying the totality of the political-public space, and nation state and Power remaining the core but with Violence occupying the majority of the public place. The last sketch represents Iraq between 2005-2007 with the System of Violence and ethno-sectarian Power bases.

Figure 5 Polis, Nation State, System of Violence
1.4 Context: Iraq 2003-2011

In this chapter, I will give a rather extensive overview of political events and periods of violence as they appear around the American occupation period, from 2003-2012. Here, specialists or scholars of the Iraqi post-2003 period may not learn something new, yet it forms the contextual frame of events and situations on which I will draw my analysis.

1.4.1 Installation of the occupation, 2003-2004

The US occupation began with an incredible episode of violence and looting that would last for weeks. In a certain sense, this seminal moment of social rage and chaos would inscribe its mark on the whole period of the occupation.

It would not take long after the official end of military operations on the 1\textsuperscript{st} of May 2003, to see the emergence of multiple forms of violence in Iraq. First, it was the spreading of criminal violence, in the context of the disintegration of the old Iraqi State. According to studies conducted by the Brookings Institute, the homicide rate in Baghdad doubled between May and June 2003, rising to 100/1000-110/1000 and never dropped below 90/1000 (Lins de Albuquerque & O’Hanlon, 2012). Immediately after the occupation, gruesome accounts of widespread criminal violence, especially against women and girls (Human Rights Watch, 2003), but also affecting Iraqi society in general, surfaced in the general media (Marlowe, 2003). There were also successive episodes of social violence, riots, violent demonstrations of workers or unemployed Iraqis—often violently repressed by the US military—that represented

\[\text{77 Until 2012, the Brookings Institute published each month a “statistical compilation of economic, public opinion, and security data called the Iraq Index.” Within this index, Brookings Institute put a Crime Related Death estimate ratio in Baghdad until . death Estimated annualized murder rate per 100,000 citizens [i] (For comparison Washington DC rate: 43[ii])}\]
the expression of a social contestation *vis a vis* the new economic order imposed by the US occupiers.

But violence was also exercised by and against political parties or individuals because of their political opinions or affiliations. It was first carried out between former opponents of the dictatorship and real or alleged members of the security apparatus (*Mukhabarat*) or the inner circle of the Saddam regime. This would soon be followed by guerrilla and military violence carried out by insurgents and US-led coalition troops. Thus, in October 2003, five months after the official end of the military operations, more than 3,000 successful attacks against US and coalition troops were already attributed to the ‘enemy forces’ (Lins de Albuquerque & O’Hanlon, 2012). This insurgency, from the beginning, was fragmented and fluid, originating from different sources (ex-officers of the army, tribal groups, ex-members of the Ba'ath Party or secret services, religious groups, foreign fighters and jihadists) depending on the areas where they were active (Chehab, 2006; ICG, 2006). These different groups were not automatically in contact with each other, and despite attempts to unify, they would never succeed to gather under one leading structure.

Although these armed groups or insurgents had been branded ‘Sunni’ by the US Administration and the local and international media, they included Shi’i fighters or officers and members from other sects and ethnic groups. However, in a matter of a year it would become “increasingly Sunni” (ICG, 2006:5). These armed operations against the coalition forces were increasing. They were the work of various groups who did not necessarily have the same political agendas or even common interests. However, the extent of their actions proved that they were representing forces beyond the simple framework of the old regime or Al Qaeda (ICG, 2006). US-led forces, still considering that they were only facing remnants of the former regime, were nonetheless mounting vast ‘search and arrest’ operations in and around cities. They were as well increasing the number of ‘kinetic’ operations, including aircraft bombing of areas (Burns, 2003), that were having violent and disastrous impact on the population (Chehab, 2006).

At that time, the United States was also facing growing anti-occupation sentiment within the Iraqi population. Yet, it should be noted that these two phenomena, the nascent insurgency and the anti-occupation sentiment, were at first rather distinct and within fragmented spaces. Secondly, a multifaceted political opposition was taking place but not obligatorily connected to the insurgency.

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78 In this thesis, irrespective of their ethnic or sectarian affiliations or their local or national level, I use ‘armed groups’ to designate specialist in violence that are not officially belonging to a political organization. Otherwise, if they are officially linked to a political organisation I name them Militia.
Hence, the summer of 2003 saw the emergence of two radical forces in both the Sunni and Shiite communities. On one side, the young imam Muqtada Sediq al-Sadr, was running the ever-growing popular Movement Al Sadr II (Jamaat al-Sadr al-Thani). Al Sadr’s movement, particularly strong within the disenfranchised and poor youth from the Shi’a community, benefited from the growing dissatisfaction of the Shiite community because of the economic crisis and the rising violence and insecurity. This movement had been able to create an armed militia, the Madhi Army, Jaysh al Madhi, (JAM) and gathered thousands of militants all over Iraq. Al Sadr, considerably hardened his speech against the coalition forces during the last months of 2003. The Al Sadr movement was considered a dangerous factor in the possible radicalisation of the Shi'a community against the US occupation. On the other side, the Sunni Association of Muslim Scholars (AMS) (Hayat al ulama al Muslimeen), which was established after the fall of the Saddam regime, was acquiring more and more weight in the political sphere. It was formed under the leadership of Sheikh Harith Sulayman al-Dari and Sheikh Abdul Salam al-Kubeissi, both figures with a national dimension. Despite not making a direct call to arms, it would offer moral, spiritual and political support to a large number of armed groups fighting the occupation (Hashim, 2008:67). Thus, it served as a bridge between armed groups and the Sunni community.

Between the end of 2003 and beginning of 2004, one could witness a rapid rapprochement between these two forces. They were participating together in different gatherings as well as in important demonstrations against the US-led occupation and the political transition led by the Coalition Provisional Authority. Although the outcomes of these collaborative attempts were mixed, it nevertheless shows that the will existed to create a broad national front against the occupation. From this point of view, the major threat to the coalition forces and Iraqi actors who supported the occupation and the transition process underway, was this connection between both armed and political oppositions, and between different confessional components of these oppositions, equiva-

79 For more development on these two forces, Movement Al Sadr II and Association of Muslim Scholars see Chapter 2.5.1 and 3.2 of this thesis.

80 In particular, within the Iraqi National Constituent Congress (INCC). See Chapter 2.5.1 Iraqi Political Landscape.
1.4.2 The failed national juncture, spring 2004

In the beginning of 2004, US-led occupation forces were facing growing unrest in all of Iraq. On the political side, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) had been put under enormous pressure by the highest religious authority of the Shi’a community, Al Ayatollah al Uthma al Sayyid al Sistani, who opposed the CPA Administrator Bremer transition project. Al Sistani was able to send into the streets hundreds of thousands of Iraqis all over the country (McCarthy, 2004; Cole, 2006:17). And in January 2004, Al Sistani finally obtained the establishment of a direct constituting electoral process. On the military front, growing numbers of US military analysts and commentators were openly acknowledging that the US-led occupation was facing insurgency in Iraq. Many of them were advising the US Army to embark into a real counterinsurgency programme (Metz, 2003; Maass, 2004; Hoffman, 2004).

Trapped between the local US agenda—the November 2004 US presidential elections—and the necessity of maintaining control over an accelerated and difficult transitional process, the Bush Administration decided to crush the alliance of forces that was threatening this process and the transfer of power to the Iraqi Interim Government scheduled for 30th of June 2004 (Hendawi, 2004)\(^{81}\). As President Bush stated, for the US Administration: “The US military's crackdown against Sunni and Shi'ite Muslim guerrillas is vital for a planned handover of power to Iraqis on June 30” (Holland, 2004). Hence, the US-led Multinational Forces opened a double offensive in April 2004 against the Al Sadr Movement and the city of Fallujah, considered at that time, the ‘home’ of the resistance in the so called ‘Sunni triangle’. Incidentally, Fallujah was also at a strategic crossroad between the major roads to Jordan and Syria and the capital (Rosen, July 2004). Yet, only a few days after the beginning of the operations against the Al Sadr Movement and the siege of the city of Fallujah, a major part of the country was in flames. Thus, fights spread to all of the south of Iraq, from Basra and Nasiriyah, all the way to Najaf. While in the west, coalition forces had to engage in fighting in Ramadhi and Baquba. In

\(^{81}\) On the question of the decision-making process concerning the offensive against Al Sadr movement and the city of Fallujah see (Hurst, 2009:200).
Baghdad, the fighting that began in the Shiite district of Al Sadr City had spread to Karrada and Khazymya but also to the Sunni neighbourhoods of Abu Ghraib and Adhamiya. After ten days of siege and hundreds of casualties, mainly civilians, the city of Fallujah had become a martyr city. Across the country the solidarity was national, Sunni and Shia mosques were organising food and blood trucks to save Fallujis. In Baghdad, the rivals' neighbourhoods of the Sunni Adhamya and the Shiite Khadhamya organised together a convoy of sixty trucks towards Fallujah. In the procession, I could clearly distinguish hundreds of portraits of Muqtada Al Sadr and Sheikh Yassin, the Palestinian cleric, whom the inhabitants of Fallujah had made their symbol. The possibility of national unity against the occupation was materialising.

For instance, not only did Sunni and Shiite organisations fight the occupation at the same time, but in different places they did it together. Thus, activists of the Al Sadr movement went to join the fighters in Fallujah, while the Sunni resistance fighters sent weapons to Al Sadr militia in Baghdad and southern Iraq. On April 17, the AMS called for support of Muqtada Al Sadr's forces wherever possible. The alliance between the radical Shiite faction of Al Sadr and the Islamic and Nationalist part of the Sunni resistance was taking shape and had awakened in the Iraqi population an Iraqi nationalism, pan-Arab and Islamic, that many thought unlikely or dead (Cole, 2004). Being present in the country during this time, it was an interesting experience to navigate (carefully) the streets of Baghdad. At that time, I arranged some interviews and contacts with different political organisation and groups, including the Al Sadr Movement and the AMS, that were clearly fighting against the occupation. As Baghdad and the Green Zone inside seemed to be cut off from the world because of the fighting, my Iraqi interlocutors—and I have to admit myself also—were beginning to think that we were maybe witnessing ond of the American occupation of Iraq. Obviously, it was not the case and soon the US-led occupation authorities would regain the initiative.

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Sadr City, was considered the 7th biggest ghetto in the world in 2005. It is one of Al Sadr Movement’s strongholds. The neighbourhood has been the place of settlement of southern poor Shi’a masses coming from a rural exodus, especially from the Amara province, since the 1930’s and 1940’s. This huge neighborhood would take the former name of al Thawra (the revolution) when General Qassem would launch a vast programme of transformation of the slum during the years 1959-60. The programme consisted of the construction or rehabilitation of around 10,000 habitations, the construction of schools and hospitals in the district. (Batatu, 2004:842). After Saddam Hussein rose to power, the area was to be renamed as Saddam City. In 2003, the neighbourhood would take the name of Al Sadr City , as a tribute to the late religious sheikh Muhammad Muhammad Sadeq al Sadr. The father of Muqtada al-Sadr, the leader of the Al Sadr II Movement.

This was despite the fact that Fallujah was regarded as a stronghold of the former Saddam regime, and that an important segment of the inhabitants were member of the security forces that had allegedly participated in the fierce repression of the Intifada of 1991 in the south of the country, and especially against the Holy Shi’a city of Najaf.
After a month of fighting, and nearly 130 soldiers killed in the country, the US-led forces were forced to back down in the face of this nascent national insurrection. They addressed the Shia and Sunni opposition forces separately and succeeded to break their alliance. At the end of April 2004, the US-led Multinational Forces Iraq (MNF-I) negotiated a truce with the exhausted city representatives of Fallujah, the AMS and an Iraqi General picked-up by the US. General Jasim Mohammed Saleh, native of Fallujah, who had been directly involved with the Republican Guard in the suppression of the 1991 Intifada—and as it surfaced later on in the Anfal campaign in the eighties—was supposed to take charge of the city with a 1,000-strong force, the “Fallujah brigade”, in the name of the the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC). General Saleh wearing his full uniform entered Fallujah with its brigade on 1st of May 2004. Too exposed because of his infamous past, General Saleh would be replaced within days by General Latif, also a former general of the Republican Guard. For many people, especially within the Shi‘a community, it was a shock. The memory of the massacres of the Intifada in 1991 and the repression organised against Shi‘a clerics and militants by the previous regime was too vivid. For them, Fallujah had become again the stronghold of the Ba‘athists and the former Ba‘athists were trying to regain power through fighting. The signal sent was clear to the many people, the US would not hesitate to reinstall the former Ba‘athist oppressors if necessary. Therefore, the solidarity that was being born vis-à-vis Fallujah and its fighters was clearly undermined.

By paralysing one of the fronts and halting the emerging national alliance, the coalition forces would be able to address each of the fronts separately. Thus, from May to September 2004, coalition forces were concentrating their efforts on the Al-Sadr Movement and its Madhi Army. Gradually, as the months passed, the fights battered the infrastructure of the movement. Hundreds, if not thousands of his supporters were killed and hundreds of its cadres were imprisoned. Moreover, many buildings and offices of the movement were destroyed. Although it still retained his militia and many militants, the Al Sadr Movement emerged provisionally weakened from the conflict. In addition, the fights also caused major damage in many cities; with consequent civilian casualties. The Al Sadr movement faced open criticism from other political organisations that did not participate in the insurgency, as well as from some parts of the population, especially in the holy city of Najaf, that had been harmed physically and economically by the fighting. Furthermore, the real winner of the conflict was the head of the Hawza of Najaf, Ayatollah

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84 A Hawza is a religious seminary and a local religious centre and charity organisation. The Hawza of Najaf is the religious centre of the Shi‘a religious life in Iraq. At the same time, an Islamic university, seminary, centre for charity, and social organisation, it also is providing the religious direction for the Shi‘a community. The two main Hawza of the Shi‘a world are Najaf in Iraq and Qom in Iran. Both Hawza remain under the guidance of the Marja‘īyya.
Al Uthma Al Sistani\(^5\), who negotiated and obtained the end of the combat operations, thus reinforcing its political supremacy (ICG, July 2006). Hence, if Al Sadr harvested credibility and visibility with many Iraqis for fighting American soldiers, he had failed to mobilise the majority of the Shi’a community with him toward a national insurrection against the occupation.

As the confrontation with Al Sadr Movement ended, the US-led MNF-I turned back against the city of Fallujah. This time, the city was accused of harbouring the Al Qaeda leader Al Zarqawi and many foreign fighters, which the local representatives of the city denied. Nonetheless, the city suffered a renewed bombing campaign allegedly directed toward terrorists during the month of September 2004. In November 2004, the Prime Minister of the new Iraqi Interim Government, Iyad Allawi declared a state of emergency for sixty days. Then, the US Armed Forces supported by members of the new Iraqi National Guard stormed the city on the 4th of November 2004. This time, residents were asked to leave the city and the offensive would go all the way. The military operation named Al Fajr/Phantom Fury, would last until December 2004 and would be extremely violent. The coalition forces were believed to have killed nearly 1,200 fighters and to have captured a thousand, among them a tiny band of foreign fighters. About 20 per cent of the city had been razed to the ground, two thirds of buildings and houses in the city were severely damaged and most of the 300,000 inhabitants became Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) settling in camps in the countryside or in other areas like Baghdad (Oxford Research Group, 2005; Eckholm, 2005; Ricks, 2007).

Finally, the AMS, which had established the truce during the first offensive against Fallujah, had been a collateral target of the November offensive. Several of its offices, including mosques, in Baghdad and elsewhere were invaded and closed by US-led MNF-I forces and several of its members were jailed. Eventually, it had taken nine months for the US-led MNF-I forces to achieve their goals. On the one hand, they had managed to crush Fallujah, the symbolic foyer of the military resistance, which they designated as a terrorist city. On the other hand, they seriously weakened if not destroyed the radical movement of Muqtada Al Sadr. But more than anything, they succeed in preventing the nascent alliance between the Al Sadr Movement, the Madhi Army, its militia,

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and insurgent groups, the majority of them Sunni, and its representatives the Association of Muslim Scholars, to turn into a national armed front against the occupation.

If the end of the siege of Fallujah had been a shock and first blow to the alliance, the second siege of Fallujah in the autumn of 2004, as Gregory noted, became a “symbol of division” (Gregory, 2008:6). Hence, a weakened Al Sadr Movement, pressurised by other main Shi’a organisations and representatives (Dawa, SCIRI), would not provide real support to insurgents in Fallujah this time. And Shi’a religious authorities like Al Ayatollah Al Sistani would not condemn the second siege and the destruction of the city. On the other side, the end of the year 2004, saw an increasing participation of sectarian Salafi jihadists into the insurgency, among them foreign fighters organised under the banner of organisations like Al Qaeda in Iraq or Jeysh Ansar al Sunnah. Although most of their actions and sectarian discourses were condemned at that time by organisations like the AMS, they were effectively present and tolerated among or beside insurgency forces (Rosen, 2004). Meanwhile, 2004 saw the first multiple bombing attacks against the Shi’a community, causing the death of more than 170 people, during the Ashura procession in March 2004. Later on, the massacre would be attributed to Al Qaeda. Also, international and Iraqi media were contributing to reinforce the sectarian vision and perception of the 2004 fighting and Fallujah sieges (Al Marashi, 2007). All of this contributed to a breach of confidence between the different components of the insurgency and their respective social bases. This was also the early outcome of another part of the US Administration’s strategy, namely the Iraqization of the crisis, implemented in the summer of 2004.

1.4.3 ‘Iraqization’, 2004-2005

The counterinsurgency model designed by the US military staff in 2004 (US Department of the Army, 2004) was based mainly on a reassessment of the British counterinsurgency strategy used in Malaya between 1948 and 1960 as well as the US experience in Salvador during the eighties. As noted by Renard and Taillat, it was implemented by the newly appointed commander of the MNF-I, General George W. Casey, and an important part of its strategy relied:

“... on the “Iraqization” of the counterinsurgency through the new Iraqi army supposedly reproducing a model of national force that integrated all the factions of the country. More importantly, Casey tried to diminish the visibility of US troops in order to reduce their vulnerability and to avoid alienating local populations.” (Renard & Taillat, 2008:4. Translation is mine)
In fact, all of the newly reconstructed state institutions would become a buffer between the coalition forces and growing popular resentment and the insurgent guerrilla movement. Especially as this included the whole new security apparatus, Iraqi police and army that were trained in haste (Hurst 2009: 195). These newly created forces would be used directly as auxiliary forces of the MNF-I. Hence, October 2004 saw the first massive joint operation, in and around Samara, that were involving battalions from the new Iraqi Security Forces and the US Army (Batiste, 2005). One of the effects of Iraqization from 2005 and onward would be the increase of direct violence between Iraqis, especially political and guerrilla violence between insurgent groups and the new Iraqi security apparatus, but also against Iraqi organisations or individuals involved in the political process handled by the coalition forces. This political violence that started since the beginning of the occupation in 2003, was exerted mainly through assassinations and kidnappings. It also saw a rapid development of car bombings and attacks of police stations, military barracks and recruitment centres (Lins de Albuquerque & O’Hanlon, 2012).

Moreover, the ethno-sectarianisation of the new state institutions including the new police and the Iraqi Army was to have even more adverse effects, contributing to the sectarianisation of the conflict. Hence, the result of the political sequence of the year 2005, organised around the constitutional elections in January 2005 and parliamentary elections in December 2005, was an extensive marginalisation of the Sunni community from the institutional political sphere as well as the new Iraqi State structures86. For Dodge, it was this “exclusive elite bargain” against the Sunni community that would be “the final cause of the sectarian civil war” (2012:148). In particular, Sunni representation or interests would have almost no room at all in the new state security apparatus—police, army and special forces— that were divided between the key powers brokers of the time, Shi'a and Kurd political organisations87. For instance, the Al Sadr Movement which integrated the political process before the elections of 2005, began to rapidly re-expand its different structures, notably the Madhi Army. It was taking advantage of its participation in the political process and the resources granted by its control of the health and transport ministries. Meanwhile, its true rival in Shi'a politics, the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI/ISCI)88, was able to integrate most of its militia, the Badr Brigades, into the different Security Apparatus (IPS, INP, IBES, FPS) under supervision of The Ministry of Interior (Perito, 2009). This would have huge consequences, the first being that Sunnis would

86 On this topic, see Chapters. 2.5; 2.6.
88 Shi’a Islamic Iraqi Political party founded in Iran in 1982. It would change its name to Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) in 2007.
be completely under-represented within the security apparatus forces. The second would be a growing estrangement between an important part of the police and the army forces and the Sunni population. And many operations against insurgents or ‘terrorists’ would take place in the so-called ‘Sunni triangle’, for example in Al Anbar or Nineawa, or in the neighbourhood of Adhamya in Baghdad. This estrangement would soon turn into alienation. In many areas, the tanks of the Iraqi police or Iraqi Army would not be considered differently from the tanks of the American occupiers (Malkasian 2007:48). Yet, in the summer 2005, the Iraqi security forces, although still not reliable, were gathering around 180,000 men who were walking along or before the US Humvees to confront insurgents, ‘Ba’athist’ or ‘terrorists’, in many areas populated by a majority of Sunni inhabitants.

At the end of 2005, attacks against the police and the Iraqi Army continued to rise, causing the deaths of nearly 200 police officers and soldiers per month, mostly Shiites or Kurds. Meanwhile, the newspaper Le Monde reported that “…the Shiite death squads linked to the Interior Ministry, were taking revenge by removing and executing leaders of the Sunni community.” (Leser, 2005). Similarly, the year 2005 saw a dramatic rise of massive bombing attacks against Shiite and Kurdish populations, most often claimed by or affiliated to Al Qaeda. Predictably, they were condemned as attacks coming from foreigners plotting against Iraq by the vast majority of the different Sunni armed groups and organisations like the Association of Muslim Scholars. But one wonders if these attacks against Shiites and Kurds were not perceived as acts of revenge and reprisal for the destruction of Sunni towns and villages such as Fallujah, Haditah or Tal A’far by the US-led coalition forces and the Iraqi Army. Even the north of the country was not immune to the accelerating effects of the ethno-sectarianisation of the political field and the worsening of the violence that was directly linked to it. Therefore, Kirkuk and Mosul were becoming the arena of inter-ethnic clashes between Kurds, Arabs and Turkmen and suicide bombings attacks would even reach Irbil, the capital of the Iraqi Kurdistan. Finally, one could see the first circumscribed episodes of sectarian expulsion in 2004 (Ali, 2012:152) and notably in Baghdad after the second siege of Fallujah (Schwartz, 2008). Soon enough they would expand into real campaigns of sectarian cleansing between Sunni and Shi'a in many areas of Iraq.

In conclusion, the Iraqization strategy accelerated the projection of the three main communities (Shiite Arabs, Sunni Arabs, Kurds) into a dangerous encounter, the United States playing the referee. Here, there is a real shift where political violence, mainly between pro- and anti-occupation, would be now distorted by an ethno-sectarian prism. In the eyes of the world and including Iraq, the majority of Shiites and Kurds were part of the political process launched by the occupation authorities and working with its soldiers, while the majority of Sunnis opposed it. And by the end of 2005, one can say
that Iraq was entering a “multiple civil war” on at least three fronts. All over the country a guerrilla war opposed insurgent groups against occupation forces and the new Iraqi State. In southern and central Iraq, a guerrilla war waged between Shiites and Sunnis militias and armed groups. In the north around Kirkuk and Mosul, Arabs, Kurds and Turkomans would (although in a more restricted manner) fight against each other for the control of this area. In a sense, sectarian military blocks were being created with the rapprochement of the different Sunni armed groups, some tribes and Al Qaeda, facing the different Shi’a militia and the security apparatus of the new Iraqi State. All of this would be characterised by a proliferation of actors of the war, especially deaths squads, armed groups and militia, by destructive campaigns of ‘pacification’ and population displacement that looked increasingly like ethnic or religious cleansing. In fact, one can say that the year 2005 was a kind of rehearsal for the 2006-2007 fully fledged civil war for the control of territories and power, that would pit multiple actors, Sunni armed groups, Shi’a militia, Iraqi police and army, against the increasing involvement of the tribes, and the full participation of the US-led MNF-I.

1.4.4 Territorialisation and sectarian violence, 2006-2007

The years 2006 and 2007 saw a dramatic increase of multiform violence, mass murders and sectarian cleansing and of their casualties (Lins de Albuquerque & O’Hanlon, 2012). The “Battle of Baghdad” (Cockburn 2006) would be the symbol of this territorial and ethno-sectarian violence. Although it was firstly “a war for sectarian and ethnic control of the space” (Cordesman, 2007:2), ethno-sectarian war fronts would gradually fragment following trends of territorialisation and, to a certain degree, of autonomisation of violence. So much so that in May 2007, Stansfield would consider that:

“There is not 'a' civil war in Iraq, but many civil wars and insurgencies involving a number of communities and organizations struggling for power”. (Stansfield, 2007)

Hence, within the context of social and economic chaos in Iraq, militias, armed groups and the guerrilla fronts were breaking up and recomposing into a multitude of more or less loosely affiliated subgroups and sub-militia. This was true for nearly all militias and armed organisations, like the Al Sadr

89 On the question of the violence that plagued Iraq at that time, see Chapter 1.4 Violence and Politics and Chapter 3.2 System of Violence.
Movement militia, the Madhi Army\textsuperscript{90}, but also Sunni armed organisations like the Islamic Army in Iraq (IAI), the 1920 Revolution Brigades, and even Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia (AQM) and the Mujahedin Shura Council. Thus, some of these groups or subgroups were losing their political centre or command (ICG, 2008: 8). This sectarian cleansing of many parts of Iraq and Baghdad turned many old mixed areas into homogeneous neighbourhoods or towns, effectively transforming millions of Iraqis into IDPs unable to go back home in a near future (Cohen, 2009: 338). The other effect was the reinforcement of the role of local powers (the ‘strong men’) being ethno-sectarian or tribal and definitely based on violence and coercion, on which national institutions remained quite impotent (Tripp, 2008). As noted by a former US ambassador, it was:

“...a quasi-feudal devolution of authority to armed enclaves which exist at the expense of central government” (quoted in Gregory, 2008:38)

However, with the increasing territorialisation of violence the different fronts of the civil war began to disintegrate during these years. Thus, in Baghdad and in the south, violent competition was regularly pitting Shi'a militia, the Madhi Army or its splinter groups (like Asaib Ahl al-Haq), the Badr Brigades or the Iraqi Hezbollah against each other. While in Basra, it was no less than a dozen of militias, gangs, armed groups and tribes all linked in one way or another to Shi'a political and religious movements that were competing for the control of the black oil market (William, 2009: Chapter 3).

The Al Sadr Movement and its militia would pay a heavy toll in this intra-sectarian competition. Firstly, they were facing a kind of class alliance between the Shi'a religious authorities (the \textit{Hawza} of Najaf), the merchant classes associated with the religious tourism and business in the holy cities\textsuperscript{91}, and the militia of the ISCI\textsuperscript{92}, and the Badr Brigades, that were more or less representing these interests. The competition, punctuated by physical confrontations and armed clashes, would escalate into full violence between JAM and the Badr Brigade, as well as smaller militia or security apparatus linked to the Shrines and the Hawza, during the summer of 2007 (ICG, 2008). Secondly, Jaysh el Madhi (JAM), and by extension the Al Sadr Movement, were being singled out more and more for their ultra-violent and extremist behaviour. Not only did they take the blame for the worst episodes of sectarian cleansing and attacks against civilians belonging to the Sunni community, but Jaysh el

\textsuperscript{90} For example, see Visser briefing on the fragmentation of Jaysh el Madhi between different branches and tendencies related to Iran, Shi'a Madhism and mainstream nationalists in the South of the country. (Visser, 2008)

\textsuperscript{91} Samarra, Khadamya, Najaf, Kerbala.

\textsuperscript{92} Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), Previously the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution of Iraq (SCIRI).
Madhi and all the sub-groups claiming to be part of it, were also accused of engaging in various criminal networks and enterprise by an important part of the Iraqi population. Finally, in the wake of the Kerbala clashes, the leadership of Al Sadr Movement abashed by the undisciplined and relentless character of the loose militia they had created, announced the freezing of all Jaysh el Madhi operations the 29th of August 2007.

Inside the Sunni camp, the fragmentation led also to an internal struggle for resources and power, especially in the province of Al Anbar. There, the loose coalition between AQM, the various Sunni armed groups and the local Sunni tribes that emerged during the year 2005 began to crumble in 2006. The ultra-violent behaviour of AQM, but most of all, its attempt to supplant tribal prerogatives and impose its Islamic Emirate in Al Anbar in October 2006, would infuriate all the other Sunni actors (Hashim, 2008: 59; ICG, April 2008: 4). Moreover, the Sunni armed groups were losing the wars that most of them were waging on two fronts; one against the foreign forces and the new Iraqi government, and one against Shiite militias for the control of Baghdad and some other areas. Within one year, all of this produced a complete reversal in the situation. Before, the Sunni armed groups and AQM were leading the struggle against the American troops, the Iraqi government and the Shiite militias. In that battle, Sunni tribes were providing assistance, fighters and even making a pledge to the Sunni armed groups or AQM. But, in 2007 the tribes increasingly emerged as the leaders of a campaign directed primarily against Al Qaeda, and secondly against Shiite militias (considered as proxies of Iran).

In this new configuration, the Sunni armed groups had a secondary role and the US forces were then considered as a subsidiary target (ICG, April 2008: 4). The American administration saw the opportunity to make an alliance with this movement of tribal revival and to bolster it in order to boost its fight against the AQM. Consequently, at the beginning of 2007, the Sahwa (the Awakening Movement) was officially created under the patronage of disenfranchised sheikhs and the US Army (McCary, 2009:48; Benraad, 2008; 2011). In this movement, sheikhs willing to fight and provide fighters against Al Qaeda would be armed and well paid by the US Army (SIGIR, 2008:94; ICG, 2008). One year later, the Sahwa also called 'the sons of Iraq' would expand beyond the al Anbar province and gathered more than 90,000 fighters. As the Sahwa was growing faster and stronger every day, the major part of the Sunni armed groups was either forced to stop their operations and remain in the shadows, or to enlist in the Sahwa. Still, some Sunni armed groups remained active, but to a lesser extent than previously (ICG, 2008: 12).

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93 Association of Muslim Scholars “We Are Now Waging Two Battles: Against 'the Occupation' and Against 'the Terrorists’”, Al-Hayat, January 26, 2006. (The first real fighting between some tribal groups and Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia occurred in Ramadi and then expanded gradually to all al Anbar and the rest of Iraq.)
1.4.5. 2008-2011: Reduction of Violence, turn to Politics

The period 2008-2011 is characterised by a dramatic reduction in violence, a trend that began at the end of 2007 (Lins de Albuquerque & O’Hanlon, 2012, SIGIR, 2009b). Of course, a reduction in violence did not mean the suppression of all violence. Hence, assassinations, bombings attacks would continue and never stop to interrupt normal life all over Iraq, but at a very much limited rate since the beginning of the post-2003 period (Lins de Albuquerque & O’Hanlon, 2012). But at least the period coincided with a reduction in the amplitude of violence and the vanishing of extreme forms of violence, notably the mass killings and especially the sectarian cleansing. This was the result of shifting of forces, like the rise of tribes, the reduction of insurgency operations and the contraction of activities of important networks of Specialists in Violence like Al Qaeda/ISIS and JAM.

The contraction of violence coincided with and may have opened more space for a return to politics and a contest of the ethno-sectarian political system, the Muhhasah, as it had been implemented since 2003. This return to politics would be punctuated by the provincial elections of 2009, the national elections of 2010 and the Iraqi spring of 2011. One of its first consequences was a fragile attempt of reintegration of the different Sunni forces into the political process. For many of them, the necessities of the hour—as the US withdrawal was becoming increasingly close— compelled them to switch from ‘the gun to the pen’ and build on their new alliance with the US Administration to regain political weight in the competition for power and positions in the new state in construction. For example, the newly empowered sheikhs of the Sahwa in Al Anbar and Baghdad provinces were eager to transform their fighting power into political power. They tried to transform their tribal military alliance into political gatherings in preparation for the provincial elections of 2009. Also, as the climate of insecurity and fear that had stifled the country was slowly receding, public debates on decisive issues that were at the centre of the Iraqi crisis since the beginning of the US occupation were re-emerging. This was happening at all levels. And so, in the Iraqi streets, in the

94 In Arabic, this could be translated as allotments, repartition. By extension it represents the quota sharing system in the new Iraq. Such a system was supposed to allow for the good political representation of the ethnic and sectarian demographic balance. On the emergence of Muhhasah as a political principle for Iraq, see Ismael, Tareq Y., and Jacqueline S. Ismael. “The Sectarian State in Iraq and the New Political Class.” International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies 4.3 (2010): 339-356.
eve of the provincial elections in 2009, people were openly talking of punishing ruling parties for the corruption and the failure of the Iraqi State, at a general or provincial level (ICG, 2009:8-9). Iraqi intellectuals and academics were asking for political reforms, contesting the federalism and the ethno-sectarian organisation of the new political system. Even political representatives that had been elected to Parliament through a sectarian and federalist political system in 2005 were contesting it.

Thus, on the 22nd July 2008, a cross-sectarian and cross-partisan gathering of Iraqi parliament members voted a new provincial electoral law which created the possibility for a partially open list in the electoral system (meaning that people would be able to vote for specific candidates and not only for a blocked list), that banned the use of religious symbols during the elections and that challenged the control of the Kurdish parties on Kirkuk. Even if the law was vetoed by the presidential council, this gathering took the name of the “22 July Bloc”, (Tajammu al-Thani wa al-Ishrin min Tammuz), and was posturing as an oppositional, nationalist and anti-sectarian parliamentary block. Of course, part of the move was the continuation of the endless game of alliances and treasons of Iraqi infrapolitics. But this was also the result of a growing pressure from the Iraqi society that had been disillusioned with the sectarian discourse and Iraqi political elites. As ICG noted:

“Former confessional blocs are fraying, as sectarianism is increasingly challenged by more nationalist sentiment and promises of better governance by political actors seeking to capture the public mood.” (ICG, 2009: i)

Yet, the 22 July Block did not translate into an electoral bloc during the provincial elections of 2009, which remained relatively fragmented with a multiplicity of lists. It was due partly to the nature of such local regional elections, were decisive alliances are made locally between local strong men, notable figures and national politicians. Nonetheless, the electoral block, The State of the Law, created by Prime Minister Al Maliki and that was declined locally or allied with local lists in the provinces would be the true winner of the 2009 elections. Although it was still a sectarian gathering of Shi’a organisations with parties of small minorities or figures belonging to minorities, the Al Maliki electoral block had abandoned the sectarian rhetoric and its religious tone for a more nationalistic one. Prime Minister Al Maliki was boasting about his

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95 See for example the Policy Report published by the NUPI based on a series of workshops gathering different Iraqi intellectual, academics and political representatives.
96 The law would be amended on the Kirkuk issue and slightly rewritten on the question of religious signs and voted in September 2008. See (ICG,2009: 14)
97 The bloc was composed of different representatives from Al Sadr Movement, the Sunni block, and some MPs belonging to the secular alliance INA.
military campaign against Shi’a militia in the south⁹⁸ as well as using the highly publicised disagreement with the Kurdish parties on the question of oil and the region of Kirkuk.

The State of the Law alliance, was somehow presented as the party of order and of a more centralised Iraq under the guidance of Prime Minister Maliki.⁹⁹ On the contrary, the big loser of the elections, failing short of nearly 150 seats in all provinces, was the other Shi’a electoral alliance, the “Al Mehraab Martyr” list, led by the ISCI (Visser, March 2009; Cole, 2009). They were punished for mainly two reasons, the religious and sectarian tone of the alliance and the fact that they had controlled most of the governorates in the south of the country for the last 4 years. In any event, one main factor explaining the result of these governorate elections was the nascent disaffection for political parties and gatherings actively using sectarianism and religion as political tools. As recalled by the ICG, an important fraction of Iraqis was beginning to express their frustration toward a political system based on identity politics:

“In other words, they at least in part blamed these parties’ deference to clerics for their failure to govern. As such, this was the first public indictment of politicians who had deployed sectarian discourse, mobilised clerics and turned mosques into political bully pulpits in an effort to provide a distinct and recognisable identity, create a siege mentality, build a mass base and gain power in a perplexing post-Saddam environment.” (ICG, 2009:3)

In this frame, the national elections of March 2010 would see the escalation of the challenge against the Muhasasah, and the exclusive political bargain. Accordingly, two lists would take the lion's share of the votes, around 49%, during these elections. The State of the Law from Prime Minister Maliki and the Al Iraqiyya coalition led by Iyad Allawi. Both coalitions had run a campaign focusing on anti-sectarian and nationalistic slogans and a centralist conception of the Iraqi State. Yet, Al Iraqiyya was going further and openly challenging the ethno-sectarian quota sharing of position and power within the state (Dodge, 2012; ICG, 2012). Moreover, they represented different constituencies. The State of the Law core was an alliance between the old Islamic Shi’a Party, the Da’wa, and some of its splinter groups and southern tribal alliances, the majalis al isnad that were related directly to Prime Minister Al Maliki. It was supplemented with independent and well known figures coming from different minorities, like Abbas al Bayati, leader of the Islamic Union of Iraqi Turkoman. Therefore, even if it distanced itself from the main Shi’a sectarian block, the Iraqi National Alliance (INA)—led at that time by the ISCI

⁹⁸ On the ‘Charge of the Knights’ the military operation launched against Al Madhi Army in Basra in 2008, see (Cochrane, 2008; Iron, 2013).

⁹⁹ As noted by ICG, Maliki's electoral victory in the south of the country may have been boosted by the creation of tribal electoral support groups in the south, paid for by state funds (ICG, 2010:6).
and the Sadrist MPs—it remained an Islamic Shi’a coalition. On the contrary, Al Iraqiyia was primordially a coalition of nationalist and secular elements from different origins, Shi’a, Sunni, Turkomans, that had been backed by a broad coalition of Sunni organisations and movements. In this frame, it also represented an attempt of reintegration of the Sunni community into the political system, but on non-sectarian bases. Yet, even before the elections, Al Iraqiyia had faced a violent and sectarian campaign portraying “Al Iraqiyia” as a “Sunni list with Shi’a head” and “the return of the Ba’athists” (ICG, 2012; Visser, 2010). The bulk of the attacks were coming from the INA block and the De-Ba’athification Commission headed by Ahmed Chalabi, who was himself a candidate on the INA list. The Commission decided to forbid 50 candidates of Al Iraqiyia from running in the election. Among them were important leaders like Saleh al Mutlak. As noted by Dodge and Visser, the De-Ba’athification commission was concentrating its attack against the Al Iraqiyia list which had the most exclusions and the more politically damaging ones (Dodge, 2012:154; Visser, 2010).

Despite the campaign and institutional barrages it faced, Al Iraqiyia would win by a small margin getting 91 seats, just ahead of the State of the Law coalition (89 seats). Both lists were largely dominating the other electoral blocks, in particular those who were relying on sectarian identity politics, like the Shi’i Iraqi National Alliance (70 seats) or the Sunni block, the Iraqi Accordance Front (Tawafuq) led by the Iraqi Islamic Party (6 seats) (Visser, 2010). Of course, sectarian calculations and identity politics were not totally absent even inside the votes for the non-sectarian lists. For instance, The State of the Law got the majority of its seats in the south of the country, in majority Shi’a areas and in Baghdad. Al Iraqiyia got its best scores and the majority of its seats in Baghdad, in the so-called ‘Sunni triangle’ and in the north of the country. But even though all Iraqis had the choice to vote directly for sectarian blocks, either Sunni or Shi’a, the majority of the voters chose lists that were asserting anti-sectarian and centralist political positions. Moreover, Al Iraqiyia would be able to win seats all over the country, Iraqi Kurdistan excepted, from Kirkuk in the north to Al Anbar and Baghdad in the centre of the country to Kerbala and Basra in the south. This was directly contradicting the view that, despite nationalists or anti-sectarian slogans, identity politics rooted in ethno-sectarian territorial division of the country was the first driver of politics in Iraq. As noted by Dodge, the results of these elections had somewhat a “revolutionary” character:

“Such a strong, overtly secular vote raised the possibility in March 2010 that Iraq’s exclusive elite pact could be swept aside and a new, more inclusive political dispensation built... The potentially revolutionary effects of Iraqiyya's 2010 election campaign and victory triggered an aggressive defence of the existing system by those who had benefitted from it most.” (2012: 152)

Despite having lost the elections, Prime Minister Al Maliki will stubbornly try every move, from delaying manoeuvres, byzantine political bargaining and finally violent repression in order to stay in power. First of all, he would refuse to accept the first result of the elections of March and ordered a recount. Meanwhile, he began a grand bargain with the Iraqi National Alliance led by the ISCI and the Sadrist Trend (Al Tayyar al Sadr) under the auspices of the Iraqi government. In mid-May 2010, the IHEC announced the final recount of votes and still declared Al Iraqiyya the winner of elections, giving Iyad Allawi the right to try to form a new cabinet to govern Iraq. Yet, three days before the reopening of the Iraqi Parliament the 14th of June 2010, the State of Law coalition and the Iraqi National Alliance, announced officially that they had merged to form the National Alliance, becoming the first block of the Iraqi parliament with 159 seats. It was basically the reconstitution of the first sectarian Shi’a block (The United Iraqi Alliance) that had won the elections in 2005 and it was a complete U-turn considering how the State of the Law list had been portrayed itself before the elections:

“We believe that conditions under which we established the UIA in 2004 have changed. We do not want to recreate the UIA on the same basis. Iraq has moved forward. We seek a new cross-sectarianism coalition. We have offered a national program to parties that are not part of the UIA. Our vision is of a large national list comprising the full political spectrum. This list should form the next government without making a coalition with the other lists, who will go into opposition. We want to advance the political process by building a multi-party ruling list and a multi-party opposition regardless of parties' sect or ethnicity.” (Kamal Al Saidi, Representative of the Dawa party quoted in ICG, 2010:15)

During the following months, Al Maliki would fight on two fronts. Inside the Shi'a National Alliance, he would manoeuvre to remain the prime ministerial candidate against different challengers and countermoves from both the ISCI and the Sadrist movement that, aside from enhancing their own positions inside the alliance, were more and more concerned by his authoritarian tendencies (Benraad, 2012, 2014; Ottaway and Kaysi, 2012; Dodge, 2012). Outside the National Alliance, Al Maliki was trying to break the Al Iraqiyya coalition and prevent it from forming a majority in the National Assembly. Obviously, the core of the struggle was between the two political leaders, Al Maliki and Allawi. Instead of engaging negotiations for a government based on a centralist, anti-sectarian programme which was the base of both State of the Law and
Al Iraqiyya, platforms, they stubbornly refused to relinquish their claim to power (ICG, 2012).

Yet, behind the scenes it was the whole political establishment that was engaged in bartering for positions and influence. As in 2006, the Kurdish block, dominated by the PUK and KDP but that had regrouped all the 57 Kurdish MPs from the different Kurdish lists, would find itself in the position of kingmaker. Therefore, Barzani and Talabani the leaders of the Kurdish block would make sure to maximise their position. In August 2010, the Kurdish block published a list of 19 demands as base for an agreement for a government coalition with any of the other blocks. The demands concerned the incorporation of Kirkuk, and all disputed territories around, into the Iraqi Kurdistan and the reinforcement of Kurdish representations into the state institutions. They were insisting on the acceptance of the Hydrocarbon Law that had been put on hold since 2007 by the Iraqi Parliament. Moreover, they were asking for a national unity government and above all the assurance that the next government would fall if the Kurdish block would withdraw from the majority coalition (ICG, 2011). If Al Iraqiyya was reluctant to adopt the Kurdish demands, Al Maliki proved to be more amenable and the State of the Law alliance publicly announced that it was ready to agree with all demands except the one concerning the fall of the government.

Of course, the US and Iran would also impose intense pressure in order to get one unity government. The new Obama Administration was trying to negotiate the retention of some US bases in Iraq while planning the withdrawal of most of the US military troops for the end of 2011. In any event, they could not afford to leave the country without a proper government and of course, a government with allies inside. For Iran, it was about maintaining or even strengthening their influence inside the Iraqi government and its institutions. Although they may have different candidates for prime minister, here again Al Maliki found himself in the middle ground between both external powers. Therefore, with the pressure of Iran and US, all factions were invited to a ‘last chance’ meeting in Erbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan, in November 2010, with the aim of working out a deal between Al Iraqiyya, the National Alliance, the Kurdish block, Al Maliki and Allawi. According to Dodge, during the three days of meetings, Al Maliki was able to break the Al Iraqiyya Alliance by offering positions to some of the Sunni figures, Nujaifi and Al Mutlaq, in the new government (2012:156). In any event, the Erbil agreement signed between Al Iraqiyya, the Kurdish Block and the National Alliance was establishing again Al Maliki as the Prime Minister of a new Iraqi unity government with Talabani, leader of the PUK, as the President of the country.

In this frame, Al Iraqiyya and Iyad Allawi had accepted to remain in the 2005 political paradigm. In the new Al Maliki government, some Sunni figures of Al Iraqiyya would receive nominations according to the rules of the
ethno-sectarian power sharing that they had denounced\textsuperscript{101}. Allawi, on the other hand, was supposed to head the National Council for Strategic Policy. The new institution was meant to be a parallel decision making body that was supposed to restrict Al Maliki powers. Yet, it would remain stillborn (ICG, 2012:22). Other points of the agreement were also supposed to limit Al Maliki powers, in particular its control over the army and the national police. In fact, the Erbil agreement had two purposes. On one hand, it was reasserting the ethno-sectarian power sharing that was beneficent to an important part of the new political elites. On the other hand, it was attempting to balance and check the growing power of Al Maliki. As noted by Dodge:

“The Erbil Agreement certainly realised its first aim of co-opting and weakening Iraqiyya, but it has assuredly not delivered on the second.” (Dodge, 2012: 157)

Yet, during this period and despite increased revenue from oil since the year 2008, the Iraqi State and the governorates would fail to deliver economic growth or the restoration of basic public services that are the landmark of a functioning state (health, education, energy, etc.). Meanwhile, inequality and poverty indicators improved despite an average growth of 7% every year between 2008-2012 (World Bank Group, 2012). In reality, the average Iraqi person did not experience economic improvement as an improvement of services delivered by the state. But they were witnessing the surge of corruption and nepotism in every stratum of the Iraqi society\textsuperscript{102}. In this context, the last episode of return to politics and contestation of the post-2003 political order came directly from the Iraqi streets.

During the spring and summer of 2011, protests erupted all over Iraq and in Iraqi Kurdistan. The ‘Iraqi spring’ was similar to the series of protests and insurrection that had swept all through the Arab world and succeeded in some cases to topple regimes. As in Tunisia or Egypt, the movement was led by educated youth, activists and intellectuals (Salloum, 2014). It was not surprising to see this particular category of the population at the forefront of the mobilisation in Iraq too. As reported by the World Bank, “In 2012, unemployment rises to almost 25 percent among youth with tertiary education in comparison to about 5 percent for illiterate.” (World Bank, 2014:130). Here as well, the use of virtual networks like Facebook and Twitter were instrumental to the success of some of the mobilisations. Yet, there were also real connec-

\textsuperscript{101} Tareq al Hashimi would become Vice-President, Osama al Nujaifi the Speaker of Parliament and Salah al Mutlaq, the Deputy Prime Minister.

\textsuperscript{102} From 2004 to 2011 Iraq would rank among the 10 worst countries in the world on the Corruption Perceptions Index. The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) is made by Transparency International (NGO). It “scores each country on how corruption in Public Services is seen to be”. http://www.transparency.org/research/cpi/
tions with the working class or popular constituencies, and important demonstrations were happening in the poor and working class areas of Baghdad in Husseynia, Kariaat (Salloum, 2014) and in the countryside. If in Baghdad people were asking for reforms and change, in some provinces they were directly trying to oust corrupt governors103. But the activists and protesters were using a mainly similar repertoire of contention, notably the peaceful occupation of central places all over the country. The most symbolic was the occupation of the Tahrir Square (liberation in Arabic) in the capital Baghdad. As noted by many specialists, it was obviously echoing the occupation of the Tahrir Square in Cairo, but it had also its own local meanings and symbols:

“While the 2006–2008 violence divided Baghdad into nearly exclusively Sunni and Shiite sectors, the area around Tahrir Square is one of the few still identified with cosmopolitan urbanity. It therefore signifies a sphere of social interaction secured by a sense of civility rather than militarized security, in contrast to the “Green Zone” directly across the river, where government institutions are located and most politicians live. While the orientation of many protesters mirrored this character of the location, a significant section also hailed from religious and conservative backgrounds. For these, mixed (Sunni-Shiite) prayers were organised in the adjacent park, which on normal days serves as a retreat for drunks, thus again underlining the claim that the movement could serve as a model for public responsibility and coexistence alike.” (Wimmen, 2014: 14)

In a sense, the occupation of the square was encapsulating the main demands and contention of the movement. Although it was not asking for regime change, it was profoundly distrustful of the political establishment and the mainstream parties (Salloum, 2014). Protestors were asking for the end of corruption and bad governance as well as the end of sectarianism. In the demonstrations and gatherings, anti-sectarian slogans and calls for unity were explicit as well as references to the national insurrection of 1920 against the British (Neggaz, 2014:7). Another symbol of the movement was the broomstick that protesters were using to clean the Tahrir Square but that was also aimed at the politicians living in the Green Zone right beside the river. In this frame, the movement was directly challenging the ethno-sectarian political system as it has been implemented since 2003. It was the continuation of a popular trend inside the Iraqi society and that had expressed itself strongly during the previous elections in 2009 and 2010. As the elections did not bring the expected changes neither in 2009 nor in 2010, it is not too surprising that some following the example of their Arabic neighbours, Iraqis decided to try street politics. But for the political elites in power, this was frightening.

In Iraqi Kurdistan, the two Kurdish parties in power facing the same kind of protests would not hesitate to use blatant force, killing dozens to suppress

103 For instance, demonstrators in the city of Hit were asking for the resignation of the Governor. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=37-tEeUTLP4. Accessed 9th of November 2015.
the protests. In Baghdad, Prime Minister Maliki, after announcing some reforms, would use strong coercion to suppress the movement. Hence, bands of thugs and state security forces would be sent against peaceful protesters during all the mobilisations. Demonstrators would be beaten, stabbed and women protesters would be sexually harassed (Essam El Din, 2011:217). For instance, the 25th February 2011, coined ‘the day of rage’ by the protesters, would be the scene of a vast repression similar to what was happening in neighbouring authoritarian countries. Baghdad was declared a no-drive zone, compelling protesters to come by foot to the Tahrir Square. Then, the thousands of protesters would be physically attacked by Iraqi police and gangs. The scene would be repeated all over Iraq and in Iraqi Kurdistan as well. At the end of the day at least 29 demonstrators would be killed (McCrommen, 2011; Amnesty International, 2011). The repression was also aimed against the media, the intellectuals as well as the small political parties that were supporting the movement (ibid; ibid). Although the Iraqi spring began to recede after the 25th of February, its repression would continue until the last day of mobilisations during the summer 2011. Furthermore, Al Maliki would launch a campaign of fear and discredit against the protesters, accusing them of being part of an international conspiracy. This continuous repression and smear campaign from the state, and the relative isolation of the ‘Iraqi spring’ from the main political parties and the religious clergy, would prevent the movement from achieving momentum to upset the Iraqi political system.

In reality, starting from the elections of 2010, Al Maliki, and his close supporters, had backtracked from their previous anti-sectarian and nationalist stance in order to justify his claim to remain the Prime Minister and to strengthen his power. In this struggle, Al Maliki would not hesitate to return to fear mongering and coded sectarianism (Visser, 2010; Dodge, 2012). It was a wild rush forward that did not stop with Maliki succeeding to be Prime Minister, but continued with the violent crushing of the Al Iraqiyaa block and its popular constituency. In the next months and years to come, the reassertion of identity politics and sectarianism would be directly correlated with Al Maliki’s successful attempts to consolidate, more and more violently, his leading position and organised networks of powers, the ‘Malikyioun’, around his person (Dodge, 2012:70). But above all, the return to identity politics and the reassertion of the ‘exclusive elite bargain’ for the benefit of Al Maliki would set in motion a new phase of sectarian confrontations, and with them the resurgence of sectarian networks of violence (Benraad, 2014; Ottaway & Kaysi, 2012).
“Our thesis is that the idea of a self-adjusting market implied a stark Utopia. Such an institution could not exist for any length of time without annihilating the human and natural substance of society; it would have physically destroyed man and transformed his surroundings into a wilderness.”

The Great Transformation

Karl Polanyi
2.1 The Destruction of the old Iraqi State

The US’s march towards a new Iraq was mainly sold to the US public with a mix of Straussian Noble Lies (such as with regard to the weapons of mass destruction), Manichean rhetoric about good and evil (the struggle against the axis of evil), martial postures (the War on Terror) and compassionate sentiments. However, the US Administration’s discourse about the invasion of Iraq was also concealing an array of very diverse objectives about Iraq that would be often contradictory with each other.

In this chapter, I will show how such contradictory objectives were already discernible in the preparation of the invasion. But more importantly, the fact that the Bush Administration would be incapable of reconciling such contradictions would put insurmountable strain on the different actors of the occupation of Iraq. It also helps to understand the inaugural events of the American occupation of Iraq. That is, the use of a destructive military strategy, Shock and Awe, for the invasion; the condoning of the three weeks of looting and destruction that followed the invasion; and the first two sets of occupying orders: the disbanding of the Iraqi Army and the De-Ba’athification process. These three initial moves from the Bush Administration would concur with the destruction of the old Iraqi State. Yet, they also reveal what I call the initial patterns, the mental and ideological frames—neoliberal Common Sense, hubris and denial—that would have a profound impact on the way that the occupation would be led by the US Administration.

104 On the question of the Compassionate Conservatism philosophy of President G.W. Bush see (Bush, 2002; Owens, 2007).
2.1.1 The devil and the details

If one follows the White House’s confidential “Principals’ Committee Review of Iraq Policy Paper” of October 2002, about the goals and objectives of the US strategy for Iraq, the war and invasion in Iraq would principally be about destroying weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and Iraq’s capabilities—as a regional military power—“to contribute to regional instability” (Rice, 2002). In fact, the US Administration only set forth a few goals concerning the regime change and occupation in Iraq. Iraq should continue to be a “single, unitary state”, it would have to “adhere to the rule of law”, “respect basic bills of rights”. The US would “...encourage the building of democratic institutions...”; the US and its allies would “rapidly starts the country’s political, economic, and security reconstruction”. Finally, the occupation would be as short as possible with a “transition to an elected Iraqi government as quick as practicable.” (Rice, 2002).

Whereas everybody could clearly understand how the US Administration would deal with the destruction of Iraqi nuclear capabilities, in comparison the second part of the US goals on Iraq were much vaguer. How would the US Administration put in place a path to re-building democratic institutions? On which political system will it be based and who would be allowed to engage in this process? How will the US ensure that Iraq would stay a single and unitary state? How will they organise the elections for an Iraqi government? What will be the range and the type of the economic reconstruction?

However, for years, diverse US departments and associated think tanks had worked on projects of regime change and occupation in Iraq105 (Rubin, 2002; Makya, 2003; Clawson, 2002; Hultman & Phillips, 2003; Dobbins, 2003). Amongst the dozens of such plans, the 13 volume and 1,200 pages long publication “Future for Iraq Project” was the result of two-year long meetings and working group sessions of hundreds of Iraqi exiles and the US State Department.106 The problem is that all these plans were very contradictory with each other because they were based on very different premises. Therefore, some studies and plans were making the case for a multinational involvement in Iraq whereas others were insisting on the need for the US to lead the occupation alone. Some were focusing on the ethno-sectarian nature of Iraq and the need for a partition of Iraq, while others were on the opposite side asserting the non-sectarian nature of the country and its society. Some were focusing on the totalitarian nature of Saddam’s Iraqi State, while different studies affirmed

105 For a precise study and review of the different scenarios see “l’Après Saddam en Irak”, in particular the first chapter (Karoui, 2005). See also, Bensahel, Nora, et al. After Saddam: Pre-war planning and the occupation of Iraq. Rand Corporation, 2008.
106 http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB198/index.htm
that it was in a crippled and dysfunctional condition after decades of dictatorship, war and embargo. The state and the army were either considered as essential for reconstruction or on the contrary considered as menacing to any regime change project. The same can be said about the question of transition plans, and the necessity or not of controlling and privatising oil. Taken together, these plan and studies, whether they were involving exiled Iraqis or not, were drawing a very interesting map of the conflicting interests and realities of US policies and the complex paradoxes of the Iraqi nation. And even if one could draw some common axes or objectives between all these plans, they remain contradictory in their essence:

_ The new sovereign Iraq would have to give up all unconventional weapons and any kind of armed force that could become a threat to other countries in the region
_ The new sovereign Iraq will be a friendly country to the US, either by signing bilateral agreements on defence and security directly with the United States, or by integrating a structure like that of the Gulf Cooperation Council, which depends largely on the US
_ The new sovereign Iraq would have to adopt a democratic system and the liberalisation of its economy
_ In this reconstruction scheme, the United States will have to rely on the opposition in exile, especially those close to the US and their values
_ The US will quickly set up a transitional or international administration composed of Iraqis, but remaining under US control

Obviously, it is not difficult to understand that such objectives would drastically encage the future Iraq and heavily restrain not only its freedom to determine and define its own foreign policy, but even worse its own political and economic regime. Here, one can find a peculiar conceptualisation, to say the least, of democracy and sovereignty. Indeed, Zizek rightly captured the ‘twisted logic’ of a neoconservative-led administration that was essentially pursuing contradictory goals, “promoting democracy, affirming US hegemony and ensuring stable energy supplies” (2004:48). Moreover, the ideological assumptions that would lead to the Kinetic Neoliberalisation of Iraq had their roots at the top levels of the US Administration. Hence, three months after the White House statement of objectives in the autumn of 2002, President Bush’s address about “The Future of Iraq” was directly putting the future occupation of Iraq on the same path as the post-World War II occupation of Germany and Japan (Bush, 2003).

The goal of the occupation would be to foster a new regime in Iraq that could serve “...as a dramatic and inspiring example of freedom for other nations in the region” (Bush, 2003). And this ‘example’ would be based on “...internal reform, greater political participation, economic openness, and free trade” (ibid). Herein lies a fundamental contradiction. If the objectives were
only top regime change, elimination of Saddam’s circles of power and quick reconstruction, the US may have hoped for a short occupation and the investment of reasonable military force and money for it. But if the goal was a complete transformation of Iraq as a country and a society into a model of a market democracy, there is no doubt that it would require a long occupation and subsequent investment and military force. Interestingly enough, this discrepancy was the subject of public discussions in Congress before the war and also after the beginning of the war. (US Senate, 2003a:86, 2003b: 41-42, 45-46). As stated by the RAND Corporation’s post-mortem study of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) rule in Iraq (regardless of its particularly positive appraisal of Administrator Bremer and the CPA actions), it seems that the Bush Administration could not reconcile the different visions that existed of the Iraq occupation and what it entailed. For the RAND study:

“The United States went into Iraq with a maximalist agenda— standing up a model democracy that would serve as a beacon to the entire region—and a minimalist application of money and manpower.” (Dobbins et al., 2009: xxxix)

In the same vein, the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction (SIGIR)\textsuperscript{107} reports that:

“The tense interplay between these competing visions fundamentally shaped the process of prewar planning for postwar Iraq in the fifteen months that preceded the March 2003 invasion.” (SIGIR, 2009:3)

But even putting aside the conflict between the two visions of the US occupation of Iraq, each of the particular objectives of the US occupation were, in detail, contradictory to the others. Hence, the Bush Administration was planning to deliver Iraqis from dictatorship and restore their freedom to enjoy a democratic regime but at the same time the US was willing to impose a foreign policy friendly to US interests and the liberalisation of its economy. As Professor Stansfield noted, the freedom of Iraqis and a democracy “satisfying their demands” did not really coincide with a “freedom interpreted, portrayed, and accepted by the US Administration and its electorate” (2004:131-132).

The US also planned to lead the reconstruction of a country destroyed by three wars and ten years of embargo, but the Bush Administration refused to provide estimates of the cost, assuring that the US would not engage more than a few billions of US dollars for it. As stated by Deputy Secretary of the

\textsuperscript{107} In 2004, the US Congress appointed a Special Inspector General in Iraq (SIGIR) in order to oversee the US reconstruction funding and programmes after a year of public controversy and scandals about the mismanagement of US and Iraqi funds in Iraq and accusation of fraud and corruption. For nine years, the SIGIR would patiently reconstruct the US “Iraqi Experience” that would be published in about a 500 hundred page report titled \textit{Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience}. Although written with the usual sanitised and diplomatic language expected of an official US agency, it nonetheless sheds a crude light on the whole US experience in Iraq.
Department of Defense (DoD) Wolfowitz before the US Senate, Iraqi funds and national assets were supposed to pay for the biggest share of the reconstruction cost (US Senate, 2003). However, the US and its allies were also planning to liberalise the economy and even push for the privatisation of the Iraqi oil sector (Muttit, 2011).108

But that is not all, the US Administration was engaging in a kind of nation state-building of a scope maybe bigger than what had been done in Japan or Germany after World War II109, even though the Pentagon was planning only for a few months of occupation and “...a minimal continuing military footprint” (SIGIR, 2009:7). If the US invasion of Iraq was conceived as a demonstration of the might and the benevolence of the US unique superpower—"the archetypal application of the American Unipolarity”—its reluctance to bear responsibility for the financial and human cost of its grand endeavour meant that sooner or later, the US would have to rely on the UN, the IMF, the Paris Club, and the international community in general, in order to fill the gap.110 In this frame, the SIGIR and RAND reports show that the whole nexus of contradictions would put insurmountable strain all during the unfolding of the invasion and occupation of Iraq. Moreover, it opened the way for the spread of an inextricable web of conflicting interests and goals pursued by the different actors of the occupation - the US military, President Bush with his own re-election agenda, the Department of Defense and the Department of State (DoS) officials and civil servants, US Agency for International Development (USAID), the Office for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Agency (ORHA), the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and its Administrator Bremer, the hundreds of private contractors firms, and the oil companies.

108 For more development on the question of oil see in this thesis, Chapter 2.3.6 Continuous Liberalisation Trends.
109 In comparison, the formal occupation of Japan before official return of sovereignty lasted 7 years (1945-1952) and with the involvement of 350,000 of US troops and dozens of thousands of allied suppletive troops at the start of the occupation. In ex-Western Germany, the American-led formal occupation lasted around ten years and involved 1.6 million US troops at the start, the number reduced rapidly to a lower limit of 200,000. Yet, the British had 80,000 troops in occupied Germany while the French would maintain 50,000 occupation troops until the mid-1950s (Dobbins et al., 2003).
110 Despite the hubris of the hour, some White House officials would acknowledge that they were in fact in great need of the international community. See for example p 215 and 239 of Condoleezza Rice memoirs, at that time National Security Advisor for the US President, (Rice, 2011)
2.1.2 ‘Shock and Awe’

In this context, the military invasion of Iraq was presented by the American Administration and mainstream media as a precise and ultra-advanced model of the application of modern kinetic power, a ‘new warfare’. In other words, the military might of the coalition of the willing would be striking Saddam's Special Republican Guard and entourage, destroy its command centre and pressure the rest of the Army to surrender. Meanwhile it would minimise collateral damage and preserve Iraqi infrastructure. After all, the US Administration would have to engage in nation-building and would rely heavily on Iraqi State infrastructure and the support of the ‘liberated population (Gordon & Trainor, 2006:84). However, the reality of the military Shock and Awe operation conducted by the US-led coalition was anything but ‘surgical’. In fact, the military doctrine that gave its title to this military operation implied such a level of destruction, of physical force and psychological damage that its aftermath could be compared to the aftermath of a “tsunami or an earthquake”. It was also intended to create a state of incomprehension and “awe”, not only for the state or military, but for the population at large. (Ullman, 1996). This induced physical and psychological conditions of the adversary population and its leadership would then radiate out and assist the rapid and total achievement of the US strategic and military objectives.

I describe in more detail the military operation and the Shock and Awe doctrine in the part of this thesis about violence. For now, suffice to say that the Shock and Awe operation did not only have military targets and Saddam's structure of coercion, but also an important part of the country's infrastructure, networks of communication, transportation, energy, and sewage systems, as well as electric transformers (Flibbert, 2013:82). Besides, and contrary to what was promised about the minimisation of collateral damage, the civilian death toll was equivalent to, or even higher than, what happened during Operation Desert Storm in 1991 (Conetta, 2003). Even worse, Conetta determined that the ratio of non-combatant/combatant deaths was in fact twice as higher than in 1991 (ibid). Yet, as recalled by different scholars, the level of destruction applied by the US-led coalition in Iraq was not as systematic as the application of the Shock and Awe doctrine would have implied (Schwartz, 2008:9; Cordesman, 2003:218). In some sense, the US-led military showed some restraint, acting short of producing the annihilation effect that could be compared to Hiroshima as Harlan Ullman, the father of the Shock and Awe doctrine, had recommended for Iraq.

Obviously, there lies another discrepancy here between the official objectives of the regime change, the short occupation and “Iraqi self-financing” of

111 See the chapter on 3.1 Collective Violence, Unorganised and Organised Violence of this thesis.
the reconstruction, stated by the US Administration, and the military strategy of great destruction applied by the US Army. However, one should first note that the US military at that time was already intervening in and occupying another country, Afghanistan. Second, the leadership of the Department of Defense, Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and his deputy Paul Wolfowitz, aggressively pushed to reduce the size of US forces that would be engaged in the Iraq invasion, and to deploy it much faster than the United States Central Command (CENTCOM) generals were originally planning.\footnote{In reality, the CENTCOM generals had initially favoured and planned a deployment of three to four hundred thousands of soldiers over a six month period. On this heated controversy between the Secretary of Defense and the CENTCOM, see for instance (Gordon & Trainor, 2006) in particular the chapters 3-4-5-6. See also (Woodward, 2004: 40-42).} It even became a publicised controversy when Army Chief of Staff Shinsheki testified, before the U.S Senate Armed Services Committee in February 2003, that the war and subsequent occupation of Iraq could require as much as “…over several hundred thousands of American soldiers” (Gordon & Trainor, 2006: 117-119; No End in Sight, 2007). This was way above the fourteen hundred thousands that would finally be sent around Iraq for the invasion in March 2003 (US House of Representatives, 2003(b): 71). It is interesting to note that this controversy between the military commanders on one side, the CENTCOM, and the Pentagon on the other would only be the initial crack in an emerging rift that would continue to widen during the first years the US occupation. Finally, there was also pressure directly coming from the White House to complete decisive military operations as quick as possible, in a way to shield the US Administration from growing geopolitical pressure in the Middle East region and elsewhere (Woodward, 2004:122). Considering these different elements, it made sense for the US Army to use maximum kinetic force in order to win the war as fast as possible and with a minimum of casualties on its side. In any case, the level of destruction was very significant, and eight months later, as I was walking into Baghdad, the damage of the Shock and Awe bombings were still everywhere to be seen and quite striking.

But if the US Army did not destroy all Iraqi state infrastructure, the weeks, and in some case the months, of looting and arson that followed would have finished the eradication of what remained. Therefore, as Baghdad fell on April 8th, the Iraqi capital but also Mosul, Samawa, Basra and other cities were left to burn and be looted for more than three weeks. Everything was plundered, from hospitals, the sewage and water plants, ministries to the schools and museums. Nearly everything would be damaged or literally destroyed except for Saddam’s Presidential compound, that would become the headquarters of the American occupiers and later on the US Embassy in Iraq. One governmental building, the Oil Ministry, would be conspicuously protected by American soldiers and would emerge unscathed after the looting. Of course, the destruction of prisons and security apparatus offices were a form of revenge by many
Iraqis against the era of fear and injustice of the Saddam regime.\textsuperscript{113} But this destruction and the looting of the capital were so dreadful that many Iraqis would think of it as a repetition of the destruction of the city by the Mongols in 1258 AD. A few months later, while I was in the capital, an Iraqi translator working for the same NGO as me, spoke of the events of April 2003 in Baghdad, in the following terms:

"Try to imagine what you would feel if Paris was burning, if the Louvre was burning, and the Sorbonne University and all your hospitals...it is what happened here".\textsuperscript{114}

At first, it is difficult to make sense of the decision of the American-led coalition not to prevent the looting and the destroying of state offices and infrastructure on such a scale. It was not only contradictory with international laws that demands the protection of civilians and public property and assets, but also with many pre-war plans and assumptions that the Iraqi State infrastructure would be quickly back in functional order after Saddam's removal (Dodge, 2009). Besides, the DoD appointed agency in charge of the Iraq reconstruction, Office for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA), had made recommendations about and maps of around 20 important governmental sites and facilities that had to be protected, yet without result (Bodine quoted in Ferguson, 2007:27mn)\textsuperscript{115}. If one follows the memories of some US actors at that time, it was the disorganisation of the US occupation administration in the making and the lack of preparation for the post-combat phases that prevented the US-led occupying forces from protecting Iraqi buildings and properties (Garner and Bodine quoted Ferguson, 2007, 20:56-22 m). For others, the disorganisation of the US occupation during the initial weeks was the result of the lack of trust between the different leading US actors, and in particular the result of “…the struggle for resources and control…” between the Pentagon and the CENTCOM (SIGIR, 2009: 54). In any events, it seems that the US was surprised by the scale of the looting and the total collapse of the rule of law. Indeed, they did not have enough soldiers in the capital or in other cities to maintain order (Gordon & Trainer, 2006: 537-8). Hence, SIGIR notes that the US occupation forces seemed to have only 25,000 troops in Baghdad, a capital with 5-6 million inhabitants, during the first days of occupation (SIGIR, 2009:83). Besides, it was right after the combat operations and the US Army did not have specific orders to deal with this kind of civilian unrest. It seems that without a mandate, the US military hierarchy was afraid

\textsuperscript{113} For a detailed analysis of the looting events, see chapter 3.1 Collective Violence, Unorganised and Organised violence of this thesis.

\textsuperscript{114} Interview with Mohammed A. Translator for Italian NGO Un Punter Per. December 2003

\textsuperscript{115} See Documentary, No End in Sight at minute 27. Ferguson, Charles H. No End in Sight. Magnolia Home Entertainment, 2007
to engage soldiers and impose martial law (ibid:57). However, the turmoil lasted more than three weeks and it is difficult to believe that the US Administration could not alter the occupation plan, and increase the presence of US soldiers in cities while giving them a mission to restore law and order. On the contrary, it seems that the Pentagon, and maybe even the White House, sent a clear order to not intervene during the weeks of looting despite the concerns from officials from ORHA and the Department of State. (Bodine: 25:00, Arming: 25:00 quoted in Ferguson, 2007).

There are no comprehensive figures for the general cost of the month of looting, but the SIGIR estimates billions of US dollars of damage to the Iraqi infrastructure, “greatly adding to the total cost of relief and reconstruction” (SIGIR, 2009:60). On his part, Diamond estimates them to range around 12 billion US dollars (Diamond, 2005: 282). In some areas or sectors, like the oil sector, looting would last not weeks but months and quite precise estimates could be made. Concerning the oil sector, SIGIR is able to provide some figures that are worth mentioning here. As I said earlier, the oil sector was an important factor in the war-making process and in any event considered as a primordial asset for the reconstruction of Iraq. Therefore, the Multinational Forces in Iraq (MNF-I) led by the US Army had taken great care to secure oil fields and assets as much as possible all over the country during the invasion (Gordon & Trainor, 2006). Nonetheless, United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) estimated that damages amounting to nearly US$1.3 billion had been inflicted on the Iraqi oil sector during and after the invasion. Around two-thirds of it (US$900 million) was the result of months of looting (SIGIR, 2009:60). Even more striking, the looting would also concern hundreds of conventional munitions depots, military barracks, and even what remained of the already defunct nuclear or weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programmes. Oddly enough, the plundering of conventional ammunitions and remaining elements or parts of potential WMD would happen under the very nose of the US-led Multinational Forces, whose first justification to be in Iraq was to ensure the control and the destruction of any WMD.116 In any case, the effects of the invasion and the looting of state infrastructure buried any hopes of having the Iraqi State be able to function normally within a few days, as was more or less planned by the US Administration. SIGIR provides a table that sums up the terrible conditions of Iraq right after the invasion:

Essential Services: The Effects of Invasion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Pre-invasion</th>
<th>Post-invasion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Electricity Production</td>
<td>4,075 MW</td>
<td>711 MW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oil Production</td>
<td>2.58 million bbl/day</td>
<td>30 million bbl/day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to Potable Water</td>
<td>12.8 million citiizens</td>
<td>4.0 million citiizens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraqi Security Forces</td>
<td>1,300,000 soldiers and police</td>
<td>7,000-9,000 police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telecommunications</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landline subscribers</td>
<td>833,000</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile subscribers</td>
<td>80,000</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Toll</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Troop Fatalities</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civilian contractors</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. civilians</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraqi civilians</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7,413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Cost (in billions)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. funding</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>$3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraqi funding</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>$0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International funding</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>$0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total funding</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>$3.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Production of electricity came to a near-complete halt during the 2003 invasion, and, by mid-April 2003, an average of just 711 MW of electricity was being produced each day. Post-war looting and sabotage destroyed nearly 1,000 electrical towers and the loss of numerous electrical control systems caused frequent blackouts in Baghdad.

Footnotes of the Sigir table are produced in Document Annex II


Figure 6 Essential Services: The Effects of Invasion
2.1.3 Orders One and Two

On May 16th and May 22nd 2003 respectively, as the security situation in Iraq was still very tense, the newly appointed head of CPA, Paul L. Bremer, issued the famous Orders One and Two, the 'De-Ba'athification of the Iraqi Society' and “the regulation of entities” (disbanding of the Army and other entities) (Talmon, 2013:53-58). With Order One, something between 45,000 and up to 120,000 civil servants, teachers, professors, and doctors were dismissed from national institutions, which included ministries, state-owned companies, universities and hospitals because of the De-Ba'athification order 117 (Sissons & Al-Saiedi 2013:22; Dodge, 2009, ICG, 2004). A week after, Order Two announced the dissolution of the whole Iraqi Armed Forces. Hence, between 400,000 to 700,000 soldiers and officers, and around 12,000 more that belonged to other dissolved entities 119 were dismissed. No difference was made between the Special Units of Saddam’s security apparatus like the Special Republican Guard or the Military Intelligence, and the rest of the Iraqi Army, nor was consideration given to the different levels of responsibilities between the different ranks of officers, not even between officers and soldiers. They were supposed to receive one last termination payment that would be defined later. Everyone except senior Ba'ath Party members and officers - with the rank of colonel and above—would be considered senior Party members if they could not prove otherwise. Overall, the damages to the Iraqi State on a human level, but also to the society at large, were huge and as Lt. Gen. Ricardo S. Sanchez wrote:

“Essentially, it eliminated the entire government and civic capacity of the nation. Organizations involving justice, defense, interior, communications, schools, universities, and hospitals were all either completely shut down or severely crippled, because anybody with any experience was now out of a job. In one fell swoop, Bremer had created a 60 percent unemployment rate and angered hundreds of thousands of people.” (Sanchez, 2008:184)

117 They either belonged to the top four ranks within the Ba'ath party or they had been full members of the party (Fifth rank) while occupying top three positions in one of the many national institutions.
119 Among the many entities that were dissolved were: The Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Information, Ministry of State for Military affairs, the different and numerous secret services, and all the armed forces of Iraq: the Army, Air Force, Navy, Air Defense Force, Republican Guard, Special Republican Guard, Directorate of Military Intelligence, Al Quds Force and Emergency Forces.
New Yorker Journalist Jon Lee Anderson shows that even US civil servants that were administrating the Iraqi ministries during the CPA period were taken aback by the disruptive effect of the De-Ba’athification:

“We had a lot of directors-general of hospitals who were very good, and, with de-Baathification, we lost them and their expertise overnight.” At the Ministry of Transport and Communications, “we were left dealing with what seemed like the fifth string... Nobody who was left knew anything.” Quoted in (Anderson, 2004)

In the words of Bremer, it was done “to show that the US means business” and to prevent any kind of Ba'ath restoration in the future Iraq (Bremer, 2003). Clearly the fear, misplaced or not, of the return of the Ba'ath Party, or at least the fear of the sabotage of the occupation and the transition process by remnants of the Ba'ath regime, seems to have been an important element of the rationale to enforce the De-Ba'athification (Zeren, 2014; Meierhenrich, 2008). Yet, these two Orders would be later considered as the symbol of the US failure in Iraq and therefore remains extremely controversial within the former Bush Administration and the US Army. During the preparation for the occupation this had been debated and two arguments seemed to have existed. One side was concerned with the necessity to preserve state structures and capabilities, and therefore advocated for the removal of Saddam’s circles of power, the top elites of the regime and the security apparatus (Secret Services, the Special Republican Guard, the Republican Guard). But it also recommended the preservation of the Army, at least temporarily, as a prudent, restrained process for dealing with the Ba'ath party and its two million members. And a second much tougher side that advocated for a comprehensive eradication of the Ba'ath as a party and as an ideology with an extended dismissal of Ba'ath party officials and members from state institutions, as well as a straightforward reduction in the size of the Iraqi Army with the dismissal of about 300,000 to 400,000 Iraqi soldiers. In short, the tough side was advocating for a process of De-Ba'athification similar in its philosophy to the De-Nazification of Germany after World War II (Allawi, 2007; Meierhenrich, 2006).

Here again, it seems that the US Administration at that time could not reconcile between two very different visions of how to deal with the Iraqi State, the old Iraqi Army, Saddam’s former regime and the Ba'ath party. A vague synthesis was formulated with President Bush’s approval, using the concept of De-Ba’athification but without really stating in detail its objectives and scope (SIGIR, 2009; Meierhenrich, 2006). Yet, like with other unresolved issues, the fight between the two sides would continue during and after the invasion (Feith, 200:418-419). Hence, before Bremer had been appointed in

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120 These two sides were debated in the US Senate Hearing on the “Future of Iraq”. See both statements of Colonel Scott R. Feil and Prof. Anthony Cordesman and the discussion that followed. (US Senate, 2003: 59-94)
May 2003, ORHA, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the US Army had been contacting and engaging with Iraqi officers and soldiers, and middle and high ranking Iraqi Ministry officials, a majority of them Ba'ath party members, in order to reconstitute a minimal State infrastructure and put it back at work (No End in Sight, 2007; Tenet, :421-427; Dobbins et al., 2009:58; SIGIR, 2009:76). And as the looting and arson were still going on, the US Army was also pushing hard to put back as much as they could of the Iraqi Army and police on the streets of the capital and other cities of Iraq (Sanchez, :183-199; Woodward, 2006:188). Therefore, when Bremer’s intentions were made known, it seems to have raised a strong array of opposing voices among the Department of State, ORHA, the CIA and within the US Army. They were calling against the De-Ba'athification as it was designed, and for the temporary preservation of the Iraqi Army (SIGIR; Tenet; No End in Sight, 2007; Woodward, 2004, 2006). However, Bremer and the DoD behind him prevailed. But even more dazzling, it seems that Bremer’s orders came as a surprise even for most of the US Administration’s top leadership (Rice, Woodward, Tenet, SIGIR).

Hence, SIGIR’s report quotes Frank Miller, the Chairman of the Steering Group of the National Security Council that depended directly on President Bush, and who believed that Orders One and Two were in contradiction with President Bush’s recommendations. In Miller’s words: “the Ba'athist regime ought to [have been] dealt with in Truth and Reconciliation panels. Membership in the Ba'ath Party ought not to [have been] an immediate disqualification for office.” (SIGIR, 2009:74).

If anything, scholars who studied in detail the 'De-Ba'athification' and the disbanding of the Army policies, show that it was led on a very ideological stance without considering the chain of command within the State, the Baath Party and the Army. It did not consider the different levels of guilt of the millions of party members, state officials or officers. It neither allowed to consider the need for the State to function nor the need for a prudent national reconciliation process (Saghieh, 2007; Meierheinrich, 2006; Gökpınar, 2014; Zeren, 2014). Obviously, nobody is disputing the fact that the former regime, the Ba'ath party and the Iraqi Army had to answer for the last three decades of terror in Iraq and their executioners had to be prosecuted. But as recalled by the International Center on Transitional Justice (ICTJ), the De-Ba'athification, and one could add the disbanding of the old Iraqi Army, was “…built on the presumption of guilt—not the presumption of innocence, with guilt collectivised”, and not with a transparent process to determine individual responsibilities and guilt (Sissons & Al Saiedi, 2013). In fact, neoconservative circles and

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121 On the debate about the decision-making process within the US Administration, Pfiffner considers that the real decision maker of the two orders was the Vice President Cheney (2010:76).
a good proportion of the US Administration, in particular within the DoD leadership, were sharing Bremer's thinking of the Ba'ath as something of a mix between Nazi and Stalinist totalitarian ideologies and parties (Krauthammer, 2002; Wurmser, 2003; Bremer, 2006; Feith, 2008; Rumsfeld, 2011). Therefore, they decided that it has to be treated as such, without so much as a regard to other considerations. This appears very clearly in Wolfowitz’s testimony before the US Senate in May 2003 (US Senate, 2003). Moreover, such perceptions of the Ba'ath ideology and the subsequent De-Ba'athification and disbanding policies were strongly supported by some of the Iraqi exiles such as Professor Kanan Makya or political figures like Ahmed Chalabi or Muwaffak al-Rubaie and the political parties among the Iraqi National Coalition. In fact, some were even pushing for a more straightforward eradication of the Ba'ath Party, but it never represented a consensus among the Iraqi exiles (Saghieh, 2007; Allawi 2007). And it certainly did not create a consensus among Iraqis in general.

As noted by Zeren in his Phd thesis, different polls, and in particular the ICJT study based on interviews and focus groups in Iraq in 2003, presented a different perspective. It showed “...a nuanced portrait of Iraqi perspectives on the issues of transitional justice such as De-Ba'athification” (Zeren, 2014:127). Despite their sufferings under Saddam and the Ba'ath regime, many of the Iraqis interviewed were ready to engage in a search for justice based on transparency, accountability, truth-seeking and reconciliation. A few months after it was put in place, they were quite critical of the De-Ba'athification policy and “...they also felt it was unfair to penalise individuals solely on the basis of their party membership” (ICTJ, 2004:iii). Besides, the interviews that the ICJT conducted show the complexity of Saddam’s social engineering of coercion but also the complexity of the relations between the population and the Ba'ath as a state party. In a sense, it echoes with the works of scholars like Baran, Harling or Rhode on the last stages of the Saddam dictatorship.123

Bremer, and others raised another argument to justify the disbanding of the Iraqi Army. They considered it as a vehicle of Sunni sectarianism and an instrument of domination against the Shi'a community. They stated that most, if not all, of the officers were Sunni while the common troops were Shi'i. Therefore, if they had maintained the Army, it would have infuriated the Shi'ia community (Bremer, 2006; Feith, 2008). Such a view was a projection of an external, in this case American, vision of Iraq only seen under the prism of its ethnic and sectarian division. Obviously, the Sunni were overrepresented in

122 On his website, Former DoD Secretary Rumsfeld, provides one of the memos concerning Orders One and Two that Bremer sent him. It shows that Bremer and therefore Rumsfeld were very aware of the scale of their decisions. See Rumsfeld memos 2003-05-19 from Bremer regarding Dissolution of the Ministry of Defense and related Entities.pdf
123 On this topic, see Chapter 1.2
the officer ranks, and the Army had been part of Saddam’s violence and brutalisation against its own people, and even worse it has been part of the genocidal campaign against the Kurds in 1988. But that was only one side of the story. In reality, the Iraqi Army as an institution was maybe one of the few that was seen by a majority of Iraqis as a real source of pride (Hashim 2006: 95). For many Iraqis, it remained the symbol of Iraq’s long road to independence since its creation in 1921. And within the Army institution, Iraqis from all origins, Sunni, Shi’a, Christians, Turkmens and even Kurds, had served and been distinguished as soldiers and officers (Al-Marashi & Salama, 2006: 204). In this sense it was seen as a symbol of the unity of the country, crosscutting the ethnic, social and sectarian diversity of Iraq. Besides, hundreds of thousands of families in the whole country were relying on the salaries of the soldiers and officers to live on. It was not a coincidence that demonstrations against Bremer’s order of disbanding the Army were happening in all corners of Iraq and without any kind of sectarian agenda, at least in the beginning (Tenet, 2007:429; SIGIR: 77). As noted by ICG, the disbanding of the Army was the result of a monolithic understanding of Iraq and “Iraqi people's complex and at times contradictory attitude toward it” (ICG, 2003a:3). Hence, by conflating the Iraqi Army with Saddam and “Sunni domination”, it was ignoring the long history of the Army, the multiple coup attempts against Saddam’s regime by officers of the Army, or the internal repression that the Army, including Sunni officers, endured from the Saddam security apparatus (Al-Marashi & Salama, 2004:203-206).

So, with just a stroke of a pen, Administrator Bremer gave a terrible blow to what remained of the Iraqi State. Dodge correctly notes that: “Bremer's decision to pursue de-Ba'athification, in effect, removed what was left of the state: its institutional memory and a large section of its skilled personnel.” (Dodge, 2009:268). Six months after the initial order, Bremer would appoint an Iraqi commission, the Higher National De-Ba'athification Commission (HNDC), led by Ahmed Chalabi in order to supervise the whole De-Ba'athification process. The HDNC would hold considerable power and would extend the De-Ba'athification. As a consequence, the De-Ba'athification led by Bremer and then Chalabi, would not only destroy the 'civic capacity of the nation', but it would hamper its difficult reconstruction by perpetually producing new lists of people to demote from civic or military service. In fact, in only two months, the Iraqi State, which was already in a chronic decline since the embargo period, was destroyed by three successive blows. First by the war

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itself, then by the weeks of looting which followed the invasion and finally by the first two Orders of the US-led Coalition Provisional Authority.

2.1.4 Initial patterns

It seems to me that from these seminal events, the episode of general ransacking, the De-Ba’athification and the disbanding of the Army that would lead to the destruction of the Iraqi State, one could identify two initial patterns which would have a profound impact on the way that the occupation would be led by the US Administration.

Blind convergences and ‘Common Sense’

In her book The Shock Doctrine, The Rise of Capitalist Disaster, Naomi Klein considers that the looting and weeks of chaos in Iraqi streets after the invasion were in some way an integral part of a general neoliberal/neoconservative ‘shock’ strategy in Iraq, of which the Shock and Awe Doctrine was the military counterpart (Klein, 2007). In this frame, after the military campaign, the US Administration did condone the looting to aggravate the disorientation of the population and to mitigate its capacity of resistance against the neoliberal shock therapy that was soon to come (Klein, 2007). Although different academics and analysts like Schwartz or Mutti generally concur with Klein, many find it an over-simplified theory or even lying on the fringe of conspiracy theories (Stiglitz, 2007). Moreover, we saw earlier that the US Administration’s inconsistent strategy for the post-war operations, the mismanagement and the rifts within the Administration and the US Army, and finally the lack of troops on the ground were all important factors that permitted the unfolding of chaos and the destruction of the Iraqi State.

However, one still needs to consider the ideological framework structuring the Bush Administration and its close circles. In fact, there was a convergence between the neoconservative discourse about the totalitarian and threatening nature of the Saddam Ba'ath regime and the neoliberal ideological hostility toward the state in general. Hence, within the neoliberal framework the state is seen as an ineffective structure in terms of resource management and allocation, but worse it is also seen as a predatory and rent-seeking actor that may represent a danger to individual freedoms and society’s development. And to a certain extent, neoliberal anti-statism echoed with the historical debate among academics, but also led by influential Iraqi exiles like Makyia, about
the level of externality of the Iraqi State and its autonomous position *vis a vis* the Iraqi society. In this sense, the Iraqi State, since its construction under the monarchy and especially after the 1958 Revolution, was seen by many as a typical example of a strong centralised, militarised state and considerably reinforced by the oil rent.125 Because of these ‘inherent’ characteristics the Iraqi State was perceived as a natural vehicle of Saddam’s totalitarian enterprise. Therefore, it is this convergence of neoconservative and neoliberal positions that allows us to understand the origin of the conflation between the Saddam dictatorship, the Ba'ath regime, the Iraqi State, and even the Army, with all these elements finally representing or being part of the same totalitarian whole. In one way or another, the Army and even the Iraqi State were seen as problematic, if not hostile, institutions that had been tainted by totalitarian, centralist and nationalist ideologies. Thus, they could not fit into the whole project of regime change and the neoliberal transformation of Iraq. As recalled by Allawi:

“The dissolution of the army also fitted into a preconceived notion of how the future Iraq would emerge. In such a vision, there was no place for a nationalist, pan-Arab institution that could be used to threaten Iraq's neighbours and block the plan to 'democratise' the Middle East.” (Allawi, 2007:159)

Therefore, objectives of reforming the Iraqi State—in reality to shrink or downsize it, and to impose federalism in order to distribute powers among a plurality of actors, as well as the demilitarisation of Iraq, and drastic reduction of its armed forces—were stated in one form or another in the vast majority of the regime change scenarios for Iraq.

In one study, Dodge, borrowing from Gramsci, describes how the decision-making process in the Bush Administration but also of its employees in Iraq, from the “Oval office to the Green Zone”, was framed and influenced by the convergence of neoliberal and neoconservative ideologies to produce a “Common Sense”.126 Dodge explains that Common Sense:

“...is the structure of everyday thinking through which the majority of any population live the greater part of their lives. It is within Common Sense that the hegemonic ideology exists in symbiotic dominance with its vanquished predecessor, securing its own influence by assimilating the more salient parts of the other.” (Dodge, 2009:258)

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125 On the historical debate about the Iraqi State, see the historical perspective in the theoretical framework of this thesis.
126 For a similar formulation of “Common Sense” based also on Gramsci see Harvey David, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Oxford University Press, Chapter 2, “The construction of consent” p39-42
Indeed, one can find examples that show how this Common Sense and the belief in the transformative power of the American-led enterprise was framing the perception of the US-led Multinational Forces and civil servants in Iraq. In his book, Imperial Life in the Emerald City: Inside Baghdad's Green Zone, journalist Rajiv Chandrasekaran, provides famous examples that are worth-while to recall here. Thus, he relates discussions with Peter McPherson, who had been the USAID Director in the 1980s, and was then the Director of Economic Policy at OHRA and later for the CPA in Iraq. It shows that some in charge of the US occupation in Iraq saw the looting and destructions of State infrastructures as an—unexpected but welcome—early development of the comprehensive neoliberal programme that was being designed for Iraq. Thus, Peter MacPherson, considered the looting of state buildings and properties as a kind of indirect form of privatisation operated by Iraqis themselves:

“To MacPherson, looting was a form of much-needed shrinkage. If the theft of government property promoted private enterprise—such as when Baghdad's municipal bus drivers began driving their own routes and pocketing the fees—it was a positive development in his view. ‘I thought the privatization that occurs sort of naturally when somebody took over their state vehicle, or began to drive a truck that the state used to own, was just fine,’ he said.” (Chandrasekaran, 2009:66)

Chandrasekaran, provides a second example with the interview of John Agresto who was the American responsible for Higher Education in Iraq: “He regarded the post-war looting, which had eviscerated many campuses, as a benefit. It provided ‘the opportunity for a clean start’ and was a chance to give Iraqis the best modern equipment.’”(Chandrasekaran, 2009:88). Interestingly, Human Rights Watch reports produced during that period show that some of the coalition officers, British this time, may have been animated by a similar kind of mood. Even as the professors of Basra University were begging the British forces to intervene and stop the destruction of the University—which the British refused to do—they would provide the same arguments:

“Professor Kadhim K. ‘Ali, who teaches English translation at the Faculty of Arts, returned to the university on April 7 to find hundreds of looters rampaging around the university while British troops were camped in the arts faculty, where he teaches. ‘I saw groups of looters just taking everything, all over the university, while the British were just standing there. The only building intact was the arts faculty, where the British were,’ Prof. Sa'adkhan also expressed astonishment that British forces, who by his reckoning had four armored vehicles parked immediately outside the university, did nothing to stop the rampant looting. “When I asked the UK forces to stop the looters, they said ‘We can bring back better books and equipment.’ But when is that going to happen? We have no idea. It would have been easier to just stop the looters then.” (Zia-Zarifi, 2003:8-9. Emphasis is mine)
These comments and perceptions may have been extreme examples and not representative of all the coalition forces. However, this thinking did exist and was being expressed because they belonged to the general understanding of Common Sense that was animating the overall US enterprise in Iraq. In the same vein, we saw that these decisions—not to prevent the looting and the destruction of state infrastructures, the De-Ba'athification and the disbanding of the Iraqi Army—provoked some controversies within the Bush Administration and in the US Army. But these controversies were mainly about the poor timing of these decisions, about the too large scope of the De-Ba'athification or about the brutality with which they have been applied, but not on their substance. In reality, these series of decisions were taken, despite the controversies, because they corresponded to what Dodge described as the Common Sense that was framing the decision-making of the US Administration.

Hubris and Denial

As recalled by many scholars, neoconservative circles were very determined in pressuring the US Administration to embark on the invasion of Iraq (Dodge 2009, 2010; Drolet 2011, Owens 2007, Schwartz, 2008:19). This decisive influence would be characterised by a mix of ideology, the use of the Straussian Noble Lie and direct manipulation of the truth. Obviously, everyone now thinks about the justifications for the war against Iraq, the (untraceable) weapons of mass destructions, the (false) “nuclear cakes”, the (missing) links with Al Qaeda and Bin Laden. However, the problem would be deeper than the distortion and manipulation of the truth to sell the war to the American public. In reality, the Bush Administration would maintain a toxic relation with factual truth and reality during the occupation period. As noted by Owens, Arendt provides a clear demonstration that political action and the lie are deeply connected in the sense that they both find their origins in human imagination. Therefore, she notes that “There is an inevitable clash between politics and factual truth” (Owens, 2007:282). Such a clash always existed within the political realm, and even more, Arendt shows in detail how previous US Administrations already fell into the trap of becoming arrogant with power, spinning the truth and deceptive maneuvering during the Vietnam War (Arendt, 1972). However, neoconservative assumptions about the primacy of philosophical reason in politics (Owens, 2007), the nearly religious fervour belief

128 See the five chapters of the part “Lying in Politics” of Crises of the Republic. There are obviously interesting parallels that can be drawn from Arendt’s analysis and accounts of the
in “national greatness” (Brown, 2006; Drolet 2007, 2011) and the will to use violence to reshape the world, would make it worse. In fact, within the Bush Administration there was a peculiar mixture of hubris and denial. In the frame of the American adventure in Iraq, I would define Hubris as the belief in the moral righteousness of the claim to reshape the world and the overconfidence in the transformative power of the ‘American empire’ to do so. And Denial, as the construction of a “de-factualised world” and to recall Arendt’s sentence, the “inability or unwillingness to consult experience and to learn from reality” (Arendt, 1972) 129. This particular mindset in conjunction with the neoliberal Common Sense would constitute the mental frame that would shape the US Administration’s perception and decision-making process in Iraq at least until 2006, and that would remain pervasive until the end of occupation in 2011.

Hence, the memoirs of some of the principal actors of the occupation as well as discussions and hearings before the US Congress, show how much the Bush Administration and its allies were convinced—or maybe trying hard to convince each other—that they were actually liberating Iraq and Iraqis. However, the more US officials were insisting on the fact that Iraqis had to be involved in this liberation, the more Iraq and Iraqis appeared to be without consistency, without history. Hence, in the official discourses or the debates in the US Senate or the US House of Representatives there are very few references to the long and rich history of Iraq. Except for the very formal and empty discourses about Iraq being a ‘cradle of civilisation’, and ‘Iraqis being one of the Arab world’s most educated populations’, it is very difficult to find any attempts by the US establishment to connect the liberation project with anything that could relate to the long experience of the Iraq nation. Remarkably, they somehow overlooked the movement for independence during the British Mandate, the revolutions, the western-style parliamentary institutions of the Monarchy or even the Islamic constitutionalist movement of the 19th century. Iraq and the Iraqis were only seen under the prism of the decades of Saddam’s totalitarian rule and the ‘historical’ ethno-sectarian divisions, beyond that there was a black hole. In reality, many of these discourses and discussions about the ‘liberation of Iraq’ appear to be first and foremost projec-

129 Besides, Arendt was identifying previous experiences within the US Administration where ideological fervour discarded any relations with factual truth. “Anti-Communism, not the old prejudiced hostility..., was originally the brain child of former Communists who needed a new ideology by which to explain and reliably foretell the course of history. This ideology was at the root of all “theories” in Washington since the end of World War II. I have mentioned the extent to which sheer ignorance of all pertinent facts and deliberate neglect of postwar developments became the hallmark of established doctrine within the establishment. They needed no facts, no information; they had a “theory,” and all data that did not fit were denied or ignored.” (Arendt, 1972:39)
tions of American myths and beliefs in the transformative power of the American nation. In this frame, Iraq was only a kind of hollow decorum, or in Dodge’s words, it was “...the screen on which the US Administration could project its vision of how the world should be and would be upon the application of American power” (Dodge, 2009:259). This appears for example in Rumsfeld’s discourse before the Council on Foreign Relations in May 2003. There, the Defense Secretary was developing the general plan of occupation and regime change that would be carried out. In his introduction he was also trying to make sense of the general chaos that had engulfed Iraq during the first days after the invasion by comparing it with the aftermath of the American Independence:

“If these problems sound familiar, they should: they are historians’ descriptions of the conditions here in America in 1783—in the period after our nation’s war for independence. Those early years of our young republic were characterized by chaos and confusion. There was crime and looting and a lack of an organized police force. The issue of competing paper currencies by the various states led to uncontrolled inflation and popular discontent.” (Rumsfeld, 2003)

To his audience in New York, the comparison may have seemed very sensible. But reading it now, one cannot help but be struck by this evocation of the American War of Independence in order to explain the difficulties that the Bush Administration was facing in Iraq. It was as if Iraq did not already have its own long historical struggle for independence against the British empire from the beginning of the 20th century until the revolution of 1958. As if the US-led invasion of Iraq and the removal of the Saddam regime was in fact a kind of US war for the liberation of Iraqis. There are many other examples of the very denial of what was the nature of the American enterprise in Iraq. For example, this is blatant in the message to the Iraqis released by General Tommy Franks on the 16\textsuperscript{th} of April 2003. The “Freedom message to the Iraqi people” was a modern American copy of the “Proclamation of Baghdad” issued by the British Commander Maud in 1917, using the very same words. Yes, 90 years before the US-led army, the British troops who had come to invade and occupy Iraq were also seeing themselves “as liberators, not conquerors”. In reality, the Bush Administration refused to acknowledge and to assume the fact that they would be occupiers in Iraq. This contradicted totally with Bush’s own rhetoric of Freedom and Democracy, but also with the image of the US that neoconservatives were trying to project. The celebration of “national greatness” and its manifestation abroad through a ‘moral foreign policy’ was difficult to reconcile with the vulgar position of being a colonial power. Ironically, it was not until 2011 and the official departure of U.S. troops from Iraq that some officials within the Bush Administration, like Condoleezza Rice, could confess to it:
“At the time Tommy Franks sent a draft of his initial address to the Iraqi people to us for review, I remember turning to Anna Perez. “This sounds like a Roman emperor,” I told her. We modified the address to make it sound friendlier. The British had no such qualms. They knew that for all intents and purposes we were occupying the country and constantly said so. It turned out that the Iraqis, even those who supported us, thought so too.” (Rice, 2011:241)

I think this initial denial about the occupying status of the US, the hubris of the Bush Administration, its delusion about the liberation and the transformation of Iraq explains a lot. It helps to understand why the Bush Administration could not reconcile between the maximalist agenda for the transformation of Iraq that they had and the minimalist application of means they were ready to project. Of course, money and personnel were important factors in the preparation of the Iraq invasion and post-war phases. In reality, the US Army forces were already stretched between multiple peacekeeping operations, the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, even before the invasion of Iraq. And the overall budget of the DoD was already skyrocketing to unseen levels since the Cold War (US Senate, 2003c). The White House could not, or maybe was careful enough, to refuse to release any precise figures for the cost of the Iraqi war that was soon to come. But hearings in the Congress show that congressmen were estimating the cost, for the war only, to be between 18 to 85 billions of US dollars (US Senate, 2003c), while the Congress Budget Office (CBO) was estimating the cost of the Iraqi occupation to be around 1 to 4 billion US dollars a month (CBI, 2002).

Therefore, the initial “plug and play” transition plan for Iraq elaborated by the DoD, had the advantage of proposing a very short plan of occupation whose term would be calculated in months and not in years, with a minimal projection of American soldiers and a minimal cost for the US budget. But this plan had also the merit of fitting perfectly with the rhetoric of liberation that was adopted by the White House during this period. The US would come into Iraq, liberate Iraqis and make them the inestimable gift of Freedom. The US would remain there as a benevolent power with US companies, multinationals, and experts to help steer the process towards market democracy, with a few marines to protect it if necessary. This was explained as being planned

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130 On the debates about the provisional costs of the Iraqi invasion and occupation before and during the early days of the invasion of Iraq, see different hearings and testimony in US Congress such as: (US House of Representatives, 2003a; US Senate, 2003a; US Senate, 2003b; US Senate, 2003c). Obviously, all the estimations about the cost of the Iraq war and occupation would be gross underestimations. In reality, the cost of the Operation Iraqi Freedom and the eight years of occupation that followed should have been estimated not in billions but in trillions (Stiglitz & Bilmes, 2008).

in the best interests of Iraqis, who anyway were supposed to dream the American dream.

As recalled by journalist Ronald Suskind, some within the Bush Administration were persuaded that in any case the American Empire was creating its own reality:

“...The aide [from the White House] said that guys like me were "...in what we call the reality-based community," which he defined as people who “...believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality.” I nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. “That's not the way the world really works anymore,” he continued. “We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality—judiciously, as you will—we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.” (2004)

However, the future would show that reality is not a docile creature, but something much more willful and bitter. It would destroy the Bush Administration’s plans one after another and finally after years of destruction, it would seriously shatter the delusion about the transformative power of the US empire. Yet, it would also destroy Iraq in the process. But before all this this destruction took place, the fundamental denial about what represented the American enterprise in Iraq and what was Iraq (certainly not a blank screen), would be the initial frame, or maybe the cage, within which all reality and facts would have to enter. As it was impossible, it would lead the Bush Administration to rebuff reality and facts, to deny their existence until it would be submerged by them. Then, the US Administration would brutally change course, resort to more coercion and application of kinetic power with the hope that it would regain its control on a violent and chaotic reality they had contributed to produce. In fact, denial and hubris, would be pervasive and entrenched among US institutions in charge of the invasion and the occupation of Iraq and we will encounter different such episodes of denial all throughout this thesis. But one can, in passing, show some examples now. Therefore, it suffices to re-read the first comments of Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld about the ransacking of Baghdad in April 2003: “Stuff happens” or his joke about the Iraqi vase that the international media was supposed to have shown again and again, while nearly every Iraqi museum and library was being ransacked.132 But it was also present in the refusal to identify Afghan and Iraqi

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132 “‘Let me say one other thing,’ Rumsfeld continued. ‘The images you are seeing on television you are seeing over, and over, and over, and it’s the same picture of some person walking out of some building with a vase, and you see it 20 times, and you think, ‘My goodness, were there that many vases?’ Both Rumsfeld and the press corps laughed. ‘Is it possible that there were that many vases in the whole country?’ he asked.” (Quoted in Woodward, 2006:116)
casualties of the invasions and the occupations, which General Tommy Franks would sum up with a simple comment “we do not do body counts”. Or for example, it was there with the refusal to acknowledge that the US was facing an insurgency in Iraq until the end of 2004, while US troops were already receiving thousands of attacks every month. Also, sometimes this denial would take an even absurd or maybe ironic turn, as in the US General Petraeus’s *pro domo* article published in 2011 and titled “*How we won in Iraq*” (Petraeus, 2011).

In some ways, the swift and spectacular victory of the American-led coalition against the Iraqi Army and Saddam regime may have contributed to the denial and hubris state of mind to contaminate mainstream currents in the media, but also among Congress representatives, at least during the initial moments of the occupation. Indeed, one can see a clear difference of mood in the US Congress before and after the invasion. Few weeks before the war, anxiety about the possible failure of the US enterprise was raised in the Senate, about what exactly was the goal of the US in Iraq and what it entailed. Even Professor Anthony Cordesman in his testimony was able to caution the US Administration about “The US as Liberator Syndrome” and that it should “focus on giving Iraqis what they want, and not on giving Iraqis what we feel they want.” (US Senate, 2003a:78-79) However, two months later in May 2003, the cautious tone of the previous debates in the US Congress was lost, and the discussion focused on how to “help generations of Iraqis who had been denied for decades the skills to compete in the modern world” (US House of Representatives, 2003b:21). It was about helping Iraqis to plan for an economy driven by “free choices”, to guide them toward a society based on the rule of law and driven by “rational choice” and “critical thinking”. In a sense, congressmen and the Bush Administration were implicitly identifying what they thought were the fundamental concepts that, in other times or other places, one would have called “modernity”. This ‘modern world’ described by the congressmen was equated with market democracy and it looked wildly like a version of the US. The question now was about how to instil principles of market democracy in Iraq and how Iraqi society and its culture would have to be changed and remodeled to enter the ‘modern world’.

The transformation of Iraq would have to be thorough, from the economy to basic laws, politics, culture and education. Hence, in the same hearing, USAID Administrator Chamberlain was already discussing with House representatives about the “pretty monumental task” of restructuring the Iraq educational system, and the sensitive question of how to reform the Iraqi curriculum, how many ‘locals’ (Iraqis) should be involved and what they were “ought to learn” (US House of representatives, 2003b:63). Of course, the US Administration and USAID had no “…intention of imposing a curriculum on the Iraqi

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people without their full participation”, yet they had also “…no intention of maintaining or supporting or promoting in any way the current curriculum, which [they] we find offensive in many ways”. Ambassador Chamberlain emphasised that US will impose nothing on Iraqis. As he recalled: “In fact, it has to come from them (Iraqis)” (US House of representatives, 2003b:63). It is striking that this discussion between the Congress and officials of the Bush Administration was taking place while in Iraq, all cultural and educational institutions were still being looted and burned, or already transformed into smouldering ruins. Hence, on Capitol Hill in Washington, the United States Congress was discussing the future of Iraqi culture and education, exactly at the same time that in Baghdad, Basra, Mosul, Iraqis were dispossessed of their vast cultural heritage and scientific knowledge, all under the watch of Americans GIs.

Obviously one may consider that the picture sketched here underestimates the weight of interests of many different actors, individuals and corporates, and their ability for cold calculations, in favour of ideologically-driven perceptions and behaviours. But in reality, a wide range of interests, both economic and political, were coinciding with these ideological and mind-set frames, at least for the period of the invasion and the first years of the Iraqi occupation. As noted by Muttit, material interests and beliefs are not always opposites, on the contrary: “Human beings have a great capacity to hold beliefs about the world that advance or reinforce their own material interests.” (Muttit, 2011: xxiii)
2.2 Violent liberalisation of Iraq

The impact of the neoliberal agenda of the Bush Administration has often been overlooked, due to the unleashing of violence and the political unrest that followed the post-2003 period of occupation in Iraq. Instead other explanations were favoured that centred on the rise of identity politics, religious fervour or the failed mechanism of political transition (Kirmanj, 2013; Stansfield, 2007; Osman, 2012; Marr, 2006). While some actors within the Bush Administration even denied it was in the initial plan for regime change in Iraq, the neoliberal transformation of Iraq was seen by many as a marginal part of the regime change programme introduced by the US occupation. Mostly, it is considered a short-lived attempt that did not really survive the controversial reign of the head of the Coalition Provisional Authority, Paul Bremer (Gunther, 2011). While for Dodge, the counterinsurgency doctrine adopted in 2007 by the Bush Administration “marked the complete jettisoning of the neo-liberal policy prescriptions…” (2010:1285). Besides, even when mentioned, it has been often disconnected (except for a few studies) from the political transformation in Iraq, the constitutional rift and the general rise of violence that engulfed the

134 Here, I concur with Gregory to say that this new strategy did not represent at all the end of the neoliberal remaking of Iraq. See Gregory, Derek. “Baghdad Burning: Neo-Liberalism and the Counter-City.” What is new about neo-liberal urbanism? Middle Eastern Cities in comparative perspective, 2011
However, a good range of works\textsuperscript{137}, as well as the testimonies of key actors and institutions, concerning US reconstruction and restructuring policies and delivery has been published during the last decade. This allows the emergence of a consolidated picture of the post-2003 period.

In this chapter, I will argue that the neoliberal restructuring agenda in Iraq was part and parcel of the overall American project of reform and change in Iraq, in spite of the denial of the former heads of the Department of Defense. In fact, it was at the heart of the “democratic package” that would be imposed with force by the US. It was a project of reform and change of such magnitude that Arato would call it “an externally imposed revolution” against concepts of “nation building” and “regime change” (2009:1). Moreover, the neoliberal constructivist project of transforming Iraq was not only the blueprint of the Bush Administration but more generally it reflected the influence of a vast nexus of neoliberal forces and proponents within the US Congress and within the US State structures, State administration – Department of State, Department of Defense, Department of Treasury—USAID, the US Army and within the international community institutions, the UN, the IMF, the World Bank. However, there were differences and disagreement about strategies for implementation of the neoliberal plan within the US forces and with international institutions. In this regard, the policies followed by the CPA Administrator Paul Bremer from May 2003 to June 2004 were without doubt the harshest and boldest neoliberal restructuring reforms ever attempted since the birth of the Washington Consensus in the 1980s. Here, borrowing from different works about the neoliberal rationality and the market-state, I will study Bremer's reforms in detail as well as the peculiar neoliberal structuring of the reconstruction process operated by the US Administration and US Army. Although the rise of violence and the formal transition to a sovereign Iraqi government after 2005 would slacken the pace in the implementation of the economic and social restructuring process, a reversal of some of the most controversial policies would only be attempted during the peak of the civil war at the end of 2006. In any case, I will argue that the neoliberal constructivist project in Iraq was a complete failure. A failure both in term of general reconstruction of infrastructures and services and in introducing a sustainable economic environment. Finally, I will show that despite these considerable failures, the neoliberal reforms and restructuring would remain on the agenda of Iraq’s successive governments long after the formal recovery of sovereignty, and

\textsuperscript{136} See for example, Stansfield, “What were the causes and consequences of Iraq's descent into violence after the initial invasion?” which explores a range of different hypotheses but without any connections with neoliberal economic and social restructuring. This appears also very clearly in Marr Phoebe, \textit{the modern history of Iraq}, 2012, in (Chap 10.11.12).

continually pushed by the US Administration, the international institutions and an important part of the new Iraqi political elites.

2.2.1 The ‘Democratic Package’

Many years after the Bush presidency, the blame game between the former Bush Administration officials about responsibility for the Iraqi quagmire was still raging. The former Bush Department of Defense (DoD) leadership, mainly Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Douglas Feith, tried to build a defence of their actions in their written recollections of the period of invasion and occupation of Iraq. Their case can be summed up in a few sentences. The original plan of the US post-war operations in Iraq, following the Principals’ Committee Review of Iraq Policy Paper, was only about the reconstruction of Iraqi economy and infrastructure towards a modest pre-war level and the implementation of a quick plan of transition that would have seen Iraqis, mainly Iraqi exiles, forming an Interim Iraqi Administration (IIA). Rumsfeld insists that: “...the aim was not to bestow on it an American-style democracy, a capitalist economy, or a world-class military force.” (Rumsfeld, 2011:482). “Unfortunately”, this plan was mitigated since its origin by the Department of State and later on would be totally “buried” by the CPA Administrator, Paul Bremer (Rumsfeld, 2011; Feith, 2008). They argue that, contrary to the DoD strategy, the Department of State was, since the beginning, advocating for a “multi-year” US-led occupation of Iraq. In short, it was presented by Douglas Feith as an internal fight within the US Administration between proponents of the “liberation” of Iraq, mainly the DoD, versus proponents of the “occupation” of Iraq, the Department of State, the CIA and others (Feith, 2008)138. Obviously, other actors in the Administration like George Tenet (CIA head at that time) or Condoleezza Rice, and even Bremer recall another story (Tenet, 2007: 417-424; Rice, 2011:122-132; Bremer, 2006:23-25). It is not my intention to delve into the internal controversy between the former Bush Administration officials. In addition, the core of the argument between the DoD and the other agencies of the Bush Administration, even as presented by Rumsfeld and Feith, was and remains about how to control the occupation process, which Iraqis to empower and how to legitimise the American presence. Hence, the DoD strategy of “liberation” had been clearly stated by former Under Secretary Feith:

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138 See in particular Chapter 8 “Discord in Washington” and Chapter 14 “From Liberation to Occupation” of his memoires (2008)
“The IIA was designed to balance a number of interests, I told the President—specifically, to “maintain sufficient U.S. control over the process of reconstruction while preserving the legitimacy of our presence and the bona fides of cooperative Iraqis.” (Feith, 2008:407)

In a sense, the debate between the Bush Administration was about the best and most efficient way to conduct the transformation of Iraq. The DoD thought that they could quickly impose/legitimise friendly Iraqi exiles that would deliver the necessary reforms and transformation of Iraq with the protection of minimal US troops. This plan would have helped to preserve the American image of ‘liberators’ and involve minimal cost for the US budget. It seems that Department of State and other agency officials, and even President Bush, did not concur or had reservations about the rapid transition model and the DoD’s empowerment strategy for Iraqi exiles. They therefore were pushing for a more comprehensive and longer model of transition, involving both Iraqi exiles and local Iraqis (Tenet, 2007; Rice, 2011). But again, this controversy reflects what I described in the preceding chapter about the fundamental denial from the US Administration about its status of occupying power, and the failure of reconciling this reality with the image of ‘liberators’ they wanted to project in Iraq and abroad.

But what was never really debated in the Bush Administration was the nature of the economic restructuring and regime change as it was conceived in Washington. In reality, the neoliberal ideology was the backbone of the Bush Presidency project to transform Iraq, politically, economically and socially and this was clearly stated in Bush’s speech about Iraq in February 2003 (Bush, 2003). As a matter of fact, the Bush Administration and its employees in the Green Zone would have to change their political project of transition and regime change to adapt to the difficult realities on the ground in Iraq. Hence, in a span of a year, they went from a ‘plug and play’ strategy and an Iraqi exiles’ empowerment model to a long-term top-down constitutional process with caucuses and an American ‘Presidential Envoy’, to finally completely accelerating the handover to an Iraqi Interim Government with a rapid constitutional elections process. All of this happened between April 2003 and June 2004, and as one can imagine it was not a smooth process. It involved a great deal of violence and coercion by US forces and Iraqis, rounds of bitter bargaining between the US Administration and Iraqi exiles and Kurdish political representatives, the mobilisation of the highest Shi’a religious authority and hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, and many controversies within the Bush Administration.139 And this chaotic and violent process towards market-driven democracy would continue long after the formal handover of sovereignty, 139 I will come back to this later on, in different episodes of the transitional process. However, on this question see in particular, Herring, Eric, and Glen Rangwala. op.cited. 2005. (chapter “The Political dynamics of Post-invasion Iraq”) and Arato, Andrew. Constitution Making under Occupation: The Politics of Imposed Revolution in Iraq. Columbia University Press, 2009.
from the first elections for the Transitional National Assembly in December 2005 to the last general elections in 2010. However, something would not change from the first day of the US invasion to the formal withdrawal in 2011. This was the difficult, sometimes impeded, but continuous and concerted effort to impose and implement the neoliberal transformation of Iraq.

Already a few days after the official end of the combat operations in May 2003, the neoliberal project and the transformation of Iraq was discussed openly in the US Congress. Thus, during the hearing before the House of Representatives on 15th May 2003, the general discussion and the statements of both the Under Secretary of State, Department for Economic, Business and Agricultural Affairs, Alan P. Larson, and the Assistant Administrator of the Agency for International Development (USAID), Ambassador Chamberlain, were revealing that the constructivist process of transforming Iraq into a market democracy was already on track. Hence, Under Secretary of State Alan P. Larson was detailing the kind of democratic ‘package’ that was on the verge of being established in Iraq. It was a typical model of what Brown defined as a neoliberal constructivist project; enforcing the market as the organising and regulative principle of the state and society (Brown, 2006). Quoting an Iraqi Shi’a cleric,140 who is supposed to have said that democracy in Iraq would be a package based on “…a free press, a free market, respect for human rights, and separation of powers…” that would have to be accepted or rejected in block, Under Secretary Larson assured the US House that: “The U.S. is committed to assisting Iraqis accept them all.” (US House of Representatives, 2003: 19). Reading Larson’s statement at this hearing, there is no doubt that the US Administration foresaw that rebuilding the Iraqi economy would not be a modest post-war reconstruction project. And as Larson himself stated, it could more accurately be described as a “rehabilitation, renewal and transformation”. After decades of a so called centralised and statist economy, Iraq would finally benefit from “the innovation and entrepreneurship driven by the market and private sector investment” (ibid). In this frame one of the major tasks for “Iraq’s transformation” foreseen by the State Department official was “the establishment of the legal and social framework for a market-based economy.” (US House of Representatives, 2003: 21). For his part, USAID Administrator Chamberlain detailed how his agency was already supporting reconstruction efforts and restructuring projects.

At that time, beside humanitarian projects, USAID focused its efforts on four primary sectors: “1) physical infrastructure; 2) education, health, and other social services; 3) economy; and 4) local government.” The involvement of the American private sector was deemed essential for the success of the operations and “…the furtherance of United State foreign policy objectives”. In Chamberlain’s words: “In order to implement this ambitious program,

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140 Shi’a cleric Iyad Jamal Al Din spoke at one of the first US-led conferences in Baghdad (28th April 2003) about the political future of the country.
USAID has enlisted the extensive expertise of the American private sector through the award of eight contracts to date.” (US House of Representatives, 2003: 28). In fact, there were around 100 private sector partners that were already working or contracted to work on Iraq. Among them, Bechtel, Skylink-USA, Stevedoring Services of America (SSA) for reconstruction projects, Abt Associates on health services, Creative Associates on education issues and Research Triangle Institute for governance. Of course, USAID was also working on macro- and micro-economic restructuring plans in order to foster “Expanding Economic Opportunities”:

“USAID is working closely with the U.S. Treasury, which has the lead on these issues, to help build Iraqi Ministry of Finance expertise in macro-economic policy analysis, budget planning, and inter-governmental fiscal relations...To establish a market-friendly legal and regulatory environment, USAID will help strengthen property rights-related legislation, corporate and contract law, and the appropriate framework for competition law. We will work with the Ministries of Finance and Trade to develop policies that foster robust trade. In promoting private participation in the economy, USAID activities will extend credit to small and micro businesses through local lending institutions and a micro-credit lending facility.” (US House of Representatives, 2003: 33)

As ironic as it is, it is DoD Secretary Rumsfeld, in his open editorial to the Washington Journal in May 2003, that best synthesised and explained the core of the ‘democratic package’ and how the US Administration would try to implement it politically and economically. Of course, Rumsfeld was cautious to pay respect to the newly-found freedom of Iraqis and assured that the US would not impose an American ‘template’. However, the US Administration, in the words of Rumsfeld, was putting a lot of ‘guidelines’ on the path of Iraqi democracy. It’s worthwhile showing a few of them here:

“*Promote Iraqis who share the goals of a free and moderate Iraq. In staffing ministries and positioning Iraqis in ways that will increase their influence, the coalition will work to have supportive Iraqis involved as early as possible—so that Iraqi voices can explain the goals and direction to the Iraqi people. Only if Iraqis are engaged in, and responsible for, explaining to and leading their fellow citizens will broad public support develop that is essential for security.

*Favor market economy. Decisions will favor market systems, not Stalinist command systems, and activities that will begin to diversify the Iraqi economy beyond oil. The coalition will encourage moves to privatize state-owned enterprises.

*Oil. The Coalition Provisional Authority will develop a plan for the Iraqi oil industry based on transparency. Iraq's oil wealth will be used and marketed for the benefit of the Iraqi people.” (Rumsfeld, 2003)

In fact, this op-ed was a pure synthesis of the neoliberal Common Sense and the sense of hubris that was animating the Bush Administration at that time.
As noted by Tabb, it reflected a general ideological frame that did not concern Iraq alone, but the whole relationship between the US and the rest of the world:

“In a sense, the US priorities of free markets over meeting basic needs in the less developed world, its insistence on neoliberal privatization, deregulation and shrinking government were the economic accompaniment of its diplomacy of hegemony, pre-emption and unilateralism.” (Tabb, 2006: 177)

2.2.2 The neoliberal nexus

As noted by different scholars (Docena, 2007; Looney, 2003) in the early days of the invasion USAID had been put in charge to monitor and design the overall US plan of the neoliberal restructuring and transformation of Iraq. The agency elaborated a confidential document titled “Economic Recovery, Reform and Sustained Growth in Iraq” of which some parts were leaked to the US mainstream media in May 2003 (King, 2003). As stated by USAID, it was a comprehensive plan for the rapid transition of Iraq from a State-command economy towards market democracy:

“USAID’s economic governance assistance will support a restructured government in Iraq to implement a sound macroeconomic and structural policy framework that will support the economic restructuring, recovery and governmental transition to a sustainable market-driven economic system ...The USAID assistance will facilitate the capacity of the core economic management institutions to implement comprehensive economic reform measures by promoting the development of sustainable economic policy formulation and management capacity by Iraq's government officials and technical specialists and through the full development of Iraqi economic governance institutions.” (USAID, 2003:40)

The technical and engineering realisation of the plan would be officially contracted by USAID to an American business consulting firm, BearingPoint, in July 2003. The contract awarded to BearingPoint was a three-year plan, from July 2003 until July 2006, and for the estimated cost plus fees of US $249 million. The nearly one hundred pages of the contract carefully identified each and every one of the reforms necessary for the realisation of USAID’s ambitious and transformative plan. BearingPoint would have to intervene in all

141 An earlier USAID document had been produced in February 2003 called “Vision for Post-Conflict Iraq”. Although it was not as comprehensive as the Bearing Point contract, it nonetheless planned for the privatisation of Iraqi SOE, decentralisation and the strengthening of local government capacities. See USAID, “Vision for Post-Conflict Iraq”. Feb 19 2003.
stages of the transition toward the market democracy, from the local development of the private sector to macro-economic policies, fiscal and trade regulations, privatisation programmes:

“The contractor is expected to provide two broad levels of intervention:
  Transactional Activities that create a competitive private sector through a) credit provision, b) development of local, regional and international business networks, c) support for business operations and strategy, d) workforce development and employment generation, e) entrepreneurship training and development, f) mobilization of domestic and foreign investment, and g) privatization of state-owned enterprises, and h) trade capacity development.
  Economic Governance Activities including support to those public and private institutions that shape and implement economic and financial policy, regulatory, and legal reforms, including the Central Bank and Ministry of Finance.” (USAID, 2003:40)

Although Bush Administration officials were publicly stating that Iraqi oil would remain a national asset in the hands of Iraqis, BearingPoint’s contract with USAID stated clearly the intention to privatise the Iraqi oil sector and related industries:

“The contractor will implement USAID-approved recommendations to begin supporting the privatization, especially those in the oil and supporting industries.” (USAID, 2003:84)

Here again, I would like to insist that this project, as comprehensive as it was, was not only the brainchild of one agency but the product of a widely shared ideological set of beliefs, neoliberal Common Sense, among US Administration circles142, within the US Congress143, a good part of the corporate media

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142 One extreme, “lunatic”, example of the penetration of neoliberal rationality within the US Administration is reported by Brown: “Occasionally, this reaches levels of lunacy, as was the case in the Pentagon plan, ultimately nixed by the Senate Armed Services Committee, for setting up an online trading market to predict terrorist attacks. The goal of the scheme was to “improve the prediction and prevention of events by using the expertise of the open market instead of relying only on government agencies,” since, the Defense Department argued, “markets are extremely efficient, effective and timely aggregators of dispersed and even hidden information” Brown, 2003: Footnote 7) Another example, was the DoD attempt, under Rumsfeld, to adopt “an enterprise-wide approach to information management” based on commercial business models and the enhancement of a Chief Information Officer (CIO) role and position. (The Rumsfeld Archive, September 10, 2004)

143 See for example, the US General Accounting Office report, “Rebuilding Iraq”, on economic transition issues: “The Administration has stated that the creation of a competitive private sector within a democratic political system is one of its primary goals for Iraq. Although near-term economic assistance will focus on humanitarian and reconstruction needs, fostering long-term economic stability will require fundamental changes in institutions and laws that underpin market economies. Based on experience with other economic transitions, this transition is likely to face substantial challenges and will take a long time. For example, a major challenge facing
and the Market and even, in a certain way, the American population. This was also the reflection of decades of structural change within US State structures and even within the US Army. Indeed, the US Army went through a long process of critical transformations that began after the end of the Cold War and which has continued all through the years to date. Confronted with a massive reduction in money and manpower, the American Army had been restructured following market business models in order to concentrate on “the core of its business”, the application of kinetic forces. It involved internal restructuring of its logistic operations, implementing market management programmes like “Velocity Management” that was mirroring “leading commercials firms...institutionalized systematic methodologies” in order to rationalise and improve overall efficiency and financial management of its operations (Dumond, 2001:7). It also involved programmes of outsourcing and privatisation of part of its logistical capacities within public-private partnership contracts—for example, overseeing the construction and management of operational bases—but also the massive outsourcing of post-war operational capabilities in the 1990s in Bosnia and Kosovo (USGAO, 2003).

Hence, through the implementation of successive Logistics Civil Augmentation Programs (LOGCAP) from the 1980s to the years 2000, the US military forces operated a complete transition in order to be able to transfer almost all logistical operations, from food catering to base operations and security or health care support, to the private contracting sector (Clement & Young, 2005; Brown, 2005: 49).

Iraq is whether and how to privatize Iraq’s vast oil resources for the long-term benefit of all the Iraqi people.” (USGAO, 2003:16)

To recall Brown: “However, the fact that G. W. Bush retains the support of the majority of the American people, despite his open flaunting of democratic principles amidst a failing economy and despite, too, evidence that the public justification for invading Iraq was based on cooked intelligence, suggests that neoliberalism has taken deep hold in the homeland. Particularly striking is the number of pundits who have characterized this willful deceit of the people as necessary rather than criminal, a means to a rational end, reminding us that one of the more dangerous features of neoliberal evisceration of a non-market morality lies in undercutting the basis for judging government actions by criteria other than expediency. “(Brown, 2005: 49)

As stated by RAND, who was the think tank that collaborated with the US Army to define the programme, “Velocity Management brought new way for doing business to Army Logistics”. Dumond, John, Et al. “Velocity Management, The Business paradigms that has transformed US Army Logistics”, RAND, Arroyo Center, Santa Monica CA, 2001: iii


“LOGCAP is “advanced acquisition planning which provides for the use of civilian contractors during wartime and unforeseen military emergencies to augment the U.S. Army combat support service capability. The contractor support will be arranged through combined advance acquisition and operations planning for peacetime planning for the use of civilian contractors in wartime and other contingencies.” (quoted in Clement & Young, “The History of the Army’s Logistic Civilian Augmentation Program: an analysis of its oversight from past to present”, Naval Postgraduate School, 2005)
In 2001, the LOGCAP III plan, the main framework through which logistic operations of the US military forces for the invasion and the post-combat reconstructions in Iraq would be conducted, had become a ten-year IDIQ\textsuperscript{148}, an “umbrella support contract with a single worldwide provider, the multinational KBR” (SIGIR, 2006:15). In other words, KBR would be responsible for the fulfillment and management of a vast range of logistical operations of the US Army through a “broad latitude on the mix of labor, choice of subcontractors, transportation arrangements, and other aspects of organizing the production process to meet the specified goals.” (CBO, 2005:6-7). Neoliberal rationality had, therefore, already been applied and disseminated within the US Army structures and leadership. Hence, the US Army and think tanks traditionally close to the institution were considering post-conflict operations and reconstruction in similar terms to other agencies like USAID, that is with similar neoliberal Common Sense. For example, the Association of the United States Army, the US States Army advocacy group, and the Center of Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a bipartisan think tank and Federal Government contractor, elaborated a “post-conflict reconstruction, Task Framework” that identified “four pillars” or issues (“security; justice/reconciliation; social/economic well-being; and governance/participation”) that needed to be addressed in the different periods of a post-conflict reconstruction (CSIS & AUSA, 2002:3). And within this framework, principles of neoliberal reforms and restructuring inspired by the Washington Consensus—Tax Reform, Fiscal Policy, Trade Liberalisation, Public Spending Redirection, Deregulation—were considered important milestones that would help to lay foundations for “viable economy” and “sustainable development program” (CSIS & AUSA, 2002).

Besides, the neoliberal Common Sense was not simply the reflection of ideological and structural neoliberal penetration within the US but the set of principles and beliefs that form the superstructure of market globalisation as it evolved since the 1980s and which remain widely shared and promoted by the international community and its institutions, the UN, the IMF, the World Bank, European Commission, etc.\textsuperscript{149} Hence, it is interesting to note that in July 2003 the UN report pursuant to the Security Council Resolution 1483 (which recognised US and UK as occupying powers in Iraq) was officially requesting the transition of Iraq towards a “market economy”\textsuperscript{150}.

\textsuperscript{148} Indefinite Delivery/Indefinite Quantity, Cost plus award fees contract.


\textsuperscript{150} Hence, Bremer would be careful to quote this precise sentence of the UN report at the beginning of each Order concerning the implementation of his neoliberal shock therapy.
“84. As a result of successive wars, strict international sanctions and debilitating economic controls and distortions, Iraq's economic infrastructure and civic institutions have deteriorated significantly...It is against the backdrop of this situation, further exacerbated by the recent war and the attendant breakdown of social services, that the development of Iraq and the transition from a centrally planned economy to a market economy needs to be undertaken.” (UN, 2003:16)

Although we saw earlier that the Bush Administration, at least during the first months of the occupation, was cautious of a broad involvement of the international community in Iraq, international institutions such as United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), IMF and the World Bank would in fact intervene in Iraq as soon as the spring of 2003. In particular, the role of the IMF would be crucial because Iraq was laden with a debt estimated around 400 billion US dollars contracted mainly during the Iraq-Iran war. As Looney was noting in 2003, there was a very small chance that the “odious debt doctrine” would apply for the write-off of the totality of Iraqi debt (2003:65). Therefore, as a bankrupt country Iraq would have to have its debt renegotiated with the Paris Club, the World Bank and the IMF (Looney, 2003b). The economic restructuring framework of the IMF and World Bank is well known and their neoliberal shock therapy had been applied in every continent. Hence, not surprisingly World Bank reports, and IMF macroeconomic assessments of Iraq done in 2003 were all advocating the neoliberal restructuring of the Iraqi economy and governance (United Nations & World Bank, 2003; IMF, 2003). 151 Therefore, the question to ask is not if the Bush Administration had a plan of neoliberal transformation of Iraq since the beginning of the planning for the invasion, because it did. But the question that one may ask is if the US had transferred all authority to the international community, would the reconstruction of Iraq had been carried out with different ideological principles? In any event, there would still be a crucial difference. As noted by Docena:

“What was unique about Iraq was that such a project was to be imposed directly by the apparatus of the US State, and not primarily by multilateral organizations such as the Bretton Woods institutions or the World Trade Organization, as is the case in other countries.” (Docena, 2007:124).

In any case, the IMF and World Bank are obliged, to some extent, to take into consideration international rules and are used to asymmetric bargaining—that

is negotiating with weak or bankrupt states, but states that kept at least formally, some degrees of sovereignty. However, the Bush Administration was left without any restraints inside Iraq, neither state influence nor external pressure to respect international regulations such as the Geneva Conventions or The Hague Treaties (Whyte, 2006; Wheatley 2006), to imposing its neoliberal project. In reality, the US Administration, USAID, Department of State, Department of Defense and its employees in the Green Zone and the US Army were bartering between themselves in order to conduct the occupation. It is in this context that the Bush Administration and its pro-consul Bremer would experiment with the most brutal and boldest project of neoliberal transformation of a country of all time. So much so that even the IMF and World Bank, albeit in diplomatic phrasing, would advise a more cautious approach toward the implementation of the “very ambitious” American programme (International Monetary Fund, 2003: 4; World Bank & United Nations, 2003).

2.2.3 Market-state and neoliberal rationality

Many years after the 13 months of Bremer’s reign in Iraq, it maybe difficult to understand how much the neoliberal experimentation in Iraq was a coherent and comprehensive project. And it is even more difficult to acknowledge it, as it ended as a complete failure with far-reaching unintended consequences. In any events, as we already began to see above, the constructivist project of the Bush Administration did not only concern economic restructuring policies, but the enforcement in general of neoliberal principles in a vast array of sectors, in school reform and curriculum, in the building of ‘civil society’, in the formation of the new Iraqi constitution and so on. More specifically, it relied on the comprehensive application of neoliberal rationality as the fundamental principle of the occupation and the reproduction of a market-state as the central element of the reconstruction and “State-building”152 of Iraq.

Written during the unfolding of the American occupation of Iraq, Professor Wendy Brown provides a crucial definition of neoliberal political rationality as a “form of governmentality—a mode of governance encompassing but not limited to the state, and one which produces subjects, forms of citizenship and behaviour, and a new organisation of the social” (Brown, 2005:37). As she notes, this is a major difference with previous forms of liberal economic order such as Ordo-liberalism, in the sense that neoliberalism “recast the economic

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152 In State-building I mean the definition provided by Herring and Rangwala who make a distinction between State-building, “deliberate attempt... to create key characteristics of modern State” and State formation, “a process in which the State emerges independently go the intentions of any agents to create one”. (Herring & Rangwala, 2005:49)
as defining the entire sphere of human action and institutions, from individual behavior to government.” (ibid: 142. Footnote 2). Hence, the constructivist neoliberal project is more far-reaching. It is no longer sufficient for the state to enforce the sanctuary-making of the market with the production of norms and laws, but to allow for “the extending and disseminating of market values to all institutions and social action, even as the market itself remains a distinctive player” (ibid:40). Two other important aspects of the neoliberal rationality need to be mentioned here because, in the case of Iraq, I consider that they will have dire consequences. First, neoliberal rationality entails a shift or more aptly said, a “reduction of political and moral judgement to a cost/benefit calculus” and a focus on individual, valid or erroneous, strategies. More precisely, neoliberal rationality transforms citizens into individual entrepreneurs and consumers and “whose moral autonomy is measured by their capacity for ‘self-care’” (Brown, 2006:694). In other words, there is a general de-moralisation and de-politicisation of public life. Second and directly linked with the first aspect, it produces a new mode of de-politicisation of economic and social power relations, reducing political citizenship and the ability to build collective resistance and political constituencies. In Brown’s words, “the body politic ceases to be a body but is, rather, a group of individual entrepreneurs and consumers. . .” (Brown, 2005:43)

As noted a long time ago by Polanyi when studying the first experiences of “market fundamentalism”, it is an illusion to believe that the economic liberal order requires no state to function. On the contrary, it requires the constant intervention of the state and the continuous institutionalisation of economic liberalisation (Polanyi, 2001:46). Here also, the state remains a crucial element of the enforcement of the neoliberal rationality and the general movement of Reregulation. As defined by Block and Somers, by Reregulation, I mean the massive production of regulations by states shifting protection and empowerment of workers and citizens for the protection and empowerment of business interests and their actors (2014). However, one may agree with the idea that the ‘neo’ in neoliberalism, as it has been developed since the 1980s, represents a new form, the development of a radicalised “form of governmentality” in order to renew with the Market utopia after the Keynesian Parenthesis. As noted by Brown, this new form of governmentality implies a crucial shift from previous liberal or democratic regimes and the power relations they organise:

“Neoliberal governmentality undermines the relative autonomy of certain institutions from one another and from the market—law, elections, the police, the public sphere—an independence that formerly sustained an interval and a tension between a capitalist political economy and a liberal democratic political system.” (Brown, 2005:45)

153 See also (Block and Sommers, 2014:12).
At the centre of these power relations, the state is therefore redefined, it is not anymore the representative of the “best interests” of dominant national classes nor the mediator or “the shield” protecting society from the tensions between capital and labour—through notably redistributive policies. Corresponding to the new form of governmentality, the new State forms the legal, constitutional, architecture of the globalised neoliberal order and at the same time exists as “an extension of the market—a legitimate servant of the market, an aspect of the market, or a form of the market.” (Brown, 2005: 143.Footnote 6). Here it is interesting to see how the seminal definition of the “market-state” elaborated by neoliberal constitutional theorist, Philip Bobbitt, in The Shield of Achilles: War, Peace, and the Course of History (2003), correlates with Brown’s definition of neoliberal rationality as a form of Governmentality. Hence Bobbitt describes the principal characteristics of the market-state in these terms:

_First, market-state:

“... depends on the international capital markets and, to a lesser degree, on the modern multinational business network to create stability in the world economy, in preference to management by national or transnational political bodies. Its political institutions are less representative (though in some ways more democratic) than those of the nation-state.” (Bobbitt, 2003:229)

Second, market-state legitimacy lies on its capacity to “maximize opportunities for all members of society” while it would abandon the commitment to serve the welfare of citizens. The success of such a market-state can be measured primarily in economic terms, that is by organising the ability of its society to secure goods and services. In this view, “The market-state is, above all, a mechanism for enhancing opportunity, for creating something—possibilities—commensurate with our imaginations.” (ibid: 232). Within this frame, labour and currency are considered mere commodities and adjustment variables.

Bobbitt then sketches the overall structure and Governmentality principles of such a state:

_Political Architecture

The market-state is characterised by a process of de-nationalisation, that is the decoupling of State structures from the Nation. The market-state relies on the extension of federalism and the devolution of power and responsibilities to federated states and localities. Notably because the federal articulation and the empowerment of localities permit a better integration and experimentation of the market. However, it also paradoxically relies on the reinforcement of a
central authority, a “powerful, centralized trusted federal executive”, principally to prevent the risk of fragmentation of what remains of the political structure *(ibid: 234)*. In such a state, elements of liberal politics and liberal democracy are seriously diminished, and in reality the participation from citizens and their control of governmental is degraded. This is replaced by a market-driven system of penalties and incentives. For Bobbitt, “the market-state pursues its objectives by incentive structures and sometimes draconian penalties, not so much to assure that the right thing is done as to prevent the social instability that threatens material well-being. “* *(ibid: 228. Emphasis is mine)*

**Governmentality principles:**
The market-state remains agnostic in terms of values, cultural or moral, and in terms of norms of justice. Here also, state actions and the production of rules are considered primarily in regard to the facilitation of economic competition. In a certain way, this can be seen as a “...de-emphasis on the programmatic and legalistic aspects of governance.” *(ibid: 223)*. As the core of the economic competition is shifted from the factory to the marketplace, market-state considers citizens mainly as consumers and entrepreneurs who are making choices and taking up opportunities.*154* Within this frame, the State is above all responsibility for maximizing opportunities and lowering transaction costs of individuals. Obviously, as the market-state fosters the shifting of citizenship toward individual entrepreneurship as its constituent principle, it means also that the objective of organising a body politic and holding together a single polity is lost.

**Market-state role:**
In reality the objective of reducing transaction cost for individuals and facilitating economic competition imply the reinforcement of the centrality of the market as well as the fundamental reducing of the scale and scope of the State. Therefore, the re-regulations enacted by the State are following this double movement, and their success is measured in term of reducing the overall GDP absorbed by the government and the liberation of market forces. In this context, neoliberal policies introduce major restructuring of the previous national state structures and apparatus by directly offloading them towards the market. If this is not possible, then by outsourcing them through public-private part-

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*154* The market-state not only considers but in fact celebrates citizens as entrepreneurs:
“What can a hospital attendant, or a schoolteacher or a marriage counselor or a social worker or a television repairman or a government official be said to make?... More important than the producers... are the entrepreneurs—heroes of autonomy, consumers of opportunity—who compete to supply whatever all the other consumers want or might be persuaded to want... competing with one another to maximize everyone else's options.” *(Quoted by Bobbitt,2003: 233)*
nerships and auction contracts. Basically, the move to privatisation would typically go as far as possible and would not be limited to welfare, but extend to sectors such as education and even security. In fact, what truly remains of the State is a capacity for oversight and arbitrage over a range of actors and interests that could not be directly managed by the market. In Bobbitt’s words: “The market-state seeks a role as enabler and umpire, and shuns the role of provider and judge.” *(ibid: 233).*

Beyond the risks of fragmentation of the political structures and of the body politic, Bobbitt notes that such a State life and formation will be constrained by three fundamental paradoxes:

> “ (1) it will require more centralized authority for government, but all governments will be weaker, having greatly contracted the scope of their undertakings, having devolved or lost authority to so many other institutions, ... ; (2) there will be more public participation in government, but it will count for less, and thus the role of the citizen qua citizen will greatly diminish and the role of citizen as spectator will increase; (3) the welfare state will have greatly re-trenched, but infrastructure security, epidemiological surveillance, and environmental protection—all of which are matters of general welfare—will be promoted by the State as never before.” *(ibid:230)*

Obviously, a Market-State in this pure conceptual form does not exist anywhere on the planet, not even in the US. And neoliberal rationality is still a long way from being the sole remaining mode of governance, with its implementation still facing consequent resistance. However, what Brown and Bobbitt are describing is the long unfolding of dominant and continuous global trends. Fostered by international institutions such as the IMF or European Community, constrained by globalised financial forces, promoted by the market actors and multi-national companies, the transformation of national states toward market-state and the implementation of neoliberal rationality has reached all continents. Yet, this happened, and this is happening at different paces and on different levels when one compares the situation in West Europe with, for example, post-communist states in Eastern Europe or with Latin America. In fact, the movement towards the market-state and neoliberal integration depends of the resistance it encounters, the crises, political or economic, it faces and the allies that market forces are able to mobilise in each country.^[155] Even under the most brutal ‘shock therapy’ it took years for some

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Eastern European countries to integrate with the global market and begin institutional reforms - with mixed results, to say the least. Hence, the transition towards market-driven societies remain an ongoing and precarious process that had been set in motion decades ago. In this context, the Iraqi case remains compelling. And the belief of the Bush Administration, and in particular the CPA Administrator, Bremer, that they would have succeeded in imposing and accomplishing the complete transformation of Iraq.

2.2.4 Reconstruction and neoliberal rationality

The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) was officially established by General Tommy Franks in April 2003. However, the CPA would effectively enter into action as a governing authority upon the arrival of Administrator Paul Bremer on 12th May 2003. In addition, the UN would officially recognise the governing authority of US and British occupation powers in Iraq with resolution 1483 of the UN Security Council, on 22nd May 2003. In his own words Bremer arrived in Iraq to make “bold moves” and with a firm intention to transform Iraq (Chandrasekaran, 2009:42). In a sense, the arrival of Bremer corresponded to a change of course towards an “extended occupation”, and the assertion of the American leadership of the rebuilding of Iraq as a state and a nation (SIGIR, 2009a; Dobbins et al., 2003). However, Bremer and the Bush Administration would face two different, although interlinked, challenges. One would be the large undertaking of the reconstruction of a country in a catastrophic state after three wars, decades of dictatorship and embargo, as well as months of looting. In autumn 2003, the UN and World Bank missions assessed that the global cost of Iraq’s reconstruction in all sectors (infrastructures, government capacity, health, education, agriculture, security, private sector, etc.) would cost around $56 billion (SIGIR, 2009a). This was way above the 2.4 billion dollars initially provisioned for the first Iraq Relief and Reconstruction Fund (IRRF1) coordinated by USAID in April 2003 (SIGIR, 2009a:78). The second challenge would be the radical transformation of the Iraq State towards a market-state and Iraqi society toward a market-driven

society. These two endeavours undertaken at the same time, the reconstruction of Iraq and the state-building (the attempt to create a market-state in lieu of the Iraqi national-state), would collide rapidly and produce toxic results. All the more since the CPA, led by Bremer, as the institutional structure that the US Administration had put in place to manage the occupation would itself mirror, in a remarkable way, the principal characteristics of a market-state. And yet this was without neither the amount of trust and legitimacy required, nor the capacity for control that Bobbitt describes in his study.

As the head of the CPA, Administrator Bremer was invested with full powers as the sole “executive, legislative, and judicial authority” in Iraq, only accountable to the Bush cabinet (Dobbins et al., 2009). In July 2003, an Iraqi Governing Council, mainly composed of Iraqi exiles, who had not been back in the country for decades, and representatives of a Kurdish de facto autonomous entity, was established and represented the ‘Iraqi face’ of the American occupation. However the 25 members had only an advisory role vis a vis Bremer and the CPA (SIGIR, 2009a). The only power they were granted would be that each of the IGC members would be able to name an acting minister in one of the 25 ministries composing the new Iraqi cabinet. However, the Iraqi ministries would remain under the firm tutelage of the CPA. In any case, the CPA had control over the Iraqi budget, and was the only authority to enact executive orders, to supervise the judicial branch and to issue contracts for the reconstruction of the country. It was also the sole institution that could have some control over the principal purveyor of violence and security in the country, the US-led Multinational Forces. In Bremer's words, it was supposed to be “a government within a government” (Dobbins et al, 2009: XVI). In reality, it was more than a government within a government, for the simple reason that there was no Iraqi government. As noted by Docena, US officials and contractors were “negotiating with themselves” in order to conduct the occupation and transformation of Iraq (2007:129). In fact, Bremer was called the “dictator”\textsuperscript{157} of Iraq, leading the CPA, a Proto State in charge of 25 ministries, most of which would have to have extensive rebuilding, and in charge of all the infrastructure of a modern country of 25 million inhabitants. In fact, the CPA was the size of a mid-range company with no more than 2,000 employees (Dobbins et al,2009; SIGIR, 2009a). It was structured around “a general council, a financial management office, a policy planning unit, and an executive secretariat.”(Dobbins et al.,2009: xvi). In effect, it was the smallest institution ever to manage a country. Besides, the CPA was entrenched in the fortified Green Zone and immune from day to day contact with Iraqis, except the 25 members of the IGC and a few other Iraqi actors.

\textsuperscript{157} Lakhdhar Brahmi, UN negotiator in Iraq in 2004: “Bremer is the dictator of Iraq,” he said. “He has the money. He has the signature.” http://www.mcclatchydc.com/latest-news/article24440929.html#storylink=cpy
Therefore, there was on one side the CPA, with all executive power, money and kinetic forces, with a feeble link with what remains of the old Iraqi State and infrastructure, and on the other the Iraqi population. As noted by Bobbitt, the process of Denationalisation within the market-state “tends to isolate the executive from the body politic, making it ‘a severed head conducting its intercourse with other severed heads according to its own laws’.” (Bobbitt, 2003:235). One can say that in the CPA case, the denationalisation process and isolation from the body politic were total.

For 14 months, the CPA would manage three different sets of jobs and their related budgets. First, the CPA was in charge of leading and coordinating the overall reconstruction and upgrading of Iraqi infrastructure. The range of the task was immense as it concerned all primordial infrastructure for a modern society. It was divided by the CPA and US Administration into sectors such as: Security; Justice; Electricity; Oil; Water; Resources and Sanitation; Transportation and Telecommunications; Roads, Bridges and Construction; Private Sector Development; Health Care; Education, Human Rights, Refugees and Governance; Agriculture; Food Provision and Distribution. The scale goes from the repairing or building of primary schools, local clinics, barracks, to big infrastructure such as jails, power plants, refineries, sewer system, and so on. The second set was to build a new state and build capacity from what remains of the old state, the ministries and their existing dependent structures, hospitals, universities, state-owned companies and all state employees—which accounted for the vast majority of the Iraqi work force—and oversee the different budgets. It involved also the rebuilding of security forces, as the Iraqi army had to be rebuilt from scratch, while the police force would be built from whatever remained of the pre-existing personnel.

Finally, the third set of jobs was the transformation of Iraq into a market-driven society with a market-state. This did not only comprise the enactment of different laws in order to re-regulate the Iraqi economy, finance and trade but also the physical creation of market instruments and institutions such as a modern stock exchange, an independent central bank and a new currency. It also included the federalisation of the country and the building of its new federal architecture. And last but not least, it encompassed the indoctrination of the whole Iraqi society, from ministries to farmers, to the fundamentals of neoliberal rationality and entrepreneurial ethos.

In this frame, the US-led reconstruction endeavour would be structured around three main programmes. The first programme IRRF1 began as soon as April 2003. It was coordinated by USAID with a US budget of 2.4 billion dollars and would be closed in October 2004. The second programme, IRRF2, was designed by the CPA in October 2003 and received a US budget of 18 billion dollars. The IRRF2 programme would outlive the CPA and was almost foreclosed in 2007-2008. The third programme (Commander’s Emergency Response Program, CERP) would be managed directly by the US military and coordinated by the CPA when it existed, and would last until the end of US
military presence in Iraq. It consisted mainly of micro-projects directed toward quick and small community outreach goals. Its budget did not exceed 2 billion dollars and was composed of funds coming from DoD, IRRF 2 budget, Development Fund of Iraq and later the Iraqi Government (SIGIR, 2009a).

From May 2003 to June 2004, the CPA as the sole authority in Iraq was supposed to have a comprehensive control over the process of reconstruction. But in fact the CPA would have to deal with a multiplicity of actors, different US federal departments and agencies, the US military and US Congress and the vast bureaucratic structure that it represented. Hence, the Congress Commission on Wartime Contracting in Iraq and Afghanistan established in 2008, realised that through the whole occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, 17 federal departments and agencies have been involved in supporting contingency operations in both countries through contracts, grants and participation in the different reconstruction programmes (CWTC, 2011:145). Unsurprisingly, the struggle for the control and coordination of the reconstructions programme in Iraq created enormous tensions between the CPA, the US military and the different US agencies and departments involved. It also provoked important delays, sometimes many months, between the design of reconstruction projects, the allocation of money, and the actual beginning of work on the ground. Moreover, it appears from the different report of the Congress and the SIGIR that none of the different governmental structures of the US State had the experience or the necessary staff to manage and provide oversight to a reconstruction project of a magnitude unseen since World War II (SIGIR, 2009a:105). The CPA was not in a better position. It was constantly understaffed and mired due to an incredible turnover rate. Hence, the average duration of a deployment contract within the CPA was 3-4 months, and SIGIR noted that on the whole the CPA staff only had “...seven people [who] had served for the CPA’s entire fourteen months duration” (2009a: 83). Maybe worse, most of the CPA staff had been recruited primarily on their loyalty to the Bush Administration and neoliberal creed. Few of them had any knowledge of Iraq or even of the Middle East region, fewer even were speaking Arabic. Most of them did not have competence or experience in contingency and reconstruction management (Dobbins et al, 2009; Chandrasekaran, 2009). However, many among the CPA seniors staff had strong relations with multinational companies and US business interests (Whyte, 2007:160).

Furthermore, the US Administration and CPA would face another challenge. Following neoliberal rationality and market-state principles, the US Administration and the CPA would mostly outsource the process of reconstruction and state-building through privatisation and auction contracts. In fact, it would not only outsource the reconstruction process but also the oversight of the process. For example, the core of the IRRF2 programme that accounted for 2/3 of the $18 billion budget, was divided into 6 ‘hard construction
sectors’ “Electricity; Public Works and Water; Security and Justice; Transportation and Communications; Buildings, Housing and Health; and Oil” (SIGIR, 2009a:107). Each of these sectors would be monitored and coordinated by a prime private contractor called the Sector Program Management Office (SPMO). Then each of the sectors’ programmes would be divided into one or more procurement and acquisition projects to be auctioned to private contractors. Further, each of the prime contractors or pool of contractors responsible for one project contract would be also able to sub-contract part of their project contract to other private contractors. The 6 sectors and their SPMO would be supervised by a Support Team to the Program Management Office, composed of a private contractor and the United State Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). Finally, at the top of the structure, the Program Management Office (PMO) within the CPA was supposed to assume the general oversight and coordination with the Iraqi Governing Council, the Iraqi ministries and other actors of the US reconstruction programme (SIGIR, 2009a). Basically it amounted to creating a second bureaucratic structure158, but one that would be private and regulated by US legal procedures relative to public-private partnerships (US Federal Acquisitions Regulations). These US legal procedures and the US Administration domination of the whole reconstruction process would clearly “create a system of structural advantage for US and UK multinationals while retaining the formal appearance of equal access” (Whyte, 2007:163). Indeed, the SPMO programme management contracts and the Sectors’ programme contracts would be all auctioned to US and UK firms or joint ventures (SIGIR. 2009a: 59-60). Besides, if these private-public regulations were complex and required precise legal and technical knowledge of US acquisitions procedures in order to compete, the type of contracts (IDIQ cost plus fees) that the PMO was offering were very favorable to the contractors. In fact, at best most of the sector contractors would use such contracts to apply a strict market rationality, that is maximising profits and minimising risks and not focusing on achieving sustainable results. Many years later, that would be one of the conclusions, albeit still written in neoliberal language, of the report of the U.S. Commission on Wartime Contracting in Iraq and Afghanistan:

“Contingency-contracting competition is ineffective. Dynamic contingency operations generate rapidly changing support requirements that must be met within short timeframes. Effective competition motivates contractors to provide fair pricing, best value, and quality performance. On the other hand, the tension between a contractor’s motivation to make a profit and the demand for good performance still exists. The lessons from contingency contracting in Iraq and

158 To get an idea of the complexity of such a structure, one has to read technical documents of the CPA related to the reconstruction programme such as the “Program Management and Design/Build Construction” presented by US Army Acquisition Director Dan Mehney, January 2004 CPA and US military briefing.
Afghanistan are that agencies have not effectively employed acquisition-management strategies that balance the United States’ interests with contractors’ competing objectives.” (U.S. Congress, 2011:151. Emphasis is mine)

Consequently, in the worse cases, an important number would vastly overcharge their operating costs. In addition, the option for a prime contracting company to directly sub-contract part of its reconstruction programme would be extensively used. It would create a cascade of contracts and sub-contracts with the effect of diluting responsibilities and accountability and the evaporation of a great deal of money within the whole process of reconstruction (SIGIR, 2009; CWTC, 2011). Moreover, the coordination between private companies and the CPA, US agencies, not to mention Iraqi ministries, was extremely difficult. Each of these private companies had its own internal agenda, and each had a different plan of action and operating procedures. This problematic reconciliation between private rationality and governmental objectives did not only concern the core of the IRRF2 programme. In reality, the three main reconstruction programmes IRRF1, IRRF2 and to a lesser extent the Commander’s Emergency Response Program (CERP)159 military programme, were all outsourced to a similar private-public architecture. Yet, the fact that they would overlap during CPA rule would make it even more complicated for the CPA to control the reconstruction course. As reported by SIGIR, some CPA coordinators would complain that this situation made their job extremely difficult:

“One was left with a raft of largely unaccountable companies with their own set of rules, security procedures, arriving at intervals, whose role had never been properly defined or harmonized with CPA's political objectives” (SIGIR, 2009a:122)

Last but not least, the CPA would manage two different lines of funds. The main programme, IRRF2 and military CERP, were being approved and provisioned with US taxpayer money by the US Congress through direct provision for the IRRF2 and the DoD budget, on which the US military depended for the CERP. Yet, the CPA was also in control of another line of funds, the Development Fund for Iraq (DFI), that was established by the UN Resolution 1483. The DFI was mainly composed of seized assets from the former regime, assets from the transfer of the UN Oil-for-Food Programme (OIP), and as the

159 “The CERP was formally established by the Coalition Provisional Authority in July 2003 to provide US military commanders in Iraq with a stabilisation tool that benefitted the Iraqi people. The programme supported urgent, small-scale projects that local governments could sustain, that generally cost less than $25,000, and that provided employment ... Among other things, CERP funds were used to build schools, health clinics, roads, and sewers; pay condolence payments; support economic development; purchase equipment; and perform civic cleanup. “SIGIR, “Lessons learned on the Department of Defense's Commander's Emergency Response Program in Iraq”, Virginia, January 24, 2013: p1
Iraqi oil production and worldwide exporting was relaunched, from direct Iraqi oil revenues. Its main account was opened in May 2003 by the US Federal Bank in New York with a counterpart account in Baghdad operated by the Central Bank of Iraq. As Iraqi money belonging to the Iraqi people, the DFI were supposed to be ‘disbursed’ to the CPA in consultation with the Iraqi Interim Authority (IIA) and to remain under the international scrutiny of an International Advisory and Monitoring Board (IAMB).\(^{160}\) However, as I said earlier, the IIA never existed and was substituted with an Iraqi Governing Council, with no authority or power. For its part, the IAMB would never land in Iraq due to security reasons and would instead establish a ‘virtual secretariat’ in Baghdad (IAMB, 2008). Besides, it would also outsource its audit and monitoring missions to private audit companies, KPMG, Ernst & Young and PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) until the termination of the DFI and its complete transfer to the Iraqi Government in June 2011. Therefore, during its fourteen months of rule the CPA would have direct authority and control over the DFI, and would make frantic use of its funds (SIGIR, 2009a:155). All the more as the CPA Administrator Bremer enacted its own contracting regulations for the use of DFI funds (Memorandum 4, August 2003).\(^{161}\) Such regulations were considered much more relaxed than the US federal acquisition rules (IRWP, 2004:3; Whyte, 2007; SIGIR, 2009a). In fact, between August 2003 and June 2004, the CPA would spend over 17 billion of the 20 plus billion US dollars collected by the DFI at that time. At first the CPA would use DFI money to pay for Iraqi State employees’ salaries and Iraqi ministries’ operations, in particular to launch private contracts of re-building the Iraqi security forces. Yet, facing a US Congress reluctant to disburse funds for the IRRF2 programme, the CPA began also to use DFI money to support parts of IRRF2, CERP and other programmes in order to launch them quickly and with the hope of getting rapid and visible reconstruction results (SIGIR, 2009a; Dobbins et al, 2009; Harriman, 2006; Chwastiak; 2011). Therefore, the utilisation of DFI funds by the CPA amounted to creating another layer of contracting and grants procedures that were supposed to be tightly controlled by the Head of Contracting Activities within the CPA. In June 2004, the CPA would have disbursed around $10 billion of DFI funds to the Iraqi ministries and $7 billion to diverse US-led reconstructions programmes (IRRF2 and CERP). The problem was that according to SIGIR: “CPA failed to enforce adequate management, financial and contractual control over approximately $8.8 billion of DFI money “(SIGIR, 2009a: 155). In other words, $8.8 billion of Iraqi money, from the

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\(^{160}\) IAMB was composed of 4 international board members nominated by the UN, the World Bank, the IMF and the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development. In June 2004, a fifth member was nominated by the Iraqi Interim Government after the handover of power from the CPA.

DFI, had disappeared in the process. In contrast, around $1 billion of US taxpayer money vested by the US Congress had been spent by the CPA into the IRRF 2 programme during the same period.

Indeed, the CPA faced an impossible challenge in coordinating a multiplicity of institutional and private actors, all engaged in a giant project of reconstruction. In itself, Bremer’s “Grand Vision” plan of reconstruction, the IRRF2, had been designed in urgency, maybe more to respond to the Bush cabinet’s own political agenda than to respond to the needs of Iraq. In any event, the CPA would quickly lose track of the reconstruction programme and its thousands of projects and contracts (SIGIR, 2009a:111). Worse, the CPA, and beyond it the US Administration lost the oversight and control of the execution of contracts and the disbursement of money, despite adding layers of control agencies and offices. Hence, within the CPA Bremer created a programme Review Board and a Head of Contracting Activities office that were supposed to manage the reconstruction programme and the contracting operations of the CPA and of Iraqi ministries. The US Administration and military had its own audit and control agencies, and because of the first emergent reconstruction scandals, the US Congress appointed a Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction (SIGIR) in 2004. Yet, in 2011, the US Congress’s Commission on Wartime Contracting’s final report would state that:

“Given the plethora of federal agencies and departments spending money for contracts and grants to support operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is a challenge to coordinate the efforts of five Inspector Generals, the Army Audit Agency, Defense Contract Audit Agency (DCAA), Defense, and service investigative agencies (Defense Criminal Investigative Service, Naval Criminal Investigative Service, among others), and the Government Accountability Office (GAO).” (CWTC, 2011 :145)

Obviously, the CPA’s and after it, the Department of State’s misuse of billions of dollars of money for Iraq was the most scandalous failure of US occupation—in total contradiction with the UN 1483 Resolution and international laws (IRWP, 2004; Whyte 2006). But as I said before, the IRRF2 reconstruction programme, despite different redesigns by the Department of State, would continue after the CPA, under the same outsourcing principles and public-private auction contracts. Therefore, the lack of oversight and control by the US Administration on contracting operations, the majority of it financed with US money this time, would continue unabated until the end of the reconstruction programme in 2007-2008 (SIGIR, 2009a; CWTC, 2011). It was precisely this lack of oversight over contracting procedures and disbursement of money, and the lack of control over the private contractors’ operations would create a very permissive environment. It allowed for the worst market practices, such as poor delivery of contracts and sub-contracts, overcharging, embezzlement and general fraud by private contractors, US employees and Iraqi actors alike, and would be regularly denounced by the diverse audit authorities (IAMB, 2004;
In the end, the US Congress Commission on Wartime Contracting estimated that between 30 to 60 billions of US dollars had been lost to waste or fraud during the ten-year reconstruction process in Iraq and Afghanistan (CWTC, 2011).

Here, contrary to Bobbit’s definition of a market-state enforcing “incentive structures and sometimes draconian penalties”, the CPA, and beyond it the US Administration, were not willing or able to change the course and discipline the actors of the reconstruction. Firstly, by virtue of CPA regulations, foreign private contractors working for the CPA and US occupation forces were immune from any kind of prosecution in Iraq. Even if they had mismanaged or embezzled Iraqi money, they would have to be taken to court and prosecuted only in the US. Moreover, most of the biggest private actors of reconstruction in Iraq were important US multinationals, such as Halliburton, Bechtel group or Parsons Corporation and its subsidiaries, and had close connections with the Bush Administration, and sometimes even had been direct contributors to the Bush presidential campaign (Hogan et al., 2006). Therefore, incentives to ‘enforce draconian penalties’ against these US multinationals may have been seriously diminished. For example, Halliburton and its subsidiary KBR would overcharge operational costs to the CPA for more than $200 million in 2003 and 2004, but was never penalised or criminalised for it. In a different vein, Parsons and its subsidiaries received hundreds of millions of contracts for diverse reconstruction projects of the IRRF2 programme on Health, Security and Justice infrastructures (jails and police buildings). Despite having collected most of the money, Parsons failed abjectly to deliver on many of its contracts. Hence, the contracts were terminated by the US government between 2005 and 2007 (Chwastiak; SIGIR 2006). But Parsons did not have to pay any fees or reimburse contract money for the failed projects. In spite of the enormous and quasi-systematic nature of the fraud and waste of billions of Iraqi and US money, only one small company from Texas, Raman International Corporation, a military contractor, would be convicted by the US Department of Justice to pay a fee of 500,000 US dollars (SIGIR 2010:135).

2.2.5 The ‘Great Transformation’ of Iraq

Bremer and CPA senior officials were persuaded that the success of the transformation of Iraq into a market-driven society depended on a comprehensive set of reforms that needed to be executed swiftly and all at the same time. They clearly had the Eastern Europe ‘shock therapy’ model applied in the 1990s in mind (SIGIR, 2009a; Chandrasekaran, 2009). However, Bremer would definitely aim to outdo the Eastern European neoliberal reforms and restructuring in terms of the pace at which these neoliberal reforms would be engaged in
Iraq, as well as the content and scope of such reforms. In less than 14 months, Paul Bremer would issue 26 orders, around 1/3 of the total orders that would be issued by the CPA, all of which were covering the range of reforms and restructuring promoted by the Washington Consensus. In a sense, such a ‘bold’ neoliberal move of successive reforms in the span of a year was unprecedented. So much so that even the IMF was alarmed and worried about the sustainable nature of such a policy (IMF, 2003). Of course, this was in complete contradiction with all international laws (Geneva and Hague Conventions) applicable to occupied territories (Whyte 2006). I provide below two tables detailing the set of orders enacted by Bremer and their links to the Washington Consensus.
Table 1: CPA Orders toward Neoliberal Transformation of Iraq

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Order</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Trade Liberalization Policy</td>
<td>7 June 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Measures to Ensure the Independence of the Central Bank</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Trade Bank of Iraq (17 July 2003)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Reconstruction Levy (19 September 2003)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Foreign Investment (19 September 2003)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Bank Law (19 September 2003)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>New Iraqi Dinar Banknotes (14 October 2003)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-47</td>
<td>Amendments (Enforcement and extension of orders 38-39)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>Suspension of exclusive agency status of Iraqi State Company for Water Transportation (14 January 2004)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>Trade Liberalization Policy 2004 (24 February 2004)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>Central Bank Law (1 March 2004)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>Amendment to the Company Law No. 21 of 1997 (29 February 2004)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>Iraqi Communications and Media Commission (20 March 2004)</td>
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<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>Amendment to Reconstruction Levy (3 April 2004)</td>
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<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>Interim Law on Securities Markets (18 April 2004)</td>
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<tr>
<td>78</td>
<td>Facilitation of Court-Supervised Debt Resolution Procedures (19 April 2004)</td>
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<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>Amendment to the Trademarks and descriptions Law No. 21 of 1957 (26 April 2004)</td>
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<tr>
<td>83</td>
<td>Amendment to the Copyright Law (29 April 2004)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>84</td>
<td>Amendments to CPA order 37 and 49 extension of tax suspension (30 April 2004)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>87</td>
<td>Public Contracts (14 May 2004)</td>
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<tr>
<td>94</td>
<td>Banking Law of 2004 (6 June 2004)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7 CPA Orders Neoliberal Transformation of Iraq
Table 2: Washington Consensus Neo-liberal reforms and CPA Orders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Washington Consensus</th>
<th>CPA Orders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fiscal policy discipline, preventing fiscal deficits relative to GDP</td>
<td>Order 95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redirection of public spending from subsidies</td>
<td>Official cut of subsidies were planned but not realized during CPA rule.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tax reform (broad base, small rate)</td>
<td>Order 37 ; Order 38 ; Order 47 ; Order 49 ; Order 70 ; Order 84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest rates that are market determined</td>
<td>Order 18 ; Order 43 ; Order 56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive exchange rates</td>
<td>Order 43 ; Order 56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade liberalization: liberalization of imports</td>
<td>Order 12 ; Order 20 ; Order 39 ; Order 54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberalization of inward foreign direct investment</td>
<td>Order 20 ; Order 39 ; Order 40 ; Order 56 ; Order 84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privatization of State enterprises</td>
<td>Order 39 ; Order 46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deregulation (<em>reregulation</em>): abolition of regulations that impede market, enactioment of regulations that favor it.</td>
<td>Order 40 ; Order 51 ; Order 56 ; Order 64 ; Order 65 ; Order 78 ; Order 70 ; Order 74 ; Order 78 ; Order 81 ; Order 87 ; Order 94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal security for property rights</td>
<td>Order 80 ; Order 81 ; Order 83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8 Washington Consensus Reforms and CPA Orders
Beyond the mere application of Washington Consensus recipes, Bremer’s neoliberal programme responded precisely to the stated objectives of transforming Iraq into a ‘market-driven society’ and its integration into the globalised capitalist market. This was articulated around a few central orders. Hence, Orders 12, 18, 39, 40 and 81 formed the bedrock of Iraq integration and penetration by the international market. Basically, Order 12 organised the complete opening of Iraqi borders to the importation of foreign products without taxes or inspections. Order 39 allowed for foreign companies to own 100% of Iraqi assets without having to invest even 1% of the benefits in Iraq. These orders also opened the way for the transfer of Iraqi State-owned companies to foreign private interests. In a sense, it meant the possibility of the complete takeover of the Iraqi economy by foreign investment and companies (Malig, 2005). Order 18, about the independence of the Central Bank, deprived the Iraqi State of the ability to regulate interest rates. Order 40, the New Bank Law, allowed for foreign banks to penetrate the Iraqi finance market and to own 50% of an Iraqi bank. Finally, Order 81 regulated intellectual property rights in favour of the international market actors, notably in favor of big agribusiness multinationals. As noted by Docena:

“As noted by Docena:

“By removing restrictions on investments, the Order [39] denied the Iraqi State any power to regulate and control investments entering its territory. By giving foreign investors ‘national treatment’, it deprived Iraqis the option to support local business or pursue industrialization policies ... Order 81 ... facilitated the entry of multinational agricultural corporations and undermined Iraqis’ ‘food sovereignty’, or their right to define their own food and agriculture policies instead of having them subordinated to international market forces.” (2007:126)

In other words, these set of orders had clear consequences; they deprived the future Iraqi State of economic sovereignty by forcing Iraq’s complete integration into the international market.

The rest of the 26 orders were expanding, reinforcing or completing the central ones. Hence, for example, Orders 37 and 49 would flatten corporate and individual tax rates from 40 to 15% for 2003 and subsequent years. In the context of the liberalisation of the Iraqi market and the reduction of state operations, Order 51 would terminate the monopoly of the Iraqi State Company for Maritime Transport as agent in Iraqi ports. In the same vein, Bremer had planned the complete privatisation of all State-Owned Companies and State-Owned Enterprises (SOC/SOE) and their dozens of factories that were producing all ranges of products such as olive oil, soap, food and agricultural

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products, fertilisers, clothes, concrete or washing-machines. Before the invasion of Iraq, the Iraqi SOC/SOE were employing around 500,000 people and accounted for 90% of the country's industrial capacity. However, as consequences of decades of embargo and dictatorship, many were in a very dire state and some needed important investments to properly restart production (SIGIR, 2009a).

In any event, the CPA “plan of transition” towards the privatisation of the SOC/SOE was conceived with the same ideological ruthlessness that animated the whole of Bremer’s reign (Chandrasekaran, 2009). Yet, they did not concern the Iraqi oil, electricity and finance-related enterprises because of the political sensitiveness of such sectors inside Iraq and abroad. Nevertheless, the plan concerned the remaining 153 Iraqi SOC/SOE that were divided into different categories after the technical assessment of the CPA staff. According to RAND, 39 of the SOC/SOE were not considered viable enough to be privatised and therefore were to be reclassified as government agencies. Twenty-five were planned to be closed down right away, while the remaining 85 were supposed to be privatised (Dobbins et al., 2009:225). In conjunction with Order 39, that means 85 were candidates for foreign investment and ownership. There was also another part of this transition plan, although less advertised but with direct consequences for many Iraqis. In order to render the viable Iraq SOE more attractive for foreign investment, but also to keep in line with the market-state objective to cut governmental public spending and thus eliminate GDP consumption by the state, the plan “called for 103,000 employees to be fired or retired in 2004 (65,000 through forced retirements, 38,000 through firings); and 7,500 each in 2005 and 2006.” (Dobbins et al., 2009:226).

Obviously, the grand privatisation plan would never function, mainly because of the lack of foreign investors frightened by the quagmire that Iraq soon became. Also many foreign companies would find it more beneficial to export their products directly to Iraq than to invest there itself (ICG, 2004). Moreover, Bremer and the new Iraqi elite faced a strong resistance from the people on the ground against the privatisation scheme. Then, not able to sell the Iraqi State industrial units, the CPA decided to leave all state factories half-functioning, idle or dying. Worse, the CPA decided to clear all their bank accounts and assets, basically preventing most of the SOE from relaunching production. Again, it was the same ideological stand, ‘all or nothing’, that was making no differentiation between crippled and non-functional factories, and the ones that only needed very few investments in order to fully operate again and participate in the reconstruction of the country (Chandrasekaran 2009). Likewise, arguing that the previous US embargo regulations prohibited dealing with Iraqi State institutions, the CPA prevented Iraqi SOC/SOE from participating in the US-led reconstruction programme, even from bidding for subcontracts (Brinkley, 2007; Schwartz, 2008). Similarly, the CPA was planning to drastically reduce the governmental system of subsidies, which until then had per-
mitted the Iraqi economy and Iraqis to survive during the embargo years. Notably, the CPA and Bremer were in favor of cutting off the Oil-for-Food Programme that was benefiting all Iraqis. They were also willing to cut off the subsidies for cooking gas, oil and electricity that was delivered to the public. The CPA considered that the subsidy system cost around half of the Iraqi budget, while the State-Owned Enterprises were consuming yearly around 500 millions of US dollars in governmental subsidies (Dobbins et al., 2009). Yet, the CPA soon realised that they would not be able to cut either the Oil-for-Food Programme nor the general subsidies because of the chaos that it might provoke (SIGIR, 2009a).\[163\]

However, they realised soon that by preventing the Iraqi State-Owned Enterprises from renewing production, they had an alternative way of effectively cutting a large range of subsidies. For example, until the invasion of Iraq, Iraqi farmers were able to buy vehicles like tractors or trucks, but also fertilisers and pesticides at subsidised prices directly from SOE. As these SOE mostly stopped their production, stocks of such products were dramatically reduced. For another example, in 2003-2004 the local production of fertilisers by SOE declined by 90% (Brinkley, 2007). Then, the CPA would reluctantly distribute what remained of the fertilisers, pesticides, but at double the price paid by the farmers the year before the invasion (Eunjung Cha, 2004). And to the astonishment of the farmers, the CPA announced that the subsidised government programme for seeds, fertilisers and pesticides would end the next year. Worse, the CPA intention was for the State to not buy all farmers’ crops anymore, as was the rule before the invasion. Basically, the CPA was trying to force Iraqi farmers to integrate to the international market leaving them at the mercy of foreign agribusiness companies (Eunjung Cha, 2004; Looney 2004; Schwartz, 2008; Brown, 2015). All in all, the CPA staff were able to announce that in the space of a year or so they had succeeded in reducing state subsidies of around 250 million dollars. But as I will show later on, this will have dire consequences.

As I said earlier, the American project for the transformation of Iraq was not limited to economic governance and policies. If economic governance and policies were the core of the project, the radical transformation of the political architecture of the country\[164\] as well as its social realities were directly linked to it. In this frame, the development of civil society was considered a fundamental objective for the success of the “democratization process”. As recalled

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163 The CPA also had the plan to transform the programme into a trade auction. Then they also tried to see how they could have monetised the whole programme by delivering cash or credit cards to Iraqi households instead of the governmental delivery of goods and food. However, at the end of Bremer’s reign they would have renounced all these plans. (SIGIR, 2009, Chandrasekaran 2009)

164 I will approach it more in detail in the chapter about the formation of the new state and the reconfiguration of the political space.
by Lafourcade, architects of the transformation of Iraq, such as Larry Diamond, within the US Administration or the CPA, envisaged civil society as “the protector of collective values and interests of the society and the base for the limitation of State power” (Lafourcade, 2007:15). However, two important things need to be mentioned here. First, the persisting efforts of the CPA and of US agencies such as USAID to ideologically convert Iraqi society to the principles of neoliberal rationality. This was a comprehensive and constructivist approach that concerned all sectors of society. In a sense this was seen as part of the ‘democratic package’ that Iraqis had to adopt. Hence, since the first days of the invasion of Iraq, USAID had already contracted private firms to transform the whole Iraqi educational system. But this was not limited to that alone.

As studied by Docena, the “silent battalions of democracy”, US private contractors such as Research Triangle Institute and governmental think tanks, National Endowment for Democracy and its affiliates the International Republican Institute and National Democratic Institute, would soon travel all over Iraq in order to literally nurture local elites, managers and businessmen into becoming the “policy champions” of the neoliberal transformation of Iraq (Docena, 2005). These “battalions” were scanning the countryside and towns for people who had influence or powerful positions within Iraqi society, and that were considered “not rejectionist” of American presence and its policies in Iraq, and could therefore become a ‘legitimate’ political or civil society elite. The private contractors and think tanks were organizing trainings and seminars all over the country about topics such as “economic development”, local future prospects, “integration into the global market” (Docena, 2005). In the countryside, the CPA and USAID envoys from Development Alternatives Incorporated, a private firm contracted for 40 million US dollars to “revitalize the agricultural sector”, were teaching farmers the new agrarian market system that would be modeled on the US agricultural system (Eunjung Cha, 2004). Essentially, the programme consisted of learning about the market approach, food processing training and the development of micro-loans (ibid, 2004).

The teaching of the fundamentals of neoliberal society and entrepreneurial ethos to what remained of the old Iraqi State and ministries was such an important goal that it was discussed and monitored between the Department of Defense leadership, Rumsfeld, Zakheim, and the CPA. The goal consisted of “…training the Iraqi ministries on procurement, contracting, finance, shipping, logistics, [of the] market-based approach.” (Rumsfeld Memo, 2003-11-19, Zakheim). In the Green Zone, it was Bremer himself and his economic “Czar”, Peter MacPherson, who were organizing ‘Monday nights’ forums with top Iraqi officials and ‘shock therapy’ specialists from Eastern Europe and the IMF (Foote et al, 2004). Basically, the CPA and the US Administration were trying to create and mobilize a favorable constituency, relying on political elites and a new civil society converted to neoliberal ideas and reforms.
In reality, the political and social costs of neoliberal reforms and the restructuring and resistance they provoke, greatly undermine, in most cases, the legitimacy of governments that undertake them - even if they are not simply leading to irreversible political crises and civil conflict. Neoliberal militants in the US Administration and agencies were very well aware of this dilemma, the transformation they were planning for Iraq needed more than the support of friendly political elites. Hence, USAID stated that “Even if state elites propose reforms—for example, to privatize state industries, improve the tax system or crack down on smuggling and bribery—these reforms may not be sustainable unless society is educated about the need for them and mobilized to support them.” (Quoted in Docena, 2005: 24). However, one needs to read the different accounts of the CPA rule in Iraq from privileged spectators such as journalist Rajiv Chandrasekaran to understand how much this attempt to radically transform Iraqi society was animated by a mixture of blatant paternalism and market fundamentalism (2009). But it is maybe Bremer himself who best reveals it. In his memoirs, he recalls the creation of the famous “Monday nights” with Peter MacPherson in these terms:

“‘You’re an educator, Peter,’ I said. ‘Do you think we can teach influential Iraqis the basics of a free-market economy? We certainly can try.’ So began two months of Monday night economic seminars that became quite popular among people from the ministries, Iraq’s nascent ‘private sector,’ and younger potential political leaders.” (Bremer, 2006: 76-77)

Second, the last element of the neoliberal transformation of Iraq was the decentralisation of the Iraqi political structure. In March 2004, after rounds of bitter negotiations, Iraqi political actors and Bremer agreed to a formal return of sovereignty to an Iraqi Interim Government in June 2004 followed by a constitutional process and legislative elections. Yet, they also agreed to have a Transitional Authority Law (TAL) that would function as an “Interim Constitution.” In actual fact, it would be more of a legal frame that would constrain the whole constitutional process (Arato, 2009). Within the TAL, the federal nature of the new Iraqi State was clearly stated, as was the dividing of the

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country into 18 Governorates plus one Kurdish Region (which gathered some governorates and other territories). Baghdad, as the capital of Iraq, also became a separate governorate.

In April 2004, Bremer issued Order 61 enacting Local Government Powers which considerably strengthened the power and autonomy of Governorates and Local Authorities. Basically, the TAL and Order 61, made up the substance for the future Iraqi Federal System. It would be a radically decentralised Federal State (SIGIR, 2009a). Of course, a large range of considerations led the US Administration, and especially Kurdish political elites, to promote federalism in Iraq. However, what is of interest here is precisely the fact that federalism is a central element in the market-state political architecture. In a sense, it is the institutional element that directly links political institutions to the market. Notably, Bobbitt states that it permits a better penetration and integration within the global market. And as noted by Costantini, in post-2003 Iraq, the “...wide array of economic and administrative prerogatives granted to local authorities...” and the lack of central control would create a “...system of decentralized competitiveness among Iraqi governorates...” that would be very beneficial for foreign capital penetration (Costantini, 2013:268). But the federal architecture has also another characteristic that has been perfectly captured and described by Frederick Hayek in the late 1930s. For Hayek, Interstate Federalism or the balance of power between the federation and the states (and the Iraqi case is quite close to this because of the importance of the devolution of powers between the Federal State and the Governorates), means that neither the federation nor the states would be in a position to seriously interfere and even less, command economic activity (Hayek, 1939:266). In other words, at a certain level, federalism would act as an institutional protection for the market and (in Iraq) to prevent the return to “socialist planning of economic life” (ibid). As recalled by Docena and others, during the drafting of the new constitution in 2005, the US occupiers would make sure that important provisions of the TAL, in particular concerning the Federal State and the neoliberal frame would remain untouched (Docena, 2005; Al Ali, 2014: 91).

2.2.6 Continuous neoliberal trend

In its own right, the question of Iraqi oil is very interesting, as it encapsulates the pervasive characteristics of the American occupation of Iraq—denial, conflicting interests and invasive neoliberalism. Hence, contrary to the complete denials offered by the Bush Administration and the ‘Big Oil’ companies, Greg Muttit demonstrates with strong evidence that Iraqi oil (around 11% of the proven world reserves) was clearly an important factor in the decision-making about this war. Notably, the plan of forcefully reintroducing Iraqi oil into the
world market represented the overlapping interests of energy security for the US and its allies on one side, and of the Big Oil companies on the other (Muttitt, 2001: XXV). But maybe more importantly, Muttitt’s study shows precisely how much the three main objectives of the US invasion of Iraq concerning Iraqi oil were inextricably linked. They were, in this order: to reintroduce quickly Iraqi oil into a tight world market in order to help stabilise it; to liberalise the Iraqi oil economy and to create a friendly “playing field” for the US and UK Big Oil companies. Worse, they were clearly contradictory with the needs of the Iraqi reconstruction and the democratic aspirations of the Iraqi people. In any case, the liberalisation of Iraqi oil was the central undertaking that worked in articulation with the other two overlapping objectives, namely assuring US and UK energy security and the interests of Big Oil companies. Yet, in this frame, many different options had been envisaged by the different institutional or private actors for the transformation of the Iraqi oil economy. For example, the US Department of State’s Future of Iraq Project (FOI) working group on Oil and Energy placed plans for the liberalisation of the Iraqi oil economy within three options: the semi-privatisation of the Iraqi National Oil Company (INOC) producing oil under the Iraqi government's oversight and control; a public-private partnership consortium for the oversight of the production and operation of the oil economy; and finally the complete privatisation of Iraqi oil based on a model of the de-monopolisation of Iraqi oil production and marketisation. Obviously, it was the third option that had the favour of the FOI working group (FOI, 2003). However, the US Administration and the CPA were clearly aware that such projects were not sustainable while Iraq was under direct US occupation (Zedalis, 2009). Besides, not only did the oil economy remain the main, if not the sole, purveyor of resources for the country, but it also was seen as a symbol in the Iraqi quest for independence since the end of the monarchy. Therefore, the CPA and US Administration would concentrate on the restoration of oil production capabilities and infrastructure during the first years of the occupation. That said, they would outsource the whole process of restoring oil production to US companies and notably KBR, a subsidiary of Halliburton, with terrible results. The $5.4 billion of this part of the general IRRF 2 programme would be paid by using US funds along with Iraqi money from DFI (SIGIR, 2009a).

Meanwhile the Iraqi Oil Ministry staff and heads of the Iraqi State oil companies would receive ‘briefings’ from the BearingPoint company in order to imagine the future shape of the Iraqi oil sector and its need for structural reform. Needless to say, the briefing insisted on the extreme importance of attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and therefore the necessity to establish a legal framework, contracts with profitable returns, and investment protections that would please foreign oil companies (Muttit, 2011). In reality,

166 Notably, when the Ba’ath Party in power enacted the Law 69 on the definitive nationalisation of oil in 1972, it was immensely popular.
Muttitt demonstrates that for the years 2003-2004, the actors involved in the reconstruction of the oil economy in Iraq would clash around two opposing directions. First, the US government and big foreign oil companies were pushing for a reconstruction focused on the rapid development of all Iraqi oil reserves. This required huge investments in the midterm. Average estimates ranged around at least $20 billion dollars, and the use of the latest state-of-the-art technologies, which, incidentally the Iraqi oil industry did not master. Obviously, Iraq could not afford such investments, nor did it have the human resources to reduce the technological gap (Muttitt, 2011). This logic therefore required large injections of foreign capital (FDI) and the massive intervention of Big Oil companies through notably PSAs. This would ultimately lead to the liberalisation of Iraqi oil either through direct privatisation of the oil economy, or at least through the return of PSA-based operating contracts through foreign companies. In contrast, many Iraqi oil experts and some Iraqi politicians, but also the powerful Union of Oil Workers, denounced a policy that would ultimately deprive the Iraqi national industry, and by extension the people of Iraq, of its oil resources. They proposed instead a reconstruction controlled by the Iraqi oil industry around the hydrocarbon fields already in operation, which required much less investment and would permit the gradual integration of new technologies under the control of the Iraqi national industry.

But as we saw, it was the CPA and US foreign companies that were in charge of Iraqi oil reconstruction, therefore they were able to advance it in their favour. In any events, the push toward liberalisation of Iraqi oil would strengthen after the handover of Power in June 2004. Under pressure from the IMF, the US Administration, the Big Oil companies, and the Interim Government of Allawi would present a programme of semi-privatisation of a reconstituted Iraqi National Oil Company (INOC), and the auctioning of 50 known oil fields to foreign companies through PSA. Yet, Allawi would confront huge resistance towards such a programme, most notably from the Iraqi Oil Trade Unions. In any event, the rise of violence and then the descent into civil war in 2005-2007 would again stall liberalisation and oilfield auction plans in Iraq, but not in the Kurdish Region.

In 2005 after a difficult campaign carried out in a country already on the verge of civil war, a new Iraqi constitution was passed by popular referendum.

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167 Production Sharing Contracts (PSCs), or Production Sharing Agreements (PSA). These are individual contracts negotiated between an oil-producing country and an oil company. The contractor oil company is permitted to carry out all exploration, production and marketing in respect of the oil in the designated area, for a given period of time or until recovery cost and agreed fees are earned by the contractor. These kinds of agreements are considered by political and social actors as very detrimental to the national interest of the oil host countries. Technical-Service Contracts (TSCs) are used mainly for existing oil fields, where the key concern is infrastructure rehabilitation and maintenance. They are much less valuable for Foreign Oil Company (FOC). On this question and the question of the privatisation of Iraqi Oil through PSA see also Muttitt, Greg. *Crude Designs: the rip-off of Iraq's oil wealth*. Platform, 2005.
Apart from a few minor differences, the new constitution was the extension of the TAL that was signed a year before by the new political elites and the CPA. In particular, it reproduced nearly identically the Federal System proposed by the TAL and Bremer’s Order 61. It accorded the same radical devolution of power to governorates and localities in terms of budget, resource management, and also the possibility to merge governorates into regions to obtain constitutional autonomy (Iraqi Constitution). However, interpretation of the law relating to decision-making and resource management between all the different levels of the federal government, the governorates, and the provincial councils would remain a source of confusion and heated debate between different Iraqi actors. Therefore, necessitating constant legislative work to refine and specify how the devolution of powers in the federal system should work (ICG, 2008c).

In any event, the question of the management and the development of the oil economy and the resources it provides appears to be directly linked with the question of federalism (Al Mehaidi, 2006; Zedalis, 2009). Given that the operative oil fields are mostly present in and around the Kurdistan region in the north, and around Basra in the south of the country, the question of who was entitled to monitor natural resources and their products would became an extremely sensitive issue from 2006 and onwards. For many actors, the central State needed to be in charge of monitoring the hydrocarbon in the entire Iraqi territory and redistributing the benefits of the hydrocarbon production fairly to the regions and governorates. For others, the federal regions or governorates where the oil fields are located should have had the last word about the production, the development and the sharing of hydrocarbon resources. If the main argument on this question was to remain between the Kurdish regional authority and the Iraqi Federal State from the year 2006 and onwards, in Basra governorate too, voices would call for a special share of the oil. To argue their case, both Kurds and pro-federalist political actors would speak of the continuous history of oppression, dispossession and marginalisation of the Kurdish

168 In his precise and dry study of the “legal dimension” of the energy (Oil and Gas) economy in Iraq, Zedalis summarises the quasi-inextricable range of controversies that link the new Iraqi Federal System and the question of oil: “First is the on-going tug-of-war between the federal government in Baghdad and the regional government of Kurdistan over their respective roles with regard to oil and gas resources. ... Second is the fact that the so-called Dubai Annexes to accompany the February 2007 Iraqi federal oil and gas framework law categorize Iraq’s oil and gas resources in such a way as to result in the Iraq National Oil Company (INOC) and the Ministry of Oil controlling the overwhelming preponderance. Third would be the distinction drawn in the Iraqi Constitution and picked up on in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)'s 2007 Oil and Gas Law ... between present and future oil and gas fields. Fourth is the sharing of revenues, ...whether carried out by foreign entities and partners, or the units of the host government. And fifth, the acceptability of using the production-sharing contract (PSC) to induce foreign entities to assist in the development of the nation's oil and gas resources, especially given that such forms of contract create extensive resource-related rights in holders of such, rather than relegating them to the more subservient position associated with some variant of a service contract.” (Zedalis, 2009:295)
and Southern areas by the central state during the previous decades, but then again also of what appeared as mismanagement and corruption by the New Iraqi State (Visser, 2007). In reality, the rift between the Kurdistan region and the Federal State in Baghdad was profound. The Iraqi political actors in Baghdad in the parliament and at the level of the executive authority were caught between pressure from the US Administration and IMF on one side, and the Iraqi street workers’ and Iraqi oil workers’ unions on the other, on the question of the liberalisation of oil economy and the type of contracts for the exploration and exploitation of the oil fields given to foreign oil companies.

Although a good part of the Iraqi leaders and the head of the Oil Ministry were willing to go as far as the IMF or US Administration wanted with the privatisation of oil, the internal pressure was just too much to bear. Therefore, until 2008 the Iraqi government was proposing TSC contracts to foreign companies with a very low return on investment (Serene, 2013). Meanwhile, without consultation with the Iraqi Federal State, the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG)—which was not bearing the same pressure from unions or from the population, and had promulgated its own Regional Law about Oil and Gas management in 2007—was proposing much more advantageous contracts and direct Production Sharing Agreements to the major oil companies and therefore attracting much of their investments. For the Iraqi Government in Baghdad this was not only unfair competition but a breach of the articles 111 and 112 of the Constitution relative to oil and gas revenues. However, the KRG was arguing that as a regional government, the constitution gave them the right to explore and develop unexploited oil fields in the area under their control (ICG, 2008c). In any events, from 2008 onwards, US Administration and Big Oil Companies would increase their pressure on the Iraqi government following two different strategies. On one side the US Administration was pushing for the adoption of a liberal Hydrocarbon Law by the Iraqi Parliament similar to the one passed by the Kurdish Regional Govern-
ment, and that could reconcile the Kurdish Regional Government and the Federal State.\textsuperscript{173} On the other, ‘American advisers’ within the Iraqi Oil Ministry, led by Minister Hussain al-Sharistani, would directly craft new types of TSC contracts that would be more beneficial to foreign companies such as Exxon, Shell or BP (Kramer, 2008). The efforts towards a Hydrocarbon Law would not be rewarded. Facing multiple internal pressures the Al Maliki government would not be able to gather enough political support within the Iraqi parliament to pass the famous Law\textsuperscript{174}, and from 2007, all pushes in this direction would fail dramatically. However, the second strategy would prove more successful. Between 2008 and 2009, the Iraqi government would auction dozens of fields, that would account for around 60% of proven reserves, to foreign companies and joint ventures (Muttitt, 2011:330). Finally, beyond the evident symbol it represents for Iraqis, the question of oil epitomises the fundamental challenges introduced by the violent neoliberal restructuring of the Iraq national state. As noted by Abdul-Rahman:

“This contention over the hydrocarbons law and revenue sharing stems from the fact that there is not yet an agreed upon social contract binding the state together. Put differently, Iraqis have yet to agree on the most fundamental of state functions and where sovereignty lies.” (Abdul-Rahman, 2010:10)

Beside the question of oil, the movement towards the neoliberalisation of Iraq did not stop with the official return of Iraq sovereignty in 2004 and the rise of general violence in 2005-2007. There is a good reason for that, the US Administration would keep control of the IRFF2 reconstruction programme and over the Iraqi funds (DFI) until 2008; they would still maintain ‘advisors’ within Iraqi ministries; and of course, they would maintain a strong military presence until 2011. In other words, they would still have a heavy influence—if not the power to compel—on the political and economic life of Iraq. Moreover, the fact that the CPA led by Bremer had spent all but $3 billion of the Iraqi funds (DFI) meant that when the new Interim Iraqi Government took power in 2004, they had a budget in complete disarray. As noted by Le Billion, the new Iraqi Interim Government was at the mercy of the US and international financial aid—such financial imbalance would persist until the years 2007-2008 (2008). Furthermore, as the new sovereign Iraq entered a cycle of

\textsuperscript{173} On the liberal nature of the proposed Iraqi law, one of the Iraqi negotiators of the draft would write: “The law is investment friendly. It encourages private enterprise and welcomes the international oil companies (IOCs) to work in partnership with the Iraq National Oil Company (INOC). They have a recognised role to play in the transfer of up-to-date state-of-the-art technology, technical and managerial training of Iraqis, and in investment capital. Selection from among pre-qualified companies will be made through tendering in a transparent and accountable process.” (Shafiq, 2007:4)

\textsuperscript{174} See different critics of the Law on Oil and Gas formulated by different Iraqi oil experts. For example, Jiyad Ahmed M., “Oil and Gas Law in Iraq - Comprehensive and Critical Assessment”, 2007 (Resource not available on the web anymore)
renegotiation of its enormous international debt with the Club of Paris, IMF, World Bank, and UNIDO, these institutions would request the continuation of the neoliberal restructuring programme in exchange for loans and debt reductions.  

From the year 2004 onwards these international financial institutions would all ask or push for the reinforcement or extension of “macro-economic” stabilisation, cuts in government expenditures, an end to subsidies, the opening up of the Iraqi economy to foreign investment and the “reform” of State-Owned Enterprises. In this regard, it is interesting to consider the impact of the first Stand-By Arrangement (SBA) with the IMF negotiated by the Iraqi Interim Government and then the Transitional Government of Ibrahim al Ja'afari in 2004-2005. First, the signature of a SBA providing a loan of 685 million dollars with the IMF and the reduction of the Iraqi debt by the Club of Paris, were negotiated by the two international institutions as a single package. Hence, the Club of Paris was proposing to write off 80% of the Iraqi debt it held, around 40 billion dollars, in three stages. First, 30% of the debt would be written off unconditionally; then, the signing of a SBA, with the typical IMF reform packages attached to it, would grant a 30% reduction of the debt with the Club of Paris, and finally a further 20% reduction would be granted upon the completion of the IMF three-year reform programme (Looney, 2006). Clearly, Iraqi leaders were cornered and despite protests from the newly elected Iraqi parliament, a reluctant Prime Minister al Ja'afari would sign the SBA with the IMF. Beyond the traditional expectations about the need for macro-economic stabilisation, governance improving and transition toward market economy, the SBA was imposing precise criteria concerning Iraqi budget and finances (Looney, 2006). Basically, the IMF was taking over Iraq financial and economic sovereignty, and even more it was taking the lead over the Central Bank.

175 On this question see also Herring, Eric, and Glen Rangwala. *Iraq in Fragments: The Occupation and its Legacy*. Cornell University Press, 2006. In particular, the chapter: “Disciplined by Debt”.


177 Looney make a precise summary of the criteria imposed by the IMF, that may be worthwhile to be put here: 1. A floor on net international reserves of the Central Bank of Iraq (CBI). 2. A ceiling on lending to the government and the private sector by the CBI. 3. A ceiling on the primary deficit of the government. 4. A ceiling on the government wage and pension bill. 5. A floor on the revenue of oil-related state-owned enterprises, including those remitted to the
of Iraq, which was supposed to be an independent institution. What is striking is that despite devastating criticism of Bremer’s ‘Shock Therapy’ experimentation the year before, the IMF was pushing for “more and not less” neoliberal policies (Al-Ali, 2004). In reality, the IMF had written for Iraq a typical IMF structural adjustment and austerity programme as it had done for dozens of countries around the world before.

“The program is pure fiscal austerity in a country where the real unemployment rate may approach 50 percent and the performance of Iraq's infrastructure has fallen below pre-war levels. ...Given the unlikelihood that investors will flock to Iraq any time soon, is monetary and fiscal discipline at apparently any cost a worthwhile goal? Might not stepped-up government expenditures and job creation create a more stable short- to medium-term environment? It is as if the Fund were writing a program for an oil-rich transition country like Azerbaijan rather than a war-torn country with an ongoing insurgency.” (Looney, 2006:44)

Obviously, Iraq was not the first country that was trapped into IMF restructuring reform programmes because of its debt. Quite the opposite, as Al-Ali notes:

“Post-Saddam Iraq offers a perfect illustration of how the industrialized world has used debt as a tool to force developing nations to surrender sovereignty over their economies. Iraq had no bargaining chip—save its economic weakness—with which it could have forced Paris Club members to write off a greater portion of debt”. (Al-Ali, 2004)

Caught between the US State with thousands of boots on the ground and dozens of “advisors” in each Iraqi ministry on one side, and the IMF having a strong hand on its economic and finance policies, it is not really surprising that the successive Iraqi cabinets would pursue more or less, sometimes reluctantly, sometimes good-heartedly, the general project of neoliberal transformation in Iraq. 178 Hence, in the year 2006, following IMF recommendations, the Iraqi government would begin its “fuel liberalization program”, that is cutting off all subsidies on fuel and gas products which would provoke a literal explosion of prices notably for cooking gas and diesel (Gunter, 2007). In the following years, the economic priorities for the Iraqi government was to cut


178 See also the personal account of Zaid Al Ali: “At expert meetings that I attended and that involved constitutional committee members, the representatives of major international organizations put their cards on the table: all wanted the greatest possible liberalization of the industry.” (2014: p163-165).
off the whole range of governmental subsidies for electricity, water, agricultural products and so on. However, the internal political price to pay for it seemed to have been too heavy to bear. Therefore, the IMF would have to wait until 2011 to see the first measures concerning the reduction of subsidies for electricity (Gunter, 2013). In the same vein, the Iraqi government would sign an International Compact with the World Bank, the UN and the IMF in 2007, in order to get a new set of loans and payment facilities. These agreements were promoting the same kind of neoliberal restructuring—reinforcement of the decentralisation process; enhancement of private sector; transition toward market-driven society and integration into the global market (UN, 2007). In this frame, the reform and privatisation of the SOE in the mid-term was considered a central objective for the international institutions. Here again, the Iraqi government was very reluctant to actually privatise and lay off state workers. Therefore, the Iraqi government would mostly leave them untouched, and yet without having the ability to seriously revive the SOE sector.

Interestingly enough, the change of direction towards the SOE came from the US, more precisely from a DoD division directly linked with the US military in Iraq. From 2006 to 2011, the Task Force for Business and Stability Operations (TFBSO) led by Deputy Under Secretary of Defense Brinkley would initiate a programme that aimed to revitalise the State-Owned Enterprises in Iraq. To the astonishment and the uproar of a big part of the US Administration and notably the USAID, Brinkley was willing to spend 200 million dollars in order to put back more than a hundred SOE into effective operation and production (Chandrasekaran, 2007, SIGIR, 2009a). In reality, Brinkley would not receive the financial means necessary to fulfill its revitalisation programme due to the resistance in the US Administration, and also financing conflicts with the Iraqi Government (Schwartz, 2008; Brinkley, 2007). However, it interesting to see that in 2006 and onwards, the US Administration and the US military still had the capacity to directly impact the industrialisation policy of the Iraqi State. But more important is the context in which this attempt to revive the SOE had been made. At the end of 2006, the US Congress and Military were revisiting Iraqi policy and counterinsurgency strategies. In short, one of the assessments by these different decision makers of US policy in Iraq was that the continuous degradation of social and economic conditions of life of Iraqis was a crucial factor—if not the determinant one—contributing to the rise of general violence and insurgency (Baker III, 2006; Brinkley, 2009). In this regard, the US military in Iraq was involved since the creation of CERP, to fund multiple small-scale projects that had precisely the objective

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of improving local services and local economic life, even if it meant injecting money into local SOEs (Petraeus, 2006).

It is in this context that Brinkley tried to launch his national programme of SOE revitalisation and more broadly the revitalisation of industrial sector in Iraq. Facing huge resistance from the US Administration, he wrote a defense of his programme and assessment of Iraq’s economic problems in Military Review, the official magazine of the US Army in 2007. Declaring himself a capitalist, Brinkley wrote nonetheless a devastating critique of the general neoliberal programmes imposed by Bremer in the CPA and then by the US Administration and international institutions. In few words, he described how the SOE liberalisation programme and trade liberalisation literally killed Iraqi industrial and agriculture capacities but also any possibility of growing the Iraqi private sector. This conjunction of neoliberal policies had plunged the country into depression and massively increased unemployment (Brinkley, 2007). He therefore pushed for a different set of economic policies, the revitalisation of SOEs and notably the “...restoration of factory bank account balances in state-owned banks”, the implementation of fair trade practices for the Iraqi economy, notably the “...establishment of standard tariffs and trade policies”, and the re-establishment “...of intra-Iraqi demand” (ibid, 2007). In other words, Brinkley asked for the end of the neoliberalisation restructuring programme that had been applied since 2003. Obviously, Deputy Under Secretary of Defense Brinkley’s call for change would remained almost unanswered. Hence, Iraqi governments would keep the same policy of total imports liberalisation as the one promulgated by the CPA—with a unique 5% reconstruction levy tax on a few different products—for more than a decade. This was, to be exact, until June 2015, when the Iraqi Customs Law No.22 voted in 2010 would finally begin to be applied.181

On a more general level, the efforts toward liberalisation of trade and a market-driven society were directly mentioned at least twice within the Constitution adopted in 2005. Hence, Article 25 of the Iraqi Constitution would “...guarantee the reform of the Iraqi economy in accordance with modern economic principles ... and the encouragement and the development of the private sector”, while Article 26 “...guarantees the encouragement of investment in the various sectors”. In order to create a “...favorable environment for attracting foreign investment” the Iraqi parliament voted in the Iraqi Federal Investment Law in 2006, which would come into force in January 2007. As noted by Sami Shubber, the Iraqi legislators did their best in order to encourage investment:

“In order to achieve its objectives of encouraging investment and the transfer of technology, the Federal Investment Law offers very generous incentives, facilities and guarantees, such as exemption from taxation and fees, non-nationalisation of investment projects and free repatriation of capital and benefits, to give but a few examples.” (Shubber, 2009:12)

For Shubber, the very liberal nature of the new Iraqi law on investment—in fact, one of the most liberal in the whole Arab world—would be perfectly in line “with the free market policy adopted by the Iraqi government” (2009:25,71). In fact, with few minor changes about the rights concerning foreign ownership of Iraqi land, but with the introduction of business secrecy provisions, the Investment Law was very close to Bremer Order 39 on Foreign Investment. In a sense, these attractive policies for foreign investment would have a certain success, as the flow of FDI in Iraq would evolve, despite the terrible situation of the country, from a negative figure in the year 2000 toward a positive $5 billion in the year 2013—around 2.5% Iraq GDP.\(^\text{182}\) On this topic, the study of Costantini on the impact of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) on state-building and economic stabilisation in Iraq is revealing (2013). She shows how much foreign capital penetration had been entangled with the movement of the radical decentralisation of the country and the application of neoliberal policies on the trade and public sectors. However, this FDI would have a destabilising effect not only on the Iraqi economy but also on the political situation (Costantini, 2013).

In reality, the whole post-2003 period, which began with the ‘shock therapy’ enforced by the CPA and followed with IMF disciplinary neoliberal policies, represents the forceful and violent integration of Iraq, as an “…integral and subordinate part…”, into the international globalised market under “US-led governance” (Herring and Rangwala, 2006:258). As recalled by Herring and Rangwala, it is the Iraqi Government’s whole mode of governance (“…preferences, assessing methods to realise preferences, mechanisms of implementation of methods…”) that has been reshaped to acclimate globalising forces (idem). In other words, neoliberal rationality would become the main principle of governmentality in Iraq. However, the neoliberal utopia designed by the US Administration would explode in contact with the conflicting realities of the occupation, the necessity of the reconstruction and needs of the Iraqi population. In particular, it would fail to produce the kind of efficient market-state contemplated by Bobbitt. Instead it would produce a dystopian economy and a ‘failed’ state. That is, a fragmented and illegitimate institution incapable of organising and producing politics, nor providing Iraqi society with basic security and needs. In reality, the new Iraqi State, as an integral instrument of the globalisation “...is not representing Iraq in a globalising

world: it is representing the globalising world in Iraq.” (Herring and Rangwala, 2006:258).
2.3 Failures and Dystopian Economics

In a sense, one could say that the US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq was the encounter of two fundamental misunderstandings. On one hand, it seems that the US Administration was convinced that Iraqis would welcome the US troops and civilians as liberators after the fall of Saddam, granting them the legitimacy not only for regime change but to transform the country radically. On the other hand, Iraqis, whatever their inclination toward the US and its occupation, were truly persuaded that the mighty America would swiftly reconstruct the country and the Iraqi State, putting Iraq back to a kind of economic development track that many Iraqis believed to had been abruptly stopped since Saddam’s accession to power and the war with Iran. Obviously, and to the astonishment of everyone there, both assumptions or beliefs never materialised. As shown by Herring and Rangwala, the constant lack of legitimacy on the American side would push the Bush Administration to resort to violence and coercion (2006). But on the other side I concur with Yousif, who says that the consequences of the terrible economic policies followed by the US in Iraq have been clearly overlooked by many analysts and even academics, when trying to understand the Iraqi path towards the massive violence between 2005 and 2007 (Yousif, 2007). In reality, the conjunction of a US-led reconstruction based on neoliberal rationality and the market-state principle—the public-private contracting scheme—and the neoliberal restructuring of Iraq’s economy and politics that I described earlier, would bear toxic results. And it is precisely on the failures and the consequences of the neoliberal reconstruction and restructuring of Iraq and on Iraqi society that I will focus on in this chapter.

183 In reality, as described by International Crisis Group, from the beginning, Iraqi views on the American occupation were “ambiguous” at best, when not clearly hostile (ICG, 2003:3).
2.3.1 Reconstruction failures

The first thing that is blindingly obvious when one looks to the main reconstruction process, from 2003 to 2007-2008, is how much all Iraqis has been kept away from it. As I described it in the earlier chapter, Iraqis were barely involved in its grand design, which was orchestrated by the Bush Administration, the CPA and the US Army. The Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) had almost no say about it, and neither did the “new” Iraqi Ministries (Allawi, 2007; ICG, 2004:11). And when they were consulted, such as the Iraqi Ministry of Health, they were mostly not listened to (SIGIR, 2009a:109). The same goes with the implementation of the reconstruction plan. Iraqi State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) were all barred from bidding for contracts even though they constituted the bulk of the Iraqi enterprises that had the size, the technology, the work force and the essential know-how of the old Iraqi economic and infrastructure system, and which were a requisite part for the effective reconstruction and the upgrading of Iraqi State and economic infrastructure.

Iraqi local production was discarded, even for the production of raw materials necessary for the reconstruction. For example, instead of buying from local producers of concrete, the CPA and Iraqi Ministries were having Halliburton import concrete from outside for a thousand dollars a ton for the majority of the reconstruction projects. And this was also the case for many sectors, such as oil, electricity, health, water, transports, sewerage, and so on (SIGIR, 2009a; Muttitt, 2011; Schwartz, 2008). In fact, only a handful of old and established Iraqi business families, who were powerful and canny enough to survive the Saddam dictatorship without being so much as tainted by it, and also had outside credentials and contacts, would be able to enter the reconstruction auction process. In reality, only at the very end of the reconstruction scheme and of a long chain of contracting and sub-contracting, would one find a very small cluster of Iraqi businesses effectively working for the reconstruction. In the majority of the cases, local Iraqi companies with a small workforce would get a sub-sub-contract to “repair” or “rehabilitate” local schools or markets in the neighborhoods (ICG, 2006:14).

Finally, even as workers, Iraqis were kept away from the bulk of the reconstruction, either because foreign companies were coming with their own trained workforce or with previous contracts with international recruitment agencies. But another factor contributed heavily to the reluctance of foreign

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companies to employ Iraqis at the local or national level. As the security deteriorated drastically from the year 2004 and ahead, Iraqis were considered unreliable, even dangerous as they may have been connected to or subjected to the pressure from Iraqi insurgent organisations. As the rising insecurity was greatly aggravating the costs of security/protection and insurance, foreign companies were allegedly unwilling to add to it the risk of allowing Iraqis into their working teams (ICG, 2006; Yousif, 2006, 2007). The CPA and US Administration were aware of this particular flaw (ICG, 2006; SIGIR: 2009a). Following neoliberal rationality and market-state principles, the US Administration elaborated “incentives” in order to encourage foreign private contractors to increase Iraqi participation. Notably, the CPA included a clause in the contract auction designs where “efforts to maximise Iraqi participation in the reconstruction effort will be a significant part of the award fee evaluation.” (Mehney, 2004:37) 185 But as I have shown in the preceding chapter, the US Administration rapidly lost the oversight of the whole process, and the evaluation of private contractors’ performance increasingly focused on the quality of the goods and services delivered more than Iraqi participation.

In any case, this quasi-absence of Iraqis from the reconstruction of their own country is the first and maybe the biggest failure of the US-led reconstruction and state-building endeavour. But it is also the reflection of the ‘neocolonial’ nature of the American enterprise in Iraq. I discussed in the chapter about the destruction of the Iraq State how much Iraq was seen first and foremost as a blank screen by the US Administration and actors—a ready for the projection of American myths. The reconstruction of Iraq without the Iraqis was then the logical consequence of US Administration hubris and denial. The fact that Iraqis were not engaged in the reconstruction process means also that the whole state and nation-building effort launched there by the US could not gain the legitimacy that was sorely lacking since the beginning of the occupation. But it also reflects the fact that Iraqi society in general, and local Iraqi businessmen and companies in particular, were strangers to the neoliberal rationality, and its particular grammar 186, which was necessary to blend into the reconstruction programme as it had been framed by the US. Indeed, the Iraqi local companies did not have the codes, the particular legal and market-based technicality, which was required to successfully bid for a US framed Private-Public Partnership auction contract (ICG, 2006; Yousif, 2006; SIGIR, 2009a:). As noted and hoped by Yousif, the reconstruction programme led by the US could have been completely different. It could have been a massive

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185 However, incentives to engage with “US Small Business Concerns”, that is maximisation of small US business participation in Iraqi reconstruction, would be much greater and quantifiable: “– Goal for subcontracts to American small business concerns is 23% of total contract dollars. No less than 10% of total contract dollars shall be subcontracted to American small businesses” (ibid)

186 See for example, the question of benchmark and “best practices” discussed by Wendy Brown in *Undoing the Demos, Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution*, Zone Books, 2015
unified effort of the Iraqis to rebuild their nation with the help of the Americans (Yousif, 2006:503). But in reality, the reconstruction process, as with the rest of the US state-building endeavour, would remain something external and artificially imposed on Iraq, on its society and its remaining infrastructure.\(^{187}\)

Indeed, as much as the US Administration had imagined Iraq as a blank screen and, as I discussed in the chapter on the destruction of the Iraqi State, the US had still to begin the reconstruction with what remained of the old Iraqi State and its infrastructure. They could not with a snap of the fingers make disappear the old and deficient national electric grid system to replace it by a complete ‘made in US’ new one. In 2003, Iraqi power plants and refineries, after years of embargo and decay, were only holding on by the incredible creativity and knowledge of Iraqi engineers and technicians. But the US Administration and foreign companies could not just unplug the power plants, destroy them and replace them with new ones. And the same goes for all the Iraqi infrastructure, hospitals, schools, libraries, water sanitation, sewage system, and so on. In any case, the remaining Iraqi infrastructure was the basic layer with which the reconstruction process had to be aligned. But the huge discrepancy in input into the grand reconstruction plan, as well as its implementation by foreign companies, and the Iraqi reality, aggravated the challenges and difficulties that the whole reconstruction faced. This even sometimes provoked its own failures. Many analysts and academics provided accounts of such discrepancies and failures within the different reconstruction programmes (Herring and Rangwala, 2006; Chatterjee, 2004; Muttiit 2011; Chandrasekaran, 2009; Schwartz, 2008). While I was in Baghdad between 2003 and 2004, during my different activities with UN PUNTE PER and the different NGOs associated with it, I had the opportunity to see directly some of these outcomes.

Hence, in late December 2003, a group of us went to visit the power plant in the Al Dora neighbourhood in Baghdad. One of the biggest power plants around Baghdad, it was a thermic power plant that had been built in the late seventies and early eighties with German and Italian contractors. The power plant had been badly damaged twice during the Iran-Iraq war and during the 1991 war against the multinational coalition. Then, the decade of embargo prevented them from importing the necessary spare parts and machinery to repair it properly. The power plant was in complete decay, but it was still producing electricity, albeit to a third or a quarter of its original capacity. In April 2003, through USAID and then IRRF1 programme, the US giant construction company Bechtel got an 18 months prime contract of around 680 million dollars for a major reconstruction project, including for developing electricity capacity (SIGIR, 2009a:49). The complete rehabilitation and upgrading of the

\(^{187}\) In his study, Caitlin reaches a similar conclusion: “This paper argues that the failure of the U.S. to phase these policies in overtime and include the local population during the reconstruction process resulted in the protraction of the conflict.” (2009:2)
Al Dora power plant was part of their project contract. More than 8 months later, when we were there in December, and despite the attempt of the Iraqi director of the power plant to paint an optimistic future, no visible progress had been achieved. The power plant was still producing electricity way above its normal capacity. In fact, the overall project of reconstruction was stacked with administrative, logistical and divergent security procedures between the USAID, the US Army, Bechtel and its German subcontractors. USAID and Bechtel would blame the subcontractors and the newly constituted Iraqi Ministry of Energy for the delay and the general failures of the reconstruction of the power plant, while the German subcontractors would blame Bechtel\(^\text{188}\).

However, at the end of the visit, we met a small group of Iraqi engineers and technicians that were leaving the station. We stopped a few minutes to discuss with them about their work. And they gave us a much less sanitised and diplomatic narrative than the Iraqi director of the power plant. In my view, this account precisely reflects the gap between the grand plan designed between Washington and the Green Zone in Baghdad, its implantation through the Private-Public Partnership auction scheme and the Iraqi reality. But it also shows the feelings of dispossession and frustration growing after the first few months of occupation, and as expressed by Iraqis themselves. I reproduce here a part of their account as transcribed at that time:

“There first of all, they come when they want. Some days they are here and then we do not see them for weeks. Then it took the US company more weeks to assess the situation of the power plant and to assess our needs. But we know very well what we need to do to make this power plant working again. It is more than twenty years since we made this power plant work during wars and during the embargo. Of course, it is ten years that we have been cut off from the world. So there is a technology gap and we have a lot to learn. But we know what we need. We don’t need Americans to tell us how this power plant works, we know it by heart. We know exactly what kind of spare parts or machinery we need. We know which company makes them in Germany, how much they cost and so on. So why not just buy this stuff? Instead, we are waiting and waiting for meetings with the Americans and the German engineers and nothing changes.”

In a similar vein, some colleagues and independent journalists began to visit and check some of the schools that had been rehabilitated through USAID or IRRF2 programmes in different areas. Here again, US multinationals, Bechtel

and then later on Parsons corps would be the prime contractors for these rehabilitation plans. However, they would establish a long chain of subcontractors and at the end of the chain, one would find small or mid-sized Iraqi enterprises. And this is maybe one of the few reconstruction sectors, where Iraqis enterprises, as small as they were, had actually been contracted, albeit at the bottom line of the chain, and to do menial tasks. I was present during some of the visits in different areas of Baghdad. Most of the schools that we visited had been newly painted and refurbished, however many of them had major deficiencies that were making them barely functional. We encountered schools with newly painted walls and black boards but with their roofs cracked, leaving classrooms flooded by the winter rain. Others had new toilet facilities that were left unconnected or that could not be connected to the sewage system. For their defense, USAID and Bechtel were answering, probably in good faith, that the defects and flaws were limited to a few schools where the subcontractors had not done their job correctly or that the schools that had been reported were even not part of their rehabilitation contract, and may have been done by other contractors linked directly with the US Army or the new Ministry of Education. And of course, there were many schools where the job had been done properly.

Yet, you just had to jump from one school to another in the very same neighbourhood to see two completely different situations. And for the Iraqi community, the teachers and parents, it was very difficult to understand why one had been completely repaired and the other, left with a significantly damaged roof on top of freshly painted walls. In reality, there was a pattern of failures that was reported by foreign newspapers, NGOs and even the US Army itself. When I was in Baghdad at that time, that was the sad joke of the moment. If you wanted to see the American reconstruction, you just had to look for the schools to understand the magnitude of the problem. Indeed, the reconstruction and rehabilitation of schools were symptomatic of the patterns of failures that would spoil the overall reconstruction process.

The first pattern was the lack of oversight and control on the whole reconstruction process by the CPA and the US Administration. In this specific case, thousands of schools were supposed to have been reconstructed or rehabilitated during the IRRF1, monitored by USAID and then the CPA, and during the IRRF2 process led by the CPA and then the Department of State. Bechtel

190 In its 2006 report SIGIR would find similar disparity between the level of work done between areas or different governorates. see, SIGIR, Quarterly Report April 2006, Virginia, 2006: 53 & 174
and then Parson Corps were among the prime contractors in charge of the rehabilitation, but they themselves hired sub-contractors and sub sub-contractors to actually do the job on the ground. However, the US military through its own CERP programmes was also doing some community projects and school rehabilitation and with its own contractors, mainly small or very small local Iraqi enterprises.\textsuperscript{192} All in all, the different projects planned for the rehabilitation consisted of around 11,000 schools out a total of 14,000. As I wrote in the preceding chapter, the CPA and then the US Administration never had the capacity to oversee such a vast range of actors, institutions, private business, foreign and local small Iraqi enterprises. However, at the other end of the line, in most cases, the Iraqi communities and school boards did not have better control of who was involved and how the work was done. In many cases, Bechtel's staff, or mostly a Bechtel first sub-contractor, would come to a school with a list of furniture supplies available and assess the level of work to be done. Then some days or weeks later, another sub-contractor would come to do the job entirely or partially and leave at the end without any further ado. Most of the time this was without even leaving a written trace assessing what kind of work had been done, what kind of furniture has been provided.\textsuperscript{193}

Another pattern, connected with the first one, was the high level of corruption and predatory practices that prevailed within the schools rehabilitation programme. This was going all the way from the top to the bottom of the line, from the US prime contractors that would skim a lot of money, though overcharging and embezzlement, and passing the burden of the actual work to the sub-contractors. These sub-contracted companies would in turn “cut corners” and so on until it reached the bottom of the chain, mostly Iraqi enterprises. Of course, this was to the detriment of the actual work that would impact the schools themselves. I will provide here two different accounts that are very illustrative of the overall process, the subordinate positions of Iraqis, and of the concrete effects of corruption and predation of the rehabilitation of schools. In the autumn of 2004, in one of their reports, International Crisis Group pointed out the main failures of the reconstruction in Iraq and the corruption that prevailed:

“Iraqis complain further that subcontracting is used by foreign companies to skim off profits while passing on the bulk of the work to locals for a fraction of the contract price. Ed Kubba, a member of the American-Iraqi Chamber of Commerce, asked, “if you take $10 million from the U.S. government and sub the job out to Iraqi businesses for $250,000, is that fair business practice, or is it corruption?” (ICG, 2004:14)

\textsuperscript{192} For more precise details on the different programmes and the number of schools rehabilitated and planned to be rehabilitated within the different plans see SIGIR, ibid, p 54

\textsuperscript{193} See for example, Karim El-Gawhary,” Bechtel Fails Reconstruction of Iraq's Schools”, Special to CorpWatch, December 2nd, 2003, \textit{http://www.corpwatch.org/article.php?id=9248}
Meanwhile back in 2003, a Newsweek journalist described perfectly the effects that the general predation and corruption had on the rehabilitation of a school:

“...Bechtel proudly points out that 102 of its 140 USAID contracts were subbed to Iraqi firms. But many of these sub-subcontractors cut corners as they tried to meet Bechtel's very short deadline. “The original tender for our school called for air conditioners in every classroom,” said an Iraqi engineer named Marwan. Once the subcontractor got it, it was an air cooler. “Once we got it, it was a ceiling fan for $11 apiece.” At the Al Qaqa primary school, headmistress Haibat Abdul Hussein said the Iraqi contractor walked off the job shortly after starting, leaving the school a mess of construction debris and incomplete work. “I can't deal with this anymore; I don't even know what happened. All I know is they said the Americans told them to stop working,” she said. (Nordland, 2003)

The question of the schools rehabilitation could be seen as anecdotal compared to the vast overall project of reconstruction and upgrading of Iraqi infrastructure. But it is the opposite, the schools rehabilitation projects gives a terrible insight on the magnitude of the failure of the overall reconstruction project led by the US Administration. Hence, in a 2013 report, SIGIR would show that of all the reconstruction projects that has been assessed by its office, schools reconstruction programme were the ones showing the least deficiencies, while almost 40% of the overall reconstruction sectors assessed had major deficiencies:

![Figure 9 SIGIR, "Learning from Iraq: A Final Report from the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction", US Department of State, March 2013, p5](image)

In order to understand the magnitude of the failure of the US ‘grand plan’ of reconstruction, one can also look at the outcomes of the US-led reconstruction in the energy sector (oil production, exportation and transformation, electricity production and transmission), which was considered of primordial importance. Both the oil and electricity sectors had been deeply affected by the
whole embargo period and the looting of the country after the invasion in 2003, and obliging the US Administration and CPA to revise earlier pre-war plans and increase the inputs of resources and money in these sectors. Hence, for the whole IRRF2 provision of $18 billion, the oil sector reconstruction would account for only $1.89 billion and the electricity sector for $4.7 billion (SIGIR 2006 July; SIGIR, 2009a). Obviously, it was a priority for Iraq to have the production and sale of its oil back on track, because it was the quasi-unique source of revenue for the country. And the rehabilitation and upgrading of Iraq’s capacity to refine oil were also of utmost importance, especially as since during the embargo period the country had lost most of its capacity to refine and process crude oil into fuel, diesel and gasoline. Because of the embargo and the looting after the invasion, the 3 main refinery complexes (Al Doura, Bajji, Basra) were in such bad shape that were able to produce only a fraction of the refined oil production needed to cover Iraq’s internal demand. So much so that in summer 2003, the CPA would find the country literally out of gasoline and out of LPG, the primary cooking fuel for Iraqi households. The CPA then would order the main oil reconstruction contractor, KBR, to import tons of emergency refined fuel to supply Iraqi demand (SIGIR, 2009a:139).

However, electricity production and transmission was even more fundamental, because the whole reconstruction and transformation project, not just the oil sector, was depending deeply on the capacity of the country to meet the growing domestic demand as well as the needs of the other sectors. Hence, refineries and oil production complexes need electricity to function as do water plants and water treatment systems, hospitals, local clinics and universities. And of course, the whole economy of Iraq, public and private sectors combined, would be reliant on electricity production and transmission to be able to function and grow. The two tables, on Oil and Electricity production, that I provide below show that in reality during the whole period of the occupation, the reconstruction and upgrading goals stated by the US Administration would never be met and by a massive shortfall. Worse, it would take eight years, that is until the official end of the American occupation of Iraq and the near termination of the two IRRF appropriations, for the energy sector to barely return to a pre-war level of production.
Figure 10 Average Oil Production 2003-2011

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<tr>
<td>2.5-3</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>2.11</td>
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Source: Brookings Iraq Index

The year's average is calculated with monthly figures provided by DoD and MoE to Iraqi Index.

Figure 11 Average National Electricity Production 2003-2011

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<tr>
<td>Production Megawatts</td>
<td>4500</td>
<td>6000</td>
<td>3427</td>
<td>4029</td>
<td>4086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated Demand</td>
<td>4500</td>
<td>5000</td>
<td>8000</td>
<td>12000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours/day Baghdad</td>
<td>16 - 24</td>
<td>10 - 12</td>
<td>N/a</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours/day nationwide</td>
<td>04 - 08</td>
<td>10 - 12</td>
<td>N/a</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Brookings Iraq Index and SIGIR, January 2006; SIGIR, March 2013

* 4500 Megawatts produced by Iraqis public power plants. Around 2000 Megawatts were produced by private power plants in Iraqi Kurdistan, Turkish power ships in Basra and imports.
Concerning the other main reconstruction sectors, notably water and sanitation, health, transport and communications, it is more difficult to assess the direct outcomes of the projects. However, it does not appear that they were fundamentally more successful than the oil and electricity sector reconstruction projects. All the more, because the failure to rehabilitate and upgrade the electricity sector would drastically impede the reconstruction in other sectors but also disrupt the social and economical life in Iraq for the years to come. It also forced more and more Iraqis, to rely on private fuel generators for their houses or businesses, thereby drastically increasing the demand for refined oil that Iraq could not provide, and had to import. In 2013, Iraq was still obliged to import around 20% of its refined oil consumption, and over 30% of its gasoline consumption. (IMF, 2013:7)

2.3.2 Dystopian economics

Besides the reconstruction of Iraqi infrastructure, the sustainability and the strengthening of economic growth in Iraq had been earmarked as a major goal by the US Administration since the beginning of the occupation. However, the combination of the failed reconstruction, the neoliberal policies and the growing violence and insecurity would produce severe results. There is no doubt that, as for the reconstruction, the increasing general violence, insurgency and counterinsurgency campaigns, and the climate of uncertainty would have a dire effect on the economic growth for the duration of the occupation period. Nevertheless, I consider that an important part of economic failures were the direct outcomes of the neoliberal policies established by the US Administration, which were continued by the successive Iraqi governments. In this regard, the real GDP rate of growth is a first indicator of the economy’s evolution during the occupation period. What the different figures show is a plunging of around 33% of the real GDP rate in 2003, followed by a recovery of 23% in 2004, and then a much smaller rate of increase in the following years, respectively 3.3% in 2005, 7.4% in 2006 and 0.5% in 2007 (Merza,

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194 For the water and sanitation sectors see for instance, (Herring and Rangwala, 2006; Schwartz, 2008) on Health see (Schwartz, 2008).
195 See for example SIGIR 2009a, Chapter 18
196 IMF Iraq elected issue 2013 cr13218.pdf
197 As noted by Yousif, because oil exportation represents the overwhelming source of revenues, GDP per capita in Iraq has a tendency to illustrate the status of Iraqi oil production and exportation and the world oil price fluctuations, and not the status of the general Iraqi economy. (Yousif, 2012)
The years following, from 2008 to 2011, show a similar pattern of unsteady but constant growth (World Bank, 2016). For Yousif, who takes into consideration the annual population growth and the fact that the reconstruction happened after a decade of embargo and economic depression, "...these rates of growth seem all the more anemic." (2012:4). For his part Merza provides figures showing a decline of 2.3% of real GDP growth at a constant factor cost during the period 2002-2006 (Merza, 2008:32) and that the value added in all economic sectors, except for social services and housing, would remain below the pre-war levels until at least the year 2007 (Merza, 2008:6).

Beyond GDP indicators, it is worthwhile looking in detail at some economic sectors and to link them with specific neoliberal policies to understand their impact. Hence, Merza shows that industrial and manufacturing sector production fell about 11.9% during the period 2002-2006 and he notes that "Industrial output in 2002 was 66% its level in 1988. In the third quarter of 2007 it was 39% its level in 1988." (Merza, 2008: 32 & 7). In the same vein and despite the high demand caused by the different reconstruction programmes, Iraqi production of cement fell from 7,171 tons in 2002 to 1,828 and would stagnate around 2,500 in the years 2005-2006 (IMF, 2007:6). Beyond the question of security, it is impossible to not link this severe decline of manufacturing and non-oil industrial production, with the neoliberal policies adopted by the CPA and followed by the successive Iraqi governments that I described in the preceding chapter. In this regard, the complete liberalisation of trade and the opening of the Iraqi internal market to foreign products, the stubborn attempt to privatise the State-Owned Enterprises (SOE) and then the decision to literally let them die and forbid them to be part of the reconstruction programme helps understand the general depression of the non-oil economic sector. In the period of embargo during the 1990s, the central position of the SOE in an autarchic economy was reinforced. And until 2003, the SOE formed the centre of the non-oil economy around which Iraqi private sector, as meagre it may have been, was running. As noted by DoD Deputy Brinkley:

"The private Iraqi companies could not sell goods internationally; they sold their goods inside Iraq, often serving as suppliers of goods and services to large state-run factories. Many state-run factories are surrounded by small businesses—machine shops, service businesses—similar to the industrial parks one finds anywhere in the world."(Brinkley, 2007:8)

Therefore, by crushing the SOE and flooding the Iraqi market with import goods, the CPA and its successors destroyed the backbone of Iraq industrial economy, and they also destroyed any chance for the Iraqi private sector to "get off the ground" (ibid) or even survive.198 And since the beginning of the occupation within local Iraqi business circles, many would complain of the

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198 See for example, the article of New York Times journalist James Glanz, "Devising Survival at Factory in Iraq", April 15 2008 which described in length the struggle of the shoe manufacturing private sector in Iraq.
invasion of foreign investors and products on the Iraqi market, considering it unfair competition (ICG, 2004). The effects of the neoliberal policies did not stop there. They had also cascading effects on the agriculture sector. As I said in the earlier chapter, from 2003 and onwards, Iraqi farmers were deprived of direct subsidies, seeds, fertilisers, pesticides, but also agricultural machinery like tractors or cropper machines, that they used to get from the SOE for free or for very low investment. As reported by the Washington Post journalist Eunjung Cha, in 2004, without seeds and fertilisers, many farmers were actually not able to farm (Ejeung Cha, 2004). Without such subsidies, and despite the radical opening of the Iraqi market to multinational agribusiness firms, the luring of Iraqi farmers into bioengineered crops and high tech agricultural methods (Brown, 2015:145), the agricultural production plunged drastically during the occupation period. Here also production figures are serious and unsettling. In 2002, Iraq produced 4.1 million metric tons of cereals, mostly wheat. In 2003, the production dropped to 3.5 million of metric tons. And it dropped again to 3.3 million in 2004 before slowly recovering in 2005 (World Bank, 2016). Actually, Iraqi cereal production would return to its pre-war level in 2010, seven years later. And the crop production index, food production index and livestock production index all dropped following the same patterns, except that in 2011 they were still below pre-war level (World Bank Data, 2016). But after all, these depressive figures did not come exactly as a surprise. As recalled by journalist Chandrasekaran, the proponents of ‘shock therapy’ in the US Administration, and among them Bremer, knew perfectly that the massive neoliberal re-regulation of Iraq would have destabilising effects on the Iraq economy and society:

"It's going to be a very wrenching, painful process, as it was in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall" he said. "But won't that be very complicated and controversial?" I asked. "Why not leave it up to the Iraqis?" Bremer had come to Iraq to build not just a democracy but a free market. He insisted that economic reform and political reform were intertwined." (Chandrasekaran, 2009:39)

199 Crop Production Index (CPI): rates the productivity of agricultural land. 
Food Production Index: covers productivity of edible crops and with nutrients (Coffee and Tea excluded).
Livestock Production Index: includes meat and milk from all sources, dairy products such as cheese, and eggs, honey, raw silk, wool, hides and skins.

200 The only exception to this general depression of production, the fisheries production would continually grow and surpass pre-war level in 2004 and onwards.

201 On these questions see also Schwartz, War Without End, 2008, in chapter 3 "The Neoliberal Project in Iraq". And Wendy Brown, Undoing the Demos, Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution, in chapter 4, "Best practices in twenty first century Iraqi agriculture". See also Focus on the Global South, Silent War, The US Ideological and economic occupation of Iraq, Chapter 6, "Iraq's new patent law: a declaration of war against farmers", January 2005.
Yet, they believed this would be mitigated by the benefits of the rapid integration of Iraq into the global capitalist market. As I show in the preceding chapter, the constant, steady flow of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into Iraq, considering the general violence and the volatile situation in this country, is one indicator of Iraq’s successful steps toward its integration into the worldwide market. But the question that should be asked is how much of this foreign investment was beneficial to the Iraqi economy and society? The answer given by Costantini, whose study I mentioned in the preceding chapter, was not really positive. Hence, she demonstrates that the FDI was aggravating the economic and political fragmentation of the country. For example, she notes an extreme disparity of FDI flow on the Iraqi territory—60% of the total foreign investments went only to the Governorates of Basra, Baghdad and Erbil out of the 18 provinces. In a similar pattern, the flow of FDI, that would account for 2.5% of Iraqi GDP in 2013, was concentrated overwhelmingly in two sectors, hydrocarbons and luxury real estate. In particular, the massive investments in luxury real estate contributed to "the price distortion in the housing market", and exacerbated "the gap between rich and poor" (Costantini, 2013:276). Overall, she found that FDI was conducive to the general fragmentation of the Iraqi State by reinforcing the polarisation between the centre and periphery, and by exacerbating the competition between Iraqi Governorates. And she adds that "...aggravated by ethnic and religious divisions, these dynamics favour exclusive agreements at the expense of national cohesion" (ibid). Last but not least, because of the particular characteristics of the two main foreign investment sectors—the hydrocarbon sector is capital and technology intensive and luxury real estate relies on short term contracts and informal economy—the influx of FDI did not permit the Iraqi economy to take off nor unemployment to be resorbed.

In reality, the general depression of the Iraqi non-oil economy would begin in 2003 and would continue at least until 2010. It would have three important consequences. The first, which is correlated with the end of embargo and the liberalisation of trade, is the massive influx of importations into Iraq since 2003. Interestingly, the pattern of importation influx mirrors the period of intense violence and insecurity. Hence, the World Bank shows that from 2002 to 2005, the imports of goods and services in Local Currency Unit (LCU) would grow more than twofold, from 20 trillion to 45 trillion. Then, it would plunge to 31 trillion during the peak violence between 2005-2007 before skyrocketing again during the next 6 years to reach 75 trillion in 2013. Then it would plunge again with the renewal of political turmoil and intense violence from 2013 to reach a low 41 trillion in 2015. The second consequence would be the total failure to begin the diversification of the Iraq economy, crude oil production accounting for more than 98% of the total exportations, and therefore accounting for most of the GDP of Iraq (IMF, statistic index 2006-2012). De facto, with all non-oil production failing, the Iraqi economy would become more oil revenue dependent than ever. Third, considering that the oil sector
does not employ more than 1% of the Iraqi workforce, the depression in the non-oil economic sector and agriculture would have a strong impact on the level of unemployment in Iraq during all the occupation period. In fact, a strange situation was created for a supposedly neoliberal model: with the private sector depressing, the labour market was even more driven by the public sector than before the war. The main structure that was hiring and paying good wages would be the new Iraqi State. All the more, because the CPA and the subsequent Iraqi governments, in a move to establish a fair salary grid but also to buy the loyalty of the civil servants, would raise considerably the salaries in the ministries and some public offices in 2004 (Talmon, 2013:179-185; Alawi, 2007; Yousif, 2007). However, as the state structures would be gradually privatised by sectarian organisations and elites, hiring within the new ministries, public offices and state infrastructures would be done following political, sectarian and patrimonial affiliations.
2.4 Social Insecurity and Social Brutalisation

In this chapter, I would like to reflect on some consequences of the US neoliber-alisation remaking of Iraq. They have been, understandably, overshadowed by the violence that would plague the country in the post-2003 period. Yet, the rise of unemployment and poverty, but also the inflation, the rise of corrup-tion, and the full range of social consequences induced by the neoliberal policies of the US authorities also contributed to the rise of social insecurity and social brutalisation of the Iraqi society.

2.4.1 Social insecurity

As I wrote in Chapter 2.2 about the destruction of the old Iraqi State, Bremer's rule over Iraq began in May 2003 with the disbanding of more or less 400,000 soldiers and officers of the Iraqi Army and was followed by the sacking of 50,000 to 100,000 civil servants because of their Ba'ath party membership. One has to imagine the social and economic shock produced by the brutal lay-off of nearly 10% of the total labour force of the country (less than 6 million of individuals in 2003). In a country, whose economy has been totally de-pressed by decades of wars, embargo and corruption, most of these jobs in the army or in the State infrastructure, were the sole source of revenue for complete households. Therefore, the massive layoff of these soldiers and civil servants plunged dozens of thousands if not hundreds of thousands, of house-holds, thus millions of people, into destitution. Here again, the hubris and de-nial mentality that animated the Bush Administration during the occupation period, and that I described in earlier chapters, appear in plain sight. All the more when one reads Bremer's own recollection of his discussion with President Bush on the burning issue of unemployment:

“What about the economy? Our most urgent problem is unemployment. We think it's about 50 percent, but who really knows? Also, Iraq's got a young popula-tion, with about half of them under the age of nineteen. That's an explosive combination.”(Bremer, 2006:84)
Bremer may have been describing the urgency of the unemployment problem to the President of the United States in Washington, forgetting that he just laid off hundreds of thousands of people, but in Baghdad, the policy makers were focusing on different issues. Hence, in line with IMF directives and the neoliberal credo to reduce the scale and the scope of the State, the CPA and some of the Iraqi new elites in the ministries were designing a privatisation programme of the SOE that planned for the firing or retiring of more than 100,000 state workers for the next year in 2004. But with already hundreds of thousands of ex-soldiers demonstrating in the streets to get back their jobs and pension, the US Administration began to be cautious about laying more people off, even if the privatisation plan was calling for it. Finally, the resistance and even the violence enacted by the state workers in some of the factories would put a definitive end to the “cost reduction program”. Yet, because the SOE would be mostly not in production and left to die, workers would only be earning around 40% of their previous salaries (Brinkley, 2007:4). In any event, the question of unemployment would become another aspect of the massive failure of the US occupation and that would remain one of the major issues for Iraqis with insecurity and lack of electricity. Here, as for many other official statistics in Iraq, there is not a consensus on the actual figures of unemployment in the country.

Thus, the World Bank estimated a curve of unemployment that skyrocketed from around 18% before the war to 29% in 2003 and 2004. Then to recess from 2005 to 2008 and stabilise around 15% from 2009 and onwards (World Bank, 2016). For its part, the UNDP/Iraqi Living Condition Survey of 2004 estimated unemployment figures much lower, around 18.5% of the labour force in 2004 (UNDP/COSIT/ILCS, 2004:133). However, the Brookings Institution gives much higher figures beginning with a 50-60% unemployment rate in June 2003 to a stabilisation around 25-40% from 2007 and onwards (Brooking Iraq Index). Merza, on his part estimated that between 2005 and to 2007, “…unemployment must have increased to levels much higher than the 25 percent mentioned above [Merza unemployment rate in 2005]” (2008:14). In any case, figures of unemployment would remain extremely high for a MENA (Middle East North Africa) country, just above the West Bank and Gaza unemployment rate. And above all, it would remain much higher than before the war, at least until the years 2006-2007. As I described earlier, the US Administration encouraged private contractors through all reconstruction programmes to recruit Iraqis, but without much success. For instance, only

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203 One can find recurrent mention of unemployment and/or the poor economic situation in many of the different polls or surveys made in Iraq during the occupation period. See for example, Brookings Iraq Index for the years 2004-2005-2006 and onwards. See also IRIS surveys of Iraqi Public Opinions (May-June 2004/December 2004-January 2005)
32,000 Iraqis, around 27% of the total workforce, were registered as contractor workforce through the US military’s own contracting process while at the same time Third Countries Nationals represented 47% of it (US Congress, 2011:233). The CPA and later the US Embassy would try to tackle the issue by developing their own job reconstruction programme through the Iraqi Ministry of Public Work. Yet, a maximum of 150,000 Iraqis would be employed through diverse US-funded reconstruction programmes between March and June 2005, and numbers would fall continuously (Herring and Rangwala, 2006: 75). In any case it would remain well below the initial objective of 300,000 jobs programme for skilled and unskilled Iraqi workers planned by the CPA in August 2003 (Dobbins et al. 2009:230). And above all, it would remain largely insubstantial compared to the hundreds of thousands of Iraqis looking for jobs.

In fact, one year after the beginning of the US-led neoliberal experimentation in Iraq, the social consequences and the social fragmentation of the Iraqi society were visible. In May 2004, the Iraqi Living Condition Survey was finding that such indicators as housing, infrastructure, environment, child and infant mortality rate, child health and nutrition, which had already fallen severely during the last decade, because of the previous wars and the embargo, were still deteriorating (UNDP/COSIT, 2004). In September 2004, the Word Food Programme (WFP) found that 25 percent of the Iraqi population was highly dependent on the Public Distribution System (PDS) that was created during the Embargo Oil-for-Food Programme for distributing food rations to 96% of the Iraqi population. Besides, approximately 2.6 million people (11%) were extremely poor and vulnerable to food insecurity. If the PDS were to be discontinued, as was officially planned by the CPA in 2003-2004²⁰⁵, an additional 3.6 million people would face a high probability of becoming food insecure (WFP/COSIT, 2004:33). In the second half of 2005, the estimates of numbers of extremely poor and food insecure were rising to 15% of the Iraqi population, while the number of people at risk if the PDS programme would have been closed, jumped towards 8.3 million, or around 31% of the Iraqi population (WFP/COSIT, 2006:2). In other words, without the Public Distribution System—which was considered a serious source of distortion of market prices by neoliberal zealots within the US Administration and among international institutions—famine would had certainly risen in Iraq, despite or maybe because of the US occupation. By 2006-2007, during the peak of the civil war, conditions were worsening, and IMF analysts were reporting that: “Iraq's statistical agency estimates that 43 percent of the Iraqi population lives on less than $1 a day, with much of the poverty due to the high rate of unemployment” (IMF, 2008:7). In reality, poverty would only begin to recede during the years 2008-2009, yet remain on a high level compared to the region. Hence, in 2012,

²⁰⁵ On the failed attempt to eradicate PDS, and then to monetise it, see for instance (Chadraskeran, 2009: 87. Dobbins et al, 2009:222)
the World Bank/IHSES estimated the population below the poverty line to be around 19.8% (World Bank, 2013:20). The general worsening of social conditions would also be apparent with the dramatic rise of the urban population living in areas considered as slums, from around 16.5% in 2000 to 52% in 2005 (World Bank Data). And this would not be buffered anymore by State institutions and infrastructure for the years to come. Hence, in 2010, an IMF report stated that “...the delivery of basic public services, including water and electricity, remains unreliable, while access to medical services and education is limited, especially for the poor.” (IMF, 2010:13). The impact of the social deterioration was rendered even worse by the important inflation that took rise since the beginning of the war and the occupation. Actually, Iraq had already known massive inflation during the worst years of the embargo period (1990-1995), yet with the launching of the Oil-for-Food Programme, inflation went down continuously during the late 1990s. However, it rose again to 19.8% in 2002, the year before the invasion, and then nearly doubled in 2003, receding to 22% in 2004, before skyrocketing again to 47.6% in 2005 (Merza, 2008:34).

Obviously, the social consequences of CPA neoliberalisation campaign would be overlooked because of the ultra-violence and the casualties that will come right after during the 2004-2009 period. But we should understand that in a span of a year, between 2003-2004, Iraq already plunged into social and economic disaster with high levels of social and physical insecurity and violence, what Harding calls a “man-made disaster” (2007). This should not have come as a surprise, similar neoliberal policies and ‘shock therapies’ had devastating social and economic effects in Eastern Europe and in South America in the 1980s and 1990s. However, in Iraq, there were aggravating factors that would converge to transform the shock therapy into a tsunami of violence and misery. The neoliberal experimentation was imposed on a society that had been already been crushed by decades of dictatorship, wars and embargo, a society that was already in a quasi-state of atomisation (Al Khafaji, 2000). Therefore, Iraqi society was already short on social resources, the *corps intermédiaires*, organised civil society, associations, trade unions, which had been erased by the dictatorships and that may have buffered Iraq from social implosion. It is not to say that there were no expressions of social resistance against the neoliberal restructuring and the social crisis in Iraq during the post-2003 period. Actually, the first months of the occupation, between 2003 and 2004, would see the rapid constitution of unions and civil associations. For instance, dozens of local trade unions, as well as one general federation (IFTU), two oil union federations (Southern Company Oil Union and Kirkuk Oil Union) and the Union of Unemployed Workers in Iraq would be created.

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during the first year of the occupation. On the question of trade unions, it is important to note that the CPA and the successive Iraqi governments would try to prevent the rise of trade unions, for instance by conserving the restrictive Labour Law (1987) of Saddam’s regime and by actively repressing them. And as recalled by Yousif: “Counterfactually, the encouragement of independent labor unions, which are secular in outlook and whose membership cut across ethnic and sectarian lines, could have restrained the growing sectarianism that has characterized post-invasion Iraq.” (2006:53). In a similar vein, hundreds of organised or unorganised demonstrations and occupations of places and factories focusing on social and economical issues (unemployment, housings, low salaries, etc.) happened during the same period. For example, demonstrations in front of semi-closed or idle factories were almost routine in 2003 (Chandrasekaran 2009, Klein 2007). Newly formed oil trade unions were also organising demonstrations in front or within oil refineries and production facilities. They were blocking oil production and staging short strikes, in order to obtain pay increases, to prevent the privatisation of oil economy and the employment of foreign workers within oil production facilities. In different cities, unemployed workers and ex-soldiers would demonstrate and occupy places to demand work and their salaries back in the case of ex-soldiers. For its part, the Union of Unemployed Workers and hundreds of unorganised workers would demonstrate and camp in front of the entrance of the Green Zone for more than a month in the summer of 2003.

However, all these social mobilisations would be heavily repressed by US military, the new State security apparatus, and later on by the militias that would appear from the end of 2004 and onwards (Herring and Rangwala, 2006 Schwartz 2008, Klein, 2007). On many occasions demonstrations or occupations would turn violent, with the US military or sometimes the Iraqi Police shooting directly at people, while demonstrators would throw rocks at the police or the military in return. As a result, injuries and even deaths were not unusual during these demonstrations.

The repression would not stop there as unions leaders and activists would be rounded up, arrested and held for days by the US military or the Iraqi police (Bacon, 2003). In fact, the period between Summer 2003 and Spring 2004 corresponds to a period of social unrest and social violence. The causes were the economic depression, the US-led occupation preference for coercion and violence and the desperation of people. In any events, after 2004, the renewed Iraqi social movements would be crushed by the general extension of violence and the subjugation of public space by networks of violence. Clearly, during
the mass violence and its peak between 2005-2007, there was minimal chance for social mobilisations and movements to occupy public space. As I recalled in the chapter about Violence and Politics, the period had been a typical case where the *repertoire of contention* available to express claim was shrinking to the point where non-violence and unarmed mobilisation is not an option. It would re-emerge with the decrease of violence and the relative security amelioration within the country after 2008.  

2.4.2 Adjustments

The disbanding of the army, the De-Ba’athification, but also the economic depression in general would begin to introduce profound change in social stratification (Status Group, Social Networks) and induce high tension within pre-existing social bonds and networks of solidarities. Overall, with political and economical order being remade through these changes, many people within Iraqi society had to readjust, changing from one social situation to another and trying to grab opportunities of work or position, whatever they were. And contrary to what many Iraqis had expected, job opportunities were maybe even much scarcer and precarious than before. As I was in Baghdad between 2003 and 2004, and then later on in Syria, I encountered many Iraqis who had to adapt to a drastic change of situation and find ways to meet ends, not only for them but for their entire families. I will provide here three individual stories that relate to such adjustments.

*Waleed:*
For instance, I met Waleed in Baghdad in the beginning of 2004. He had been a non-commissioned officer in the regular Iraqi Army before the US invasion. He was living around Talbyha neighbourhood, but his maternal family was living in Al Sadr City. After the disbanding of the army, he found himself jobless with a family of six to support. After a few weeks, he found a job as head of the guards for one of the mosques in Al Sadr City. Soon after, he

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208 An important exception to this phenomenon would be the continuous struggles of the different oil unions, during the whole post-2003 period. Despite the repression by the CPA and the Iraqi governments, the oil unions have a particular position with the capacity of blocking the production of the unique resource of the country. Therefore, it provided them with a powerful card for bargaining and contesting not only the central government, but also local governorates as well as militia.

209 As for instance, the episode of street mobilisations dubbed the “Iraqi Spring” in the spring and summer of 2011. See in this thesis: Chapter 1.4.5 Reduction of violence, turn to politics 2008-2011
would enroll in the Madhi Army, the militia of the Al Sadr movement. Waleed did not appear to me as a very religious man. When I asked him why he joined the Madhi Army his answer was simple, he was a soldier, he was a Shi‘i and he needed a job. Besides he had his personal grudge against the Americans, he would never forget the humiliation of the disbanding of the Iraqi Army. I lost track of Waleed after the US offensive against the Al Sadr Movement in the spring 2004. However, by hearsay I learned that in 2005 he may have enrolled in the FPS (Facility Protection Service) attached to the Ministry of Health, at that time a stronghold of the Al Sadr movement.\textsuperscript{210}

\textit{Mansour:}

During the same period, as I began to work in Baghdad in 2003, some of my non-Iraqi colleagues and I were using the services of Iraqi ‘fixers’, when our Iraqi colleagues, busy with other tasks, could not accompany us. In general, the ‘fixers’, hired for the day or half a day, would work for independent journalists or NGOs like mine. Hence, for a few months, I would work regularly, once or twice a week, with Mansour who would help me arrange meetings with gatekeepers or political organisations, he would translate during some of the meetings if needed, and would drive me around Baghdad and beyond. Mansour was in his late thirties, and had been a middle-rank clerk and translator for the Ministry of Trade, working mainly with State-Owned Enterprises for the last decade. After May 2003, he was one of the dozens of thousands of people impacted by De-Ba‘athification and lost his job in the Ministry a few months before we met. Through acquaintances, he began to work with journalists and NGOs as a fixer and being fluent in English, as a translator for many of them. As the time passed, we began to know each other better and had discussions around a meal or a ‘shai’, sometimes in his house, sometimes in mine. It is during these discussions that I understood that Mansour did not like his new job. Being a ‘fixer’ was a dangerous activity in post-2003 Iraq. It meant being constantly with foreigners and meeting with political or religious figures in a period when violence often targeted or was looming around these particular categories of people.\textsuperscript{211} Besides, even if the pay was quite good compared to a regular salary at that time, it was still a precarious day to day, job. But most of all, Mansour did not want to be a journalist or a writer. Although he was serious when working with us, he had the sentiment that he was doing menial tasks, nothing concrete, nothing productive that he could be proud of, or that would give him recognised status in society. In reality, Mansour was longing for his past position in the Ministry of Trade. Although, he had filed a complaint to the De-Ba‘athification commission to be reinstalled in his job, being a Sunni and without the good connections, he did not

\textsuperscript{210} Interview and meeting with Waleed in February-March 2004 in Baghdad.

\textsuperscript{211} Hence, we got into a few bad encounters, once with the armed guards of the Hanafi mosque and once with US GI’s that have been very close to be fatal.
have high expectations about it. I know that later on, at the end of 2004, he began to work as a clerk for an Iraqi NGO that was financed by European funds.

_Ahmed:
A few years later, I would meet Ahmed in 2008 in Damascus. He was an established businessman, trading between Syria and Iraq, since the end of 2005. For many years, he had worked in Iraq for the Ministry of Transport, and as an aircraft engineer he was a technical director at Iraqi Airways. Although the company had been out of business and mostly prevented from operating during the years of embargo, it had kept a small fleet that had been used for a few domestic flights and pilgrimages to Mecca. After 2003, the Ministry of Transport and Iraqi Airways underwent a complete organisational change. Ahmed's bosses in the company had been fired because of De-Ba'athification, while new executives were appointed to Iraqi Airways by the new Ministry of Transport. Soon, Ahmed found himself in competition with staff that were supposed to be under his supervision but who had been appointed directly through the new Transport Ministry and who were all linked to the Al Sadr movement. Things soured until the point where Ahmed, for his own safety, retired from his position at the end of summer 2005. Then, he sold his property and some family lands and left the country a few months after. For Ahmed, the fact that his job position was being coveted, and that he was not affiliated with the Al Sadr movement and even worse, the fact that he was a Sunni, had made him an easy target within the company and the Ministry. 212

Such individual trajectories may seem anecdotal, but in reality they illustrate recurrent patterns that one would find in many individual stories from the post-2003 period. Hence, the De-Ba'athification and the disbanding of the Iraqi army appear as the principal trigger of change of social positions. In these examples, the De-Ba'athification directly impacted one of my informants and indirectly another. But more importantly, in their accounts my informants describe the interaction between the De-Ba'athification and the strengthening of sectarian political parties, here Al Sadr II movement, within the state structures and public offices. As I discussed earlier in the chapter about the new Iraqi ‘State’, it seems that Ahmed and Mansour, as members of the Sunni community did not make use of connections and _Wasta_ (protection) that could shield them from the effects of De-Ba'athification and the grip of political organisations. In a similar vein, the story of Waleed that began with the disbanding of the army, depicts quite a common trajectory of disbanded Iraqi soldiers that would join a militia or armed groups for economic and moral reasons (the grievance against the US-led occupation). Later on, the fact that Waleed may have returned to the new state security apparatus (here the FPS)

through the militia of Al Sadr movement, is an illustration of the collusion between the new state security apparatus, the sectarian political organisations and their militia. As identified by Arato, the prime allegiances of the men in the new security apparatus of the new State (the police, the army) are not to the state, but the militia and the parties that more or less command them (Arato, 2009:204). Beyond these remarks, another element is striking. These trajectories and the accounts of these Iraqis reveal profound feelings of injustice and humiliation against the US occupiers and against the new Iraqi State and political elites that one would find quite pervasive in Iraq during that period. These would only be aggravated by the extreme level of coercion used against the population, first by the US-led Multinational Forces and later on by the new State security apparatus.

2.4.3 Social brutalisation

As recalled by scholars like Bozarslan or others, the “brutalization” of Iraqi society during Saddam’s regime (2008:225), but also the corroding effects of the embargo on “the fabric of the society” (Halliday, 1999:33), would have long range consequences and may explain the incapacity of the society to prevent and stop the spiraling of violence that will engulf the country from 2005 and onwards. But one should keep in mind that the brutalisation of the Iraqi society did not stop with the forceful removal of Saddam Hussein’s tyrannical regime. In reality, the whole occupation period from 2003 until 2011, would be a period of continuous brutalisation of the society in Iraq. Hence, the first years, 2003 and 2004, would be dominated by the use of coercion and violence by the US-led forces against the whole of Iraqi society, before being outdone by the general rise of violence and the multiple actors of the civil war (Hicks et al, 2011). This continuous brutalisation would be punctuated between 2003 and 2006 by a series of kinetic and symbolic shocks that would jolt society as a whole. It would start with the invasion campaign from March to April 2003, followed by the weeks of looting, the disbanding of the Iraqi Army and the destroying of the State in May 2003. Then, with the massive bombing attack in August 2003 against the UN headquarters, and then against the Shi’a shrines during Muharram in 2004, the sieges of Fallujah and Najaf

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213 I would expand on the question of the relation between militia, political organisations and the new State security apparatus later in Chapter 3.2 System of Multiform Violence.
214 I would agree that brutalisation would not stop either after 2011 or with the removal of US troops. But this is beyond the scope of this thesis.
215 I shall return on this subject in the part on violence.
in spring and autumn of the same year, and finally the Al Askari shrine bombing in 2006. Meanwhile, the abject failures of the reconstruction and the neoliberal policies that I described earlier would plunge the country into economic turmoil. In this frame, I consider the dystopian economics, the social insecurity and the disintegration of State, to be part and parcel of the continuous brutalisation of the Iraqi society—the social brutalisation of Iraqi society. And this situation would be made only worse, as the old State, not only the Saddam regime, had been destroyed and the new one in construction would appear incredibly corrupt and impotent. In fact, many scholars and analysts would use different concepts to characterise the post-2003 Iraqi State: a “Failed State” (Baker 2004; Ismael and Ismael, 2013); an “Absent State” (Davis, 2011); a “Fragile State” (Monten, 2014); and a “Frozen State” (Al Ali, 2014), all adjectives illustrating the reality of a State that renounced or could not provide the Iraqi society with the basic social, economical and security resources it desperately needed.

This was a new phenomenon in modern Iraqi history. Despite its authoritarian trajectory, the old Iraqi State had also been the institutional result of the long struggle for liberation and emancipation. The decades of authoritarian regimes and dictatorships may have shattered and betrayed the promise of emancipation. Yet, it did not hinder the fact that the State had always been “...considered the natural vector of reforms and development” toward, at least in the mind of many Iraqis, social justice and equality (Farouk-Sluglett, 1991:5). More specifically, Zubaida demonstrated that in Iraq, the rise of the State was crucial in the creation of the modern nation, and relied on a “material basis”. Notably its central function as resources allocator, employment purveyor and as a normative cultural centre. In other respects, in the conclusion of his book, *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning*, addressing briefly the case of the destruction of the Iraqi State, Snyder, mounts a powerful defense of the State in general. For Snyder, in the last instance, the State remains the Institution or the block of institutions, moral and economics, that keeps “ideas of reciprocity plausible”, or in other words, accepting the other, despite all his differences, as oneself (Snyder, 2015:319). I consider that beyond moral norms that a state may institute and preserve, the principle of reciprocity remains plausible because the State translates such principle into concrete action, universal solidarity, within the limits of the nation. A universal solidarity, not linked to particular characteristics, local or familial, tribal or sectarian, but extended in principle to each and every citizen of the Nation. Hence, even during the last decade of Saddam’s authoritarian regime, which saw an undeniable rise of corruption and social dislocation, and despite the blatant inequalities between the favoured elites and the common

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216 On the debate about Iraqi Nation State, see the theoretical part: 1.2.3 An Artificial State?
people, the state maintained, albeit in a minimal form, universal solidarity. As Allawi recalls:

“First, and most crucially, was a system of universal subsidies that covered the entire population. Each Iraqi family was entitled to a fixed quantity of basic foodstuffs and other essential commodities on a regular monthly basis. The fixed ration covered a high percentage of the daily calorific requirements of Iraqis and could be stretched to cover a family's entire monthly needs. In addition, petroleum products and all utilities were provided at virtually no cost. Health services were mainly free as were the cost of basic medicines. Although the average Iraqi monetary income was low, it did not account for the value of free (or nearly free) goods and services that were received from the state.”(2007:122)

But, starting from the first days of the post-invasion period in April 2003, this was precisely what Iraqis were seeing disappear day after day. Not only because the new Iraqi State was incapable of guaranteeing security against the rise of generalised violence and establishing the rule of law, but also because the new State was incapable of fulfilling its function of purveyor of universal solidarity. Iraqis could see it when they were queuing for hours, if not for entire days, to get the benzine or the cooking gas necessary to live. While the ones who still could afford it would buy these things on the black market at ridiculously high prices, most of the time a few hundred metres away from the gas station. And the benzine would become even more crucial to run small and big generators—for those who could pay—that would maintain the fridges and lights in individual houses or entire neighbourhoods as the Watanya, the electricity provided by the State, would be supplied only few hours a day. If anything, the question of electricity, at least for the capital Baghdad, would be one of the symbols of the disintegration of the State and of the social brutalisation of the Iraqi society. Hence, from 2005 and onwards the general lack of electricity and the impossibility for many Iraqis to pay for the private generators to maintain fridges and freezers in their houses would revamp the old and dying business of ice factories. Prior to 2003 these antique factories were furnishing mainly restaurants, food markets, and so on. But after 2003 they would begin to sell ice directly to poor customers or people that could not have access to electricity provided by generators, in order for them to be able to conserve some food and drink for the day. In 2007, a New York times article would portray this new phenomenon in this terms:

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217 See for example, David Baran, Vivre la tyrannie et lui survivre, Mille et une nuits, 2004
“With electricity reaching most homes for just a couple of hours each day, the poor hand over soiled brown dinars for what has become a symbol of Iraq’s steady descent into a more primitive era and its broken covenant with leaders, domestic and foreign. (Farrell, 2007)

Later on in Syria, one of my informants would relate to the same story with anger and disbelief:

“Can you believe that in Baghdad, we were using ice to keep food in the house. Me, I would have never imagined that such a day would come. But, yes we were doing exactly the same as our grandparents! We went backwards 70 years!”

They also could understand it when the hospitals they went to for their family or friends would be deprived of the basic medicines or materials to simply function (Al Ali, 2004; Jamail, 2004). Yet, modern private clinics, with all equipment and imported medicines, were opening in the capital and the important cities of the country. And it would frighten them because the CPA and the new Iraqi ministers would publicly discuss the end the Public Distribution System every now and then (Allawi, 2007; Dobbins et al,2009; Chandrasekaran, 2009).

But most of all, Iraqis and foreigners alike would be astonished by the unseen level of predation and corruption that would reign within all the layers and structures of the new State and that would diffuse through the whole society (Al Ali, 2014; LaFourcade, 2007; Le Billon, 2009; Looney, 2008; ICG, 2011; Gunter,2013). If during Saddam’s regime, and in particular during the embargo period, corruption had been well known, it was mainly a corruption of survival. Petty officials or public servants taking bribes to accelerate paperwork or to unblock bureaucratic delays. As for predation, it concerned ‘mainly’ Saddam and his close circle of favourites, as everyone else in the State was under severe scrutiny (Al Ali, 2014:192). But after 2003, with the

220 Interview with refugees who were former staff at one private clinic in Baghdad. Interview done in 2008 in Damascus.
221 As such, the rise of corruption should have not come as a surprise. A lot has been already written about rise of corruption and predation during neoliberal structural adjustment policies and shock therapies. See amongst others, Haggard, Stephan. “The politics of adjustment: lessons from the IMF’s Extended Fund Facility,” *International Organization*, 1985: 505-534; Haggard, Stephan, and Robert Kaufman. “The Politics of Stabilization and Structural Adjustment.”*Developing Country Debt and Economic Performance, Volume 1: The International Financial System*, University of Chicago Press, 1989. 209-254. Villalón, Roberta. “Neoliberalism, Corruption, and Legacies of Contention Argentina’s Social Movements, 1993-2006.” *Latin American Perspectives* 34.2 (2007): 139-156. If anything, the surprise was the fact that between 2003 and 2005 it would be the US multinationals that would lead the corruption and the predation and that it would be condoned by the US Administration.
CPA and the successive Iraqi governments, this would take to another level, and Iraq would plunge and remain within the most ten corrupt countries in the world (Transparency International). As recalled by Gunter, the corruption/predation (fasād) in Iraq would become “entrepreneurial” and “decentralized”:

“Government officials are engaged in sometimes cooperative, sometimes competitive efforts to extract the maximum rents from not only private citizens but also from other branches of the state bureaucracy. … Corruption in Iraq extends from the top to the bottom of official Iraq.” (2013:49-50)

As I show below about the reconfiguration of the new State, such corruption would be a direct result of the privatisation, or even “cannibalisation”, of the State by the multiple political organisations and elites that would rise in power in the central government, taking hold of ministries, or locally in the governorates or municipalities. This would be translated by the embezzlement of billions of dollars in armament scandals, oil trafficking or ministry mismanagement by the political elites and the networks of violence that would be linked to them (Ghanim, 2014:201, Al Ali, 2014: 200-205). In fact, it is nearly all aspects of the lives of Iraqis that would be framed by the general fasād. They would be framed by the everyday rashwa (bribes) that one has to give at the police or the militia checkpoint, in ministry offices, in schools, in hospitals and the wasṭa (protection/connexion) given by relatives or acquaintances in militia, political organisations or religious elites, and that would allow one to get a job or a position in a ministry, but also may allow avoiding extortion by local networks of violence.

For instance, during my second period of fieldwork in Syria in 2007-2009, I met with different young Iraqis that had left Iraq during the post-2003 period. Many of them had quit university or college in Baghdad, and were disgusted by the level of corruption and nepotism that reigned in the Iraqi school system. Some had to pay bribes to be able to get the diploma they had obtained with their work. One of my informants would even have to pay bribes to a group of militiamen affiliated with the Al Sadr movement in order to physically enter his university and pass his exams in 2005. While all of them were complaining that they had seen or they knew people who because of their connections to political organisations, religious movement or empowered elites, were directly given Masters or PhDs, without having enrolled in any of the university programmes. 222 Hence, in the post-2003 period, the forgery of diplomas, from High School final examinations to Phds in university, would become a ‘lieu commun’ in Iraqi life and in particular among political elites. As recalled by

Al Ali and Allawi, the swelling of “Doktour”among senior ranks of civil servants had begun before the end of Saddam regime, but it reached ridiculous dimensions within the new elites, and in particular the exiles that returned to Iraq after 2003. A lot of these new elites would boast about academic positions or diplomas that had simply been invented or bought in the “Baghdad thieves' market” (Al Ali, 2014:57; Allawi, 404-405). So much so that during the regional elections of 2009, the Higher Education and Scientific Research Ministry's inspector general would find around 4,000 forged diplomas, half of them being postgraduate diplomas, belonging to governments officials and running candidates (Al Jawari, 2009). Obviously, the trend never stopped and extended from the top of the State structures to the bottom. Hence in 2011, the Iraqi parliament's investigatory commission found that at least 20,000 government employees, but also ministers and deputy ministers, were suspected to have obtained their positions with forged certificates and diplomas (Abdulkadir & Yacoub, 2011).

On the whole, this climate of general corruption and impotency of the State would produce a high level of cynicism and reinforce disenfranchisement among Iraqis. All the more, because the boundaries between the State and its infrastructure, (the ministries and public offices), the networks of violence, (State security apparatus, militias and armed groups), the informal sector, (undeclared work, oil smuggling, border trafficking) would blur as the country would plunge into generalised violence. Accordingly, Herring and Rangwala focusing on the effects of the globalisation and fragmentation of the Iraqi State “within US-led global governance” would write that:

“One should add that the very conditions of the fragmentation of the Iraqi State and the rise of corruption and violence during the post 2003 period would allow for the exponential increase of transnational informal economy, in particular based on the smuggling of Oil—which the CPA and then the successive Iraqi Governments had been incapable to curtail—but also the rise of drugs, weapons and human traffickings. These global and regional networks of informal economy would also reinforce fragmentation and polarization trends in Iraq” (2006:212)

In reality, the occupation of Iraq opens a period of violent disintegration of the State—losing its capacity and legitimacy—and its transformation, when the violence would be at its peak during the years 2005-2007, into Fragmented Tyranny. A “State” that would be fragmented and sectarianised around a multiplicity of actors; political and religious organisations, empowered elites, and network of violences. This radical transformation of the State would produce two convergent trends. On one side, the general failure of the State to fulfill its function would open the way for existing political and social movements

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223 In Arabic language, “Doktour”is a respectful way to address a person who has obtained a postgraduate diploma.
(in the post-2003 period, mainly religious and sectarian based movements), to
directly fill the security and social void left by the state. In this regard, one
explanation of the rise of movements like the Al Sadr movement has been
undoubtedly the ability of the movement to provide basic protection and min-
imal services to the most impoverished part of the Shi’ia community, from the
first weeks of the fall of the regime and the period of looting and chaos that
directly followed it until the present day:

“Operating in disciplined fashion, his followers filled the power vacuums that
existed in Najaf and al-Sadr city, the poor suburb on Baghdad’s .... Young cler-
ics from his movement went there to impose law and order, protect hospitals
and public buildings, offer neighborhood assistance, impose Islamic dress
codes and gender segregation and close music shops. They took control of
mosques, welfare centers, universities and hospitals. .... Within weeks of the
regime's collapse, Al-Sadr's representatives claimed to have employed 50,000
volunteers in East Baghdad to provide refuse collection, hospital meals and
traffic control. Religious seminaries run by al-Sadr's followers have prolifer-
ated. In the absence of a functioning public judicial system, Mohammed Far-
tousi, al-Sadr's agent in al-Sadr city, used his Hikma mosque to establish rudi-
mentary personal status courts. Al-Sadr's wakils, or agents, distributed vests to
traffic wardens emblazoned with the words “hawza-police”. (ICG, 2003:16-17)

The fact that the new Iraqi State would be cannibalised by sectarian move-
ments and elites—in a certain sense, the Iraqi State changes from a one party
State (Ba’ath Party State) to a state fragmented and ‘owned’ by multiple par-
ties—meaning that the poor services, resource allocations and security that the
state would barely succeed to provide, would be first channeled through the
political and sectarian movements or elites that would occupy specific posi-
tions within the new Iraqi State. Therefore, this convergence induced a rad-
ical change in the possibility to access the state and basic resources. Indeed,
the Iraqi population would have few options available to get access to re-
sources that would have been normally provided by the state. Either turning
to a local political or religious entrepreneur—more than often already playing
the ethnic or sectarian card—that could provide some protection and some
resources or, to what remains of the state. Yet, as it was being fragmented
and sectarianised, so would be the access to the resources, job and security
that it would provide. As this new system of resource allocation and distribu-
tion was taking hold within the new fragmented state, it would be sectarian or
ethnic affiliation, before anything else, and secondly a connection to a political
organisation that would permit Iraqis to access jobs or subsidised resources.
This trend emerges clearly starting from 2005 and would extend to the whole

224 For instance, Al Sadr movement would be ‘in charge’ of the transport and health ministries
for years, while the SCIRI would take hold of the Interior Ministry.
225 With the rise of generalised violence such figures would be replaced by or linked to a net-
work of violence.
society during the peak of violence in 2006 and 2007. Hence, in his book documenting the rise of the Al Sadr movement, Cockburn, quoting different interviews he obtained at that time, describes in length this pattern within the ministries of Health and Transport, held by the Al Sadr movement but also within areas that would fall under the control of the movement:

“In each neighborhood in Sadr City there was a Sadrist office with a social supervisor in charge of giving monthly salaries to the very poor. .... The role of Medhi army gunmen is usually emphasised in explaining the strength of the Sadrists in Baghdad, but control of ministries was also very important. ... ‘The head of the Sadrist office in Sadr City would send to the ministry lists of names of people to be employed. There was no place for any Sunni’ .... Manale says this is true of other ministries such as transport where every Ba’athist employee was dismissed and the first jobs available went to a Shia who could claim a martyr in the family ...’” (Cockburn, 2008:172)

In a similar way, he describes how Sunni doctors and medical staff were literally “squeezed out” of the Ministry of Health: “I cannot go to the ministry... All the Sunni doctors are now working in Sunni districts just as I do now, practicing in Amariya district” (idem). Here one can see the beginning of the economic separation, and even segregation, of the different communities. In fact, the channelling of resources through sectarian or ethnic affiliations signal the end of the universal solidarity that would be normally maintained by the State. With universal solidarity and “moral illumination of institutions” failing, it is Snyder’s concept of reciprocity that collapses. Instead, in Iraq the new social order would be based on the economic and political competition of communities within an unequal system of resources allocations. Within such a system, the mobilisation of communities and the activation and strengthening of sectarian or ethnic boundaries are crucial for the general competition to access resources and in the internal competition, within communities, for leadership. In this frame, Davis, writing about the general context in which the Al Sadr movement rose, would epitomise such trajectory:

“The State's unwillingness or inability to provide security and social services created the necessary conditions for the translation of sectarian identities into organized and effective collective action.” (Davis, 2011:79)
2.5 Reconfiguration of Political Space and ‘Culturalisation’ of Politics

If economic governance and policies were the core of the American project in Iraq, the radical transformation of the political architecture of the country as well as its social realities were directly linked to it. Here, the question of democracy is quite interesting. It has been one of the slogans of the Bush Administration; the US invasion of Iraq was about the removal of a dictator and the installation of freedom and democracy. However, the inception of the CPA in May 2003 coincided with the abolition of all local caucuses and genuine attempts of democratic building by Iraqis that had happened in the few days and weeks following the fall of the Saddam regime (Docena, 2005). At national level, it also coincided with the cancellation of the early plan to install an Iraqi Interim Administration (IIA) and of the political process that had begun on the 15th of April 2003 in Nasiriyah (Allawi, 2007). Of course, the US Administration and Bremer were defending such a move by arguing of the danger of the possible return of Ba’athist through these early election processes (Bremer, 2006:40). However, the processes of local democracy and elections were cancelled under the direct orders of Bremer not only for that reason. In reality, as noted by the RAND corporation “…the CPA feared that elections ‘could create a legitimate counter authority to the CPA, making its ability to govern more difficult’” (Dobbins et al., 2009:137). Indeed, Bremer and other actors of the Bush Administration considered that they needed time to consolidate their grip on the transitional process they envisaged for Iraq. Thus, for many opponents of the invasion of Iraq, the arrival of Bremer and the inception of the CPA instead of an Iraqi Interim Administration and local electoral processes, and later on the reluctance of Bremer to concede general elections and handover to Iraqi authorities were seen, with some reasons, a direct contradiction with the stated objectives of Bush Administration to install ‘democracy’ in Iraq.

However, as I discussed in the Chapter 2.2, neoliberal rationality and market-state definitions of democracy substantially deviate from a political conception that elaborate a system of relations and control between the political structures and the political constituencies, between the State and the citizen. In this mode of governance, the role of the state is the control and the facilitation of the relations between the consumer and the market. In a certain sense, within neoliberal rationality, the democratic participation of the citizen is
translated into active participation of the individual into the market. Therefore, the political architecture of the state is subordinated to the market and within this system, the language of ‘democracy’ is not a language of political participation but, before anything else, a form of neoliberal grammar that permits participation within the market. Accordingly, the ‘democratic package’ elaborated by the US Administration for Iraq was centred on the free market around which everything was supposed to turn. Hence, building on the Iraqi example, Wendy Brown noted:

“What is striking, however, is the boldness of a raw market approach to political problem solving, the extent to which a flourishing market economy built on foreign investment and radical privatization schemes are offered not simply as the path to democracy but as the name and the measure of democracy in these nations, a naming and measuring first appearing in post-89 Eastern Europe a decade earlier”. (Brown, 2005:49)

In this frame, the enforcement of the market forces and institutions were considered at least as important, if not more, than the development of democratic institutions. Hence, in an interview with journalist Chandrasekaran a few days after his installation as the head of CPA, Bremer was stating that his top priority was (radical neoliberal) “economic reform” and notably to “corporatize and privatize state-owned enterprises,” and to “wean people from the idea the state supports everything.” As the journalist recalled: “Bremer had come to Iraq to build not just a democracy but a free market” (Chandrasekaran, 2009:39). However, the US Administration who had just helped collapse the old Iraqi State, needed to establish new political institutions. Yet, such reconstruction of a political space and state institutions had to be embedded within neoliberal rationality and architecture, mainly the market and the radical decentralisation of the state. On the other side, the US Administration would also have to accommodate and mediate between different unreliable old Iraqi ‘allies’ and an emergent Iraqi political landscape. Finally, the US would coordinate this political reconstruction following an ethnic and sectarian understanding of the Iraqi society. It is on such a process that I will focus in this chapter. First, I will briefly elaborate on the Iraqi political landscape as it emerged after decades of tyranny. Second, I will show that the reconstruction of a new political space by the US was centred on the question of the ethno-sectarian division of the Iraqi society and the object of a battle between different political forces. Third, I will describe how the De-Ba’athification process would be a crucial mechanism in the reconfiguration of the new Iraqi State as a partisan and ethno-sectarian state. Finally, I will show that this reconfiguration of political space and of the state corresponds to a movement of Culturalisation of Politics and will contribute to the remaking of ethno-sectarian boundaries.
2.5.1 Iraqi political landscape

On the Iraqi side, decades of Saddam’s tyranny that eradicated any possibility of genuine political mobilisation, had transformed the Iraqi political landscape into a desert. However, soon after the fall of Saddam’s regime, hundreds of Iraqi political parties, but also splinter groups and factions of older parties were created or re-established. Yet, an important number of such political organisations would remain hollow shells. Hence, in a study of the post-2003 political landscape, Jabar and Jameel* would note in 2008 that:

“... few of them have a history or political activity of note so as to be taken into account on the Iraqi political scene. Most of them are simply political slogans. For this reason, it is difficult to classify them, especially as they have no clear activity that could indicate their ideological orientation, no communication, and some of them do not even have local headquarters.” (Jameel*, 2008)

However, some corresponded to the three old trends of the Iraqi political history. Progressive parties like the Iraqi Communist Party, Islamist parties like, the Daw’a 226 or the Iraqi Islamist Party 227, but also Arab nationalist parties, like the Free Officers Movement or the different Iraqi Nasserite parties, and many were completely new like the Green Party of Iraq. Before the Ba'ath dictatorship, some of these parties had a real constituency and social bases in the Iraqi society, in particular the Iraqi Communist Party or the Daw’a. 228 But decades later in 2003, most, except for a few, would have to build or rebuild it from scratch. And this was obviously the case for the most part of the returning exiles and the parties they had created abroad. In reality, even the well-known exiled figures who had been allied or working closely with the US and UK prior to the invasion, like Ahmed Chalabi or Ayad Allawi, did not command so much support in Iraq (Ismael & Ismael, 2010).

Besides, the return of the exiles to Iraq was not without friction with some parts of the Iraqi society resentful that the exiles did not have to endure the Saddam dictatorship nor the embargo period. 229 Meanwhile, the exiles had a tendency to look down on insiders, either considering them ‘backward’ or guilty of having been complacent towards Saddam’s regime (Al-Ali, 2014). Hence, in the political field this division between exiles and insiders would be

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226 Daw’a Party, Shi’i Islamist Party.
227 Iraqi Islamist Party, Sunni Islamist party, the Iraqi branch of Muslim Brotherhood.
229 Many of these exiles, as political opponents of the Ba’ath and Saddam, had suffered terribly before they were able to escape. Yet, the image of the opposition in exile was often the image of rich elites that enjoyed the good life in the West. They were called the ‘maradha al fanadak’ (the opposition of the palaces) by some insiders.
an important fault line starting from the first days of the end of Saddam régime. In any case, the general lack of support from Iraqi society towards political parties, either new or re-established parties, and their political elites would appear regularly in opinion polls made during the first years of the post-2003 period. For instance, a survey published by the CSIS and 19 compelling opinion polls that had been conducted in Iraq from August 20003 to October 2004, showed a “...strong negative consensus on political parties”, while “...in all of the polls, at least about 69 percent of respondents claimed to have either little or no confidence in political parties” (Zirpoli, 2004:23). In another poll from 2004 by IIACSS in 6 governorates (Baghdad, Basra, Mosul, Hillah, Diwaniyah, Baqubah), people were asked to choose a future president for Iraq among 13 Iraqi personalities (IIACSS, 2004:16). Some of these public figures were leaders of political parties and had been part of the previous Interim Governing Council, or the Iraqi Interim Government, others were well known religious figure like Ali Sistani, others (at that time) were adamantly contesting the occupation of Iraq and the current transition process like Muqtada al Sadr or Ahmed al Kubaisi. For 1,093 respondents, around 60% could not relate with any of the personalities proposed (375 did not know who to pick, 218 refused to pick anyone, 57 had another person in mind, 42 agreed with anyone “fair and efficient”). Except for a peculiar outlier, Ibrahim al Jafari, who got a little bit more than 10% of the “votes”, none of the 12 other personalities would even reach 5%. Incontestably, such general distrust for political organisations and political entrepreneurs was also the legacy of the decades of harsh authoritarian rule under the Ba’ath party.

But this combined distrust for political parties and the increasing multiplication of political organisations, political gatherings and splinter groups reflected also the profound fragmentation of the society and its difficulty in rallying around a common set of values, representations and public policies. Similarly, Jabar and Jameel would recall that:

“This vast number of parties denotes increasingly important social and political contradictions and reflects intellectual chaos on the level of convictions as well as conflicting interests, all of which helped heighten the level of relative tension.

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231 In votes obtained, Sadoun Hammadi: 2; Mushin A. Hameed: 3; Ahmed al-Kubaisi: 3; Mowaffaq al-Rubaie: 4; Ghazi Ajeel: 4; Ahmad Chalibi: 6; Mehdi al-Hafudh: 6; Ali Sistani: 20; Muqtada al-Sadr: 22; Shareef Ali: 27; Saddam Hussein: 37; A.Azziz al-Hakeem: 38; Any fair and efficient person: 42; Adnan Pachachi: 45; Other: 57. Ibrahim Jaafari: 184

232 On the question of partisan dynamics, political mobilisations and parties see Catusse Myriam and Karam Karam (eds), A Return to Partisan Politics? Partisan Logics and Political Transformations in the Arab world, IFPO press, 2010, focusing on six countries in transition, Algeria, Bahrain, Iraq, Lebanon, Morocco, Yemen.
within the political system. ... One of the most important factors behind this deluge of political parties in Iraq is the social fragmentation and the plurality of sub-identities (nationalist and sectarian) whereas there was no reference capable of assembling all groups under a single Iraqi identity.” (Jameel*, 2008)

In this regard, the Iraqi opposition in exile had not been spared by the division trend. It was dogged by a bitter history of internal fights, mutual accusations of betrayal or of being on the payroll of foreign countries, the US, the UK, Iran, Saudi Arabia, that had arrived in Iraq with the invasion of the country233. However, within such a landscape, two phenomena would be clearly set apart. First, the general rise of Islamist movements and organisations, such as the SCIRI, the Daw’a party, the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) and the al Fadlalah Party, was evident in the aftermath of the fall of Saddam regime, although not really surprising. After all, the re-emergence of Islamic movements but also the return to religious practices and mobilisations in Iraq was in line with the general movement of ‘re-islamisation’ that was happening in the whole region over the previous 20 years or so.234 In Iraq, as in other cases, different factors were contributing to this rise. In a nutshell, these were the ideological demise of the nationalist/progressist movements and the fall of the Soviet Union, the impact of the Islamic revolution in Iran, the abject failures of the authoritarian nationalist State and the rise of social polarisation. Besides, if the Ba’ath and Saddam regime succeeded in eradicating the political landscape in Iraq (including emergent Islamic parties such as the Daw’a or the IIP), the Iraqi social movement and trade unions, it never succeed in curbing the movement of the re-islamisation of the society and even tried to instrumentalise it during the 1990s by launching the al Hamla al Imanyya, the ‘Faith campaign’, with very mixed results.235 In a sense, despite all its efforts, during all the decades of dictatorship, the Saddam regime never succeed to destroy the ‘Mosque’ nor to firmly


control it. But the “Faith campaign” contributed undoubtedly to the continuity of the movement of re-islamization of Iraqi society, in both sects Shi’a and Sunni, that had begun from below in the 1980s. Yet, during the first year of the post-2003 period, the ‘old’ Islamist parties, (the IIP, the Daw’a and the SICRI to a lesser extent) would still face difficulty in mobilising, recruiting new members and garnering support within the population (Jabar and Jameel*, 2008), even though they were benefitting from the fact that Islam had become “a dominant idiom in the politics and the culture of the region” (Zubaida, 19993: xiv-xx).

Second, two Islamic ‘movements’, one Shi’a, the Movement Al Sadr II, Jamaat al Sadr al Thani, led by Muqtada al Sadr, and the other one Sunni, the Association of Muslim Scholars (AMS), Hayat al ulama al Muslimeen, led by Sheikh Harith Sulayman al-Dari and Sheikh Abdul Salam al-Kubeissi, two well-known Sunni clerics, emerged directly during the first weeks and months after the fall of Saddam regime.236 Both movements were producing a strong Islamist and Arab nationalist rhetoric against the US occupation. They were receiving increasing support among important fractions of the Iraqi population and demonstrated a real capacity to mobilise dozens, if not hundreds, of thousands of supporters. For instance, the AMS had gathered a network of more than 3,000 mosques, including very famous ones like Abu Hanifa in Baghdad and a number of associations and Sunni religious institutions in Iraq. While in Baghdad only, the movement Al Sadr II was largely in control of Al Sadr City, a gigantic neighbourhood of around 2 million individuals. The movement Al Sadr II had emerged in the late 1990s under the religious leadership of the Marja’ Sayyed Mohammed Sediq al Sadr.237 It was a popular network of followers, middle ranking sheikhs and tribes, as much a social movement than a religious one that would be reactivated by Muqtada al Sadr after the fall of Saddam regime in 2003. In reality, both movements, the AMS and Al Sadr II were enjoying more popularity and support from the population than most of the other political organisations and movements, including the political elites and the parties favoured by the US Administration as the Iraqi representative
political forces. The rise of the Al Sadr movement had been largely documented by different analysts and scholars (ICG, 2003, 2006; Cole, 2003; Jabar, 2004; Terill, 2004; Haugh, 2005; Luizard, 2007; Harling and Nasser 2007; Cockburn, 2008; Visser, 2008; Davis, 2010). While a few studies had approached the Association of Muslim Scholars (Meijer, 2005, 2005/2006, ICG, 2006; 2008b; Benraad, 2007, 2008; Hashim 2008). Interestingly enough, both movements would refuse to define themselves as political organisations and it seems difficult to classify them using common organisational party structures (Leninist, Bureaucratic, etc.). Hence, concerning the Al Sadr movement, Harling and Naser would aptly describe a “une mouvance Sadriste” or ‘Sadrist’ phenomenon characterized by:

“... a rather charismatic figure using a motley combination of legitimizing factors: lineage, the mobilization of popular millenarian sentiments, diverse forms of populism strictly speaking, a set of oppositions (with Persia, with the returning exiled politicians, with the quietists with the occupier and his collaborators, with the saddâmiyîn the takfîriyîn and Nawasib), clientelistic relations, etc. It revolves around a constellation of 'Sadrists' whose actions often seem to contradict the words of their leader (Qa'id).” (Harling and Nasser, 2007:267)

In a certain sense, both organisations were building themselves as a counter model of the Hawza of Najaf and the Shi'i Marj'iyya (ICG, 2006; Meijer, 2006). That is, an autonomous religious authority developing its own social institutions (mosques and madrassa, charity networks, schools and clinics) but at the same time, and this is the major difference with the Hawza, as an institution involved directly in Iraqi political life. Moreover, both organisations would also develop direct links with networks of violence. The Al Sadr movement would create its own militia, Jeish al Mahdi, the Mahdi Army, while the AMS would endorse the role of “spiritual leadership of the Iraqi armed resistance”, with direct tribal connections to some armed groups such as the 1920 Revolution Brigades. However, the two organisations would refrain to directly participate in the institutional political game. For the AMS, things were quite easy, they would boycott and deny any legitimacy to the new institutions and the political process created by the American occupiers and would

238 Translation is mine. “Il se caractérise plutôt par une figure charismatique recourant à une combinaison hétéroclite de facteurs de légitimation : le lignage, la mobilisation de sentiments populaires millénaristes, des formes de populisme à proprement parler, un jeu d'oppositions (avec la Perse, avec les politiciens rentrés d'exil, avec les quiétistes, avec l'occupant et ses collaborateurs, avec les saddâmiyîn, les takfîriyîn et les nawâsib 2), des procédés clientélistes, etc. Autour de lui gravite une constellation de « sadristes » dont les actes semblent souvent contredire les paroles de leur leader (qa'id) déclaré.”

239 “Our stance on the resistance in Iraq is the same stance as that of every nationalist and Muslim whose land is occupied. If he does not resist, then he supports the resistance. Our sharia orders us to resist the enemies. We do not incite resistance, but we do support it ... It is a natural right for any nation.” (Quoted in Hashim 2008: p 67).
maintain this position until the end of occupation in 2011. But in any case, the
AMS would consider that their role was not to be involved in political com-
petition (Meijer, 2005/2006). The Al Sadr movement would maintain a similar
boycott position until the elections of December 2005. Yet it will authorise
‘supporters’ to form multiple electoral groups (‘The National Independent Ca-
dre and Elite’ in January 2005, “The Rysalioun” in December 2005, “The In-
dependent Free Movement” in 2009, the “Al Ahrar” block in 2010) to concur,
successfully, in all the elections. In a similar vein, Muqtada al Sadr himself
would refuse to join any Iraqi governments that would form after the handover
of sovereignty in June 2004. Yet after the January elections of 2005, Muqtada
would allow different cadres of his movement to join the different successive
governments and take hold of ministries.

2.5.2 Reconfiguring the political space/occupying the space

The US-led occupation introduced an “ethno-sectarian quota sharing system”
(Visser 2004) inside both the State institutions and the political space since
the very beginning of the occupation. The first move toward the sectarianisa-
tion of the political life in Iraq would be the creation by the Coalition Provi-
sional Authority (CPA) of the first Interim Governing Council (IGC) in Sep-
tember 2003. The IGC was supposed to be the Iraqi body preparing a real
transition towards sovereignty and appointing staff ministries under the con-
trol of the CPA. This outcome created by a CPA under pressure, was the result
of weeks of negotiations between Bremer, the US Administration, the UK and
the main parties that belonged to the Iraqi exile opposition. 240

Essentially, the organisations and personalities that were having the lion's
share of positions within the IGC were the main exiled parties and leaders that
had formed the recognised opposition in exile since decades. Hence, the vast
majority of the 25 members of the IGC were either exiles or came from the
autonomous Kurdistan, while only 8 of them had been living in Iraq during
the last decade. Of the nine members of the revolving presidency of the IGC,
six, (Ahmad Chalabi (INC), Mas'ud al-Barzani (KDP), Jalal Talabani (PUK),

Adnan Pachachi (AID), Iyad 'Allawi (INA), and 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Hakim (SCIRI) had been the leadership of the Follow Up and Arrangement Committee (FUAC), a body created during the autumn of 2002 to gather the official and recognized opposition in exile and their perspectives on the invasion (Ghareeb, 2004:74). The IGC members were vetted by Bremer not to represent a political project or a political constituency but were on two conditions: compliance to the US-led specific federalist, neoliberal, nation-building project and not being subject to the De-Ba’athification policy. On this topic, the entrance of the old Iraqi Communist Party within the IGC is revealing. In Bremer’s own words, the Secretary General of the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP), Hamid Maid Moussa, was recruited into the IGC after having renounced communist “misbegotten ideas” about the economy. But maybe worse, despite a long history of secular ideology, rhetoric and practices, mixing Sunni, Shiites, Christians and Kurdish militants and leaders, the ICP was de facto belonging to the Shi’ia caucus (al Beyt al Sh’ia) of the IGC. In reality, each of the 25 members (13 Arab Shi’i, 5 Arab Sunni, 5 Kurds, one Assyrian, one Turkman) was officially supposed to be a representative for his sect or ethnic constituency before anything else. The mathematical composition of the IGC was supposedly matching the general demographic composition of the country (50% for the Shi’a, 15% Sunni, 15% Kurds, and the rest) that many assumed more or less true. However, even if such numbers seem plausible, in the absence of a real census of Iraqi society, they remain extremely contested for obvious reasons. Besides, it did not represent, by far, the whole spectrum of communities and sub-identities that existed in Iraq at that time. Starting from this moment, the Feylis, the Mandaeans, the Yazidis, the Shabak, the Gypsies, and all smaller communities and minorities representing hundreds of thousands of people would be left out of the political picture, which soon would have disastrous consequences for these communities. In

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241 In the immediate aftermath of the invasion, the main exiled opposition parties had formed a ‘leadership council’, gathering nearly all the people from the FUAC (Jalal Talabani, Massoud Barzani, Ahmad Chalabi, Ayad Allawi, Abdul Aziz Hakim,) and adding Ibrahim Jafafari of the Daw’a Party, and one insider Nasser al Chacerdi, a Sunni, who had just refounded the old National Democratic Party that had been banned after the first Ba’ath coup in 1963. The group was called the G7.

242 “I said I had none, provided we could find someone who had cast off communism's misbegotten ideas about how to run an economy ...Fortunately, a couple of days later, Sawers and I interviewed Aziz's replacement as party leader, Hamid Majid Moussa. He was an energetic roly-poly man in his mid-forties who clearly understood the need to encourage a private sector in Iraq. Moussa, a Shiite, was to prove one of the most effective and popular members of the Governing Council.” (Bremer, 2006:108-109)

243 Interview with one member of the Central Committee of the Party, January 2004. See also Ismael, The Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Iraq, Cambridge University Press, p 306. As recalled by Allawi, the Iraqi Communist Party was invited from the beginning to participate in the Shi’a caucus that had been officially formed within the IGC. (Allawi 2007:205). See also (ICG, 2006:10).
fact, the creation of the IGC was symbolically dividing Iraq in three, between the Arabs Shi'i, the Arabs Sunni and the Kurds. And in a sense, that was the only legitimacy that the IGC, as a political institution, could invoke to defend its existence; to represent the three 'main' ethnic and sectarian communities of the Iraqi society. As recalled by ICG, it was exactly in these terms that the head of CPA Paul Bremer would announce the creation the Iraqi Governing Council:

“CPA administrator Bremer lauded the Council for bringing together, ‘...for the first time in Iraq’s history, a balanced representative group of political leaders from across this country. It will represent the diversity of Iraq: whether you are Shi’a or Sunni, Arab or Kurd, Baghdadi or Basrawi, man or woman, you will see yourself represented in this council’”. CPA, ‘Text of Ambassador Bremer’s Weekly TV Address’, 12 July 2003, available at http://usinfo.state.gov.” (Quoted in ICG, 2006:10.Ft65).

It was the first time in Iraqi history that sectarian or ethnic affiliation became officially a condition to access power, the first time that communities have been officially transformed into forming political constituencies. If one set apart the Kurdish national movement of liberation, this was also a clear rupture with a long history of political mobilisations and partisanship in Iraq—which had never been primarily based on the affirmation of ethnic or sectarian values or communities—at least during the period from the beginning of the British occupation and the birth of the Iraqi State, until the 1980s.244 As I said earlier, as an institution, the IGC was devoid of real power, except that the 25 members of the IGC would appoint the interim ministers within the newly re-established ministries under the supervision of the CPA.245 Each minister having in turn some latitude to reshuffle the Iraqi direction of ministries. Unsurprisingly, the first interim cabinet appointed by the IGC was indeed reproducing its ethno-Sectarian composition. Of the 24 appointed interim ministers, 11 were Arabs Shi'i, 5 were Arabs Sunni, 5 were Kurds, 1 was a Sunni Turkmen, 1 was a Shi'i Turkmen and 1 was Assyrian Christian.247 Also, 15 of them

244 One could consider that confronted with the ultra-repression from the regime during the 1970s and 1980s the Shi'i Islamic current evolved from a political Islamic movement with a Shi'a community constituency toward a sectarian Shi'i Islamic movement. Similarly, one could say that the Saddam regime evolved toward sectarian rhetoric and practices after the 1991 Intifada. But in my view this remains debatable.

245 They would also nominate representatives in international organisations, discuss with the CPA the Iraqi budget and appoint a preparatory constitution commission in charge of drafting a constitutional process. (ICG, 2003)

246 Yet, as reported by The International Crisis Group, the announcement of the quota system for the appointment of ministers was met with anger and dismay by many Iraqis and analysts. The practice was therefore denied by other IGC officials. But the reality shows that it is exactly what happened. See ICG, 2003 footnote 110 p 17

247 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/middle_east/03/post_saddam_iraq/html/govern-ing_council_members.stm
were official members or closely associated with one of the 13 political parties represented in the Interim Governing Council. The interim Minister for Oil, Ibrahim Mohammed Bahr al Ulloum, despite having a PhD in oil engineering, was nonetheless the son of one of the nine presidents of the IGC, the Shi'i cleric Sayyed Mohammed Bahr al Ulloum, while the Minister for Trade, Ali Allawi, although a reputed economist and scholar, was the nephew of another president, Ahmed Chalabi. One can understand that this ethno-sectarian quota system (Visser, 2009), the muhasasah248, would soon become the central disposition of the Iraqi political life, and that the privatisation of ministries for the profit of political parties and elites started at that very moment.

Such evolution of the Iraqi political field, which was frightening for many analysts and scholars, Iraqi or foreign (Alkadiri and Toensing, 2003; IGC, 2003), was neither a natural trajectory of Iraqi politics, nor the expected result of a democratisation process as it was predicted by Wimmer (2003). In this regard, many political organisations, political and religious elites were contesting the creation of the IGC, because it was seen as the creation of the US occupiers but also clearly on the grounds of its ethno-sectarian nature. For instance, this was a case of the AMS and the Al Sadr movements and the diverse trends and organisations around them that were at that time participating in the same initiative, the Iraqi National Foundation/Constituent Conference of which the Shi'i cleric Jawad Medhi al Khalissy would become the general secretary in May 2004. Between 2003 and 2005, the INFC would launch a series of political meetings and street demonstrations against the US occupation and the political process ignited by the CPA. I personally observed a series of meetings held between December 2003 and April 2004 and participated in different demonstrations organised by the INFC.249

During these two years, this initiative would constitute a loose gathering of religious and political organisations and intellectuals, representing a broad spectrum of Iraqi society in term of political trends, religious and ethnic as well as social origins. Hence, Shi'i religious sheikhs and ayatollahs (Sheikh Jawed Medhi al Khalissy, Ayatollah el Sayyed Ahmed al Hassani el Baghdadi, Sheikh Abd al Hadi al Darraji) were sharing the stage with Sunni Sheikhs (Sheikh Abdel Sattar Abdel Jabbar, Sheikh Ahmad Ubay al Kubaysi, Sheikh

248 In Arabic, could be translated as allotments, repartition. By extension it represents the quota sharing system in the New Iraq. Such a system was supposed to allow for the good political representation of the ethnic and sectarian demographic balance. According to Ismael & Ismael, the emergence of Muhasasah as political principle for Iraq was already discussed among some members of the exiled opposition in the 1990’s. See Ismael, Tareq Y., and Jacqueline S. Ismael. *Iraq in the Twenty-First Century: Regime Change and the Making of a Failed State*. Taylor and Francis, 2015:86

Harith Sulayman al-Dhari, Sheikh Ali Abdelaziz, Sheikh Mu'ayyad al A'adhami), tribal sheikhs, intellectuals and old political personalities (Dr Wamid Jamal Nusmi, the Iraqi writer and militant Abdulamir Al Rekaby, the writer and scholar Adel Ra'ouf, Dr. Subhi Abdel Ahmad who was a minister during A'ref regime) as well as a good range of political organisations from Islamic, nationalists and even some leftist background (the AMS, Al Sadr Movement, the Islamic block in Iraq, the Arab Nationalist Movement, the Unified Iraqi Patriotic Movement, the United Nasserite Party, the Democratic Reform Party, the Iraqi National Democratic Current, the Socialist Nasserite Party, the Iraqi Christian Democratic Party, the Iraqi Turkmen Front).250

In any case, the fate of such initiatives would be short-lived, the INFC would begin to disintegrate after May 2004 and would not survive the 2005 January and December elections.251 Yet, added all together these diverse forces—obviously the bulk was coming from the AMS and Al Sadr Movement—were able to put thousands of people out in the streets.252 This represents an attempt, yet a failed attempt, to unify a political resistance against the US occupation and the transformation of the country, by drawing from the Islamic, Arab nationalist, and patriotic trends that had irrigated the history of Iraqi political life. As such, the INFC was claiming a direct filiation with the 1920 Revolution against the British, a violent event seen as the founding moment of the modern Iraqi nation (Khadim, 2012).253 In a nutshell, the 1920 revolution saw the alliance of nascent nationalist and patriotic movements, tribal gatherings, important Sunni clerics and the Marja'iyya Shi'ia. This alliance was characterised by the merging of nascent Arab nationalist and patriotic Iraqi discourses with Islamic references and symbols of unity, calling for a defensive Jihad of Sunni and Shi'i to protect Iraq as a dar al islam. Therefore, the INFC would re-enact the symbolic mobilisations of the period. For instance, the INFC would organise common prayers in Sunni and Shi'i mosques (in Abu Hanifa mosque in Adhamya, in al Kadhimya mosque, in Um

250 See in annex, the call for 20 March 2004, initiated by the INFC and the boycott of the January 2005 elections issued by the INFC.

251 For a longer study of the INFC, see Khalil Osman “Trans-sectarian moral protest against occupation: a case study of Iraq”, in Sadiki Larbi, Heiko Wimmen and Layla Al-Zubaidi (Eds), Democratic Transition in the Middle East. Unmaking Power, Routledge, 2013

252 For instance, I was present with other foreign observers when more than 30,000 persons demonstrated in Baghdad between the highly symbolic neighbourhoods of Khadhamya and Adhamya in March 2004 for the first anniversary of the invasion of Iraq.

Qura mosque in Ghazaliya), or celebrating Army Day on the sixth of January 2004 with a demonstration beginning at the historical emplacement of the first Iraqi Battalion (Moussa al Kadhum battalion), crossing the al Aaimah bridge toward the Sunni Abu Hanifa mosque in the Adhamya neighborhood. Such demonstrations would be repeated on the 19th of March 2004 when dozens of thousands of Iraqis would march together, in Baghdad but also all over the country against the US occupation. In this way, the first series of preparatory meetings of the INFC to which I attended were mainly focusing on two dimensions:

“Averting the sectarian division between Sunni and Shi’i that was initiated by the US empire to divide and rule Iraq”

“Reaffirming the central role of Islam and Nationalism for Iraq”

In this context, the diverse participants of the meetings were unleashing furious attacks against the US and British occupiers, but they were also directly attacking the Interim Governing Council. Interestingly enough, the bulk of attacks were not so much directed at individuals or parties inside the Interim Governing Council. But it was precisely its ethno-sectarian nature—the fact that the Interim Iraqi Institution and by extension the State was being “cut down between sects and folks”—that was at the centre of the INFC assault against the legitimacy of the IGC.

Aside from the INFC, the “institutionalization of sectarian and ethnic lines” was not particularly well received within Iraqi social and political life. Obviously, with the DeBa’athification process at play, it was among the Sunni Arab community that people were the most afraid (ICG, 2003:16). But the contention about the ethno-sectarian quota sharing, was not limited at all to the Sunni elites per se. In reality, even among the IGC there was “dissatisfaction” with the “communal spirit of dividing shares” (ICG, 2003:15). For instance, within the Iraqi Communist Party, some militants and cadres of the

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254 Besides, the fact that two leading figures of the INFC, both well-known clerics, a Shi’i and a Sunni, Sheikh Jawed Madhi al Khalissy and Sheikh Harith ibn Sulayman ibn Dari al-Dhari, were the grandsons of two heroes of the 1920 revolution, the Ayatollah Medhi al Khalissy and the Sheikh of the Zobeid tribe, Sheikh Dhari al Mahmood, was reinforcing the symbolic filiation to the 1920 revolution.

255 This was how the themes were framed during the first meeting on the 23rd of December 2003 in the madrassa of Cheikh Jawad el Khalissy in Khadhamya, Baghdad.

256 Many years later, Iyad Allawi, who had been a member of the IGC and then Prime Minister of Iraqi Transitional Government, would recognise later that: “... And their [the US] setting of the Iraqi Governing Council along sectarian and ethnic lines also helped generate the sectarianism we are still struggling with today ...” Quoted by Jamail, Dahar. “IRAQ: Tentative Hope Rises Ahead of Elections”, Inter Press Service, 28 January 2009. http://www.ip-snews.net/2009/01/iraq-tentative-hope-rises-ahead-of-elections/
Party were privately expressing dissent about the participation of the ICP within the Interim Governing Council. Obviously, the collaboration with the US occupiers was a clear breach of the anti-imperialist line of the party and its previous positions before the invasion of Iraq (Ismael, 2008:298-299). But the question of the sectarian quotas was also a source of grievance within the party:

“This division between the Iraqi different sects is pure imperialism. The US government and with them the fundamentalist forces and the terrorists are using the question of religion. ...To answer your question, yes, they built the Interim Council partly on it and this is dangerous. The party decided to enter the Council to limit the damages to the country, but I am not sure how long we should remain in it. I think we should leave the Council and work with the Iraqi people directly.”

In a certain sense, I concur with Othman who analyses the rise and fall of the INFC in the broader context of a battle to occupy the political void opened by the removal of the Saddam regime (2013). In a similar way, Iraqi renascent trans-sectarian social movements, trade unions and associations would also try to occupy the social space liberated by the fall of the regime. Beyond doubt, I think that between 2003 and 2005, the reconfiguration of the Iraqi political space— in terms of cultural membership (sectarian or ethnic)— by the US occupiers and the majority of the new elites, was not an accomplished fact yet. It was still the object of a struggle with different forces, among which the INFC and in particular Al Sadr movement and the AMS were the most important. In his study about the INFC, Othman critically highlighted the internal contradictions and weakness of such gatherings that would contribute to its failure (2013). Yet, I think he failed to consider the extreme violence of the repression initiated against the AMS and Al Sadr movement and, in a lesser extent, other components of the INFC by the CPA and by the Interim Government of Ayad Alawi in 2004.259 This paved the way for the imposition of a constitutional process and the first elections in 2005 that would confirm and anchor the ethno-sectarianisation of the Iraqi political life. Furthermore, the role of different foreign actors such as Al Qaeda, Iran and Saudi Arabia, would contribute to reinforce the sectarian polarisation. In this context, it is difficult to see how the INFC could have survived. Interestingly enough, most of the surveys and polls conducted in Iraq from 2003 until the elections of January 2005, would not indicate that sectarian and ethnic affiliations were drivers of political attitude within the Iraqi population.260 In many of these polls, if and

258 Interview with one cadre of the Iraqi Communist Party in Baghdad. December 2003
when sectarian and ethnic representations appeared as drivers, they were largely counterbalanced by other sets of values and issues, such as the interest of the nation, social justice or government welfare.

Finally, this struggle for the reconfiguration of the political space was not limited to its centre, the State institutions, but also engaged at the lower end. As I said in the preceding chapter on the liberalisation of Iraq, the US Administration embarked on a project of ‘fabrication’ of civil society and local elites in order to foster the decentralisation of the State and the dissemination of Neoliberal rationality within Iraqi society. Within this overall project, Lafourcade describes how the “Local Governance Program”, financed by USAID and monitored by RTI, had the long-term goal, “to modify the relation of Iraqis with politics, to remodel the relations between State and society” (Lafourcade, 2007:23). Hence, the programme consisted of installing local representative councils in Baghdad and then all over the country. Such councils were formed through a system of caucuses where citizens were selected by the US contractors (ibid, 24). She rightly identifies the “decisive factors” of such selection: “communal affiliations” and “gender”, while “education, level of English and above all the inclination to cooperate with the Americans were equally determinant” (ibid, 25). But it was an RTI officer that she interviewed who put it the more bluntly:

“We selected Shi'i, Kurds, and Sunni, one or two Christians, women, in order to build councils that would be the most representatives of the different Iraqi communities as possible.” (Quoted in Lafourcade, 2007: 24)

In any case, the transitional process conducted in 2005 would confirm the ethno-sectarianisation of the political space and the marginalisation, as in the case of the INFC and the AMS, or the absorption in the case of the Al Sadr movement, of the political forces that opposed it. Even the forces that had been part of the political process since the beginning, but that tried to maintain a non-sectarian line, like the Iraqi Communist Party, the Iraqi National Accord of ex-Interim Prime Minister Allawi would be defeated. The winners of the electoral process and especially of the first National Assembly elections in December 2005, were ethno-sectarian electoral blocks that were the simple translation of the ethno-sectarian composition of the Interim Governing Council. These comprised of a Shi'i block, the United Iraqi Alliance —which was the electoral offshoot of the Shi'i caucus al Beyt al Shi'a inside the IGC—the Kurdish block, the Democratic Patriotic Alliance of Kurdistan, and one Sunni block, the Iraqi Accord Front. In fact, the way the elections had been struc-

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261 The 30th of January 2005, Iraqi people would elect a Transitional Assembly in charge of drafting the new Iraqi Constitution within the frame (the Transitional Administrative Law) established by the CPA. They would adopt the New Constitution by referendum the 15th of October and would finally elect the 1st National Assembly the 15th of December 2005.
tured and the electoral campaigns had been run was pushing for the enforcement of sectarian trends. Hence, in January 2005, the national proportional list system, where lists received a percentage of seats equivalent to the national result they have obtained, pushed to create blocks of parties and lists in order to get a maximum of seats and compete for the majority in the new assembly. For the elections of December 2005, it would be even limited to a closed list system where individual candidates would be forbidden. Therefore, Iraqi people were not voting for candidates from their provinces or their towns but for national closed lists, in which most of the candidates were anonymous because of the security context. Of course, the climate of fear and violence in which both elections were conducted did not permit any kind of sustainable political debate between political competitors neither in public meetings or direct discussion about political programmes with the population, except during some TV shows (Fisk, 2005; Filkins, 2005). As recalled by a UIA candidate, these elections were devoid of political content:

“This will be an election of constituencies, not of programs like you have in America,” said Adil Abdul Mahdi, the finance minister and a candidate in the United Iraqi Alliance. “The Iraqis know their people. They know who they are voting for.” (Quoted in Filkins, 2005)

In general, most of the blocks would use similar slogans celebrating the unity of the country, the hope for the departure of the US occupiers and so on. Yet, the main sectarian blocks would also play on sectarian or ethnic markers to mobilise communities. For example, in both elections, electoral posters of the Shi’i block would be pasted side by side with images of the highest religious Shi’i authority, El Sayyed Ali al Sistani262 or even with images of Imam Ali. Clearly, there was not so much left for the voters to identify with a list or another, except the sectarian or the ethnic colour of the block. In this sense, the context of violence and the framing of both sets of elections could only reinforce sectarian and ethnic mobilisations (Dodge, 2006, 2012; Al-Ali, 2014).

However, the adoption of the Constitution in October 2015 and the election of the first National Assembly in December 2005 did not really solve the fundamental problem of legitimacy and representation that had spoiled the whole ‘democratisation’ process conducted by the US occupiers. In fact, for many Iraqis the whole process had been framed by the US occupying forces and imposed through fierce coercion. Moreover, the whole method of constitution-making that relied on bargaining, mostly held between the US, and a few number of political elites (basically the leadership of both Kurd parties, the SCIRI

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262 Although Sayyed al Sistani had released a statement to declare that contrary to the December 2005 elections, he was not endorsing any list.
and Daw'a), would largely undermine its legitimacy (Arato, 2012:337ft48). Besides, the new federal constitution institutionalised the principle of Muhasasah, by creating a three-man presidential council, a president and two vice presidents, that must take decisions unanimously. As recalled by Arato:

“While it remained unspoken, everyone understood that this had to mean conventionally one Shi’ite Arab, one Kurd and one Sunni Arab member, even though a Shi’ite deal with one of the other groups could possibly subvert that imagined convention.” (2012:183)

In fact, until now the “imagined convention” had been literally respected, and not only for the presidential council, but for the all legislative and executive structures. Hence, both successive presidents of Iraq had been Kurds, with one Arab Shi’i and one Arab Sunni vice-presidents, while each successive prime minister had been Shi’i, and all speakers of the National Assembly, except one, had been Arab Sunni. But more importantly, the transitional process gave birth to an incoherent constitution with a dysfunctional “combination of Confederal/federal/Centralistic and Consociational formulas” (ibid: 256). In other words, interpretation of the law relating to decision-making between all the different levels of the federal government, the governorates, and the provincial councils would remain a source of confusion and heated debate between the different political actors. Also, the question of division of resources between the federal state and the regions or governorates would fuel the fear of unequal development between the areas which have oil and those which don’t. In this context, the Iraqi population (except in Iraqi Kurdistan) and a good part of the political elites, were in general opposed to the imposition of Federalism. In particular, they were reluctant to accept the possible creation of quasi-autonomous regions in the mould of Iraqi Kurdistan. This they felt, coupled with the encroachment of ethno-sectarianisation of political life, would contribute to increasing the competition between elites for the control of resources and positions within the new Federalist state structure. They also anticipated that simultaneously, this would lead to an increase in fear and the possibility of a breakdown of the country into three entities (Kurd, Arab Sunni, Arab Shi’i).

Moreover, within this new reconfigured political space between three blocks, the Arab Sunni community was the big loser. Most of the political


forces that emanated from the Arab Sunni community were being marginalised, whether the political forces and elites that chose to participate to the ‘democratisation’ process within a nonsectarian block (within the Iraqi National List or within the Iraqi National Dialogue Accord), or within those which refused to join it completely (the AMS). Furthermore, in this new community game revolving around the Federal question, the share of resources between State and regions, the question of De-Ba’athification and national reconciliation were discarded by the two other blocks who were the real victors of the whole process. Meanwhile, Sunni were evicted from the structure of the new Iraqi State being formed, and from the new security apparatus. In reality, the Sunni were victims of an “exclusive elite bargain” that had been set in motion since the beginning of the occupation (Dodge, 2012:148). As I discussed in the chapter about Violence and Politics, the ‘democratisation’ process initiated by the US occupiers would not produce Legitimacy nor Authority. In reality, the whole process had gone so far mainly because of the coercion and the violence that US-led forces and the new security apparatus were deploying to impose it. Thus, contrary to what was promised to the Iraqi people, the electoral process of 2005 was not the road to peace and security but a predicament towards civil war. As Zeidel put it:

“...The immediate background for the February clash was the election, with its Ta’ifi tones (which were later echoed in the Ashuraa celebrations), and the political stalemate that followed.” (Zeidel, 2008:42)
2.5.3 De-Ba'athification, reconfiguration/privatisation of the State

As analysed by different researchers, the De-Ba'athification had been a key mechanism to impose the reconfiguration of the political space and above all, of the new Iraqi State (Dodge, 2012; Ismae & Ismael, 2015; Al Ali, 2014; Meierhenrich, 2006). Such a mechanism was producing its effect on two different levels, ideological and practical. I already discussed in Chapter 2.1 the destruction of the Iraqi State, and what the ideological bases were, but also the more practical considerations, that led the US Administration and notably the head of the CPA, Paul Bremer, to disband the army and enforce the De-Ba'athification policy. In particular, there was a conflation operated by the US Administration between the Iraqi Army, the Iraqi State, the Ba'ath Party, the Saddam dictatorship, and all different institutions and phenomena seen as a quasi-symbiotic structure, that were built on totalitarian Nazi and Stalinist models. Within this model, the Party and its ideology were as guilty as the Dictator and his close circle themselves.265 To be sure, Ba'ath ideology had detestable elements, among other things, a clear contempt, if not open racism, for non-Arab components of the Iraqi people, a doctrinal and martial vision of the Party and the Nation. But, in any case, as the Ba'ath, as a party and an ideology, was considered as “evil” as the Nazis, then its removal, physically and ideologically, had to be total. Therefore, the question of the De-Ba'athification would not be framed in term of individual responsibilities within the Saddam regime, but as the eradication of a whole system where anyone who had participated in this system in a way or another may have to atone for it. In this sense, De-Ba'athification would be built on the “presumption of guilt—not the presumption of innocence, with guilt collectivized” (Sissons & Al Saiedi, 2013). And precisely, Saghieh notes that if the English term De-Ba'athification conveys an administrative, neutral tone, its translation in Arabic “ijtithath al-ba'th”, bears a much more radical meaning, that evokes “uprooting a harmful and parasitic plant” (Saghieh, 2007:2).

But the Ba'ath was rooted in a broader Arab nationalist and modernist political trend that developed—and more than often betrayed—the questions of Arab national unity, Anti-imperialism, independent development, Statism, in Iraq and in the whole region. In this frame, it is a whole part of the Iraqi political history that became tainted by the crimes of the regime because of its ideological proximity with the Ba'ath. Even exiled political figures that had collaborated with the US and endorsed the invasion of Iraq and the removal of Saddam such as Ayad Allawi or Adnan Pachachi were being accused, both

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by circles within the US Administration and by Iraqi political opponents, of having a discourse reminiscent of the Ba'ath because of their nationalist rhetoric. As the country would be plunged into massive violence and sectarian violence after 2005, the question of Arab unity and Arab nationalism would become even more contentious between the Shi'a and Sunni political elites and intellectuals. On one side, Arab nationalism would be directly equated with the Saddam regime and its crime, on the other side Arab nationalism and the assertion of Arabity became a marker of Sunni identification (Haddad, 2011:166-177). As recalled by Dodge and Saghieh the equation between Sunni, Arab nationalism and Saddam had been projected since the beginning by the people in charge of drafting the De-Ba’athification programme in the Bush Administration, but also within neoconservative circles close to the power (Dodge, 2012; Saghieh 2007). The logic between this conflation between the State, the Saddam dictatorship, the Ba'ath and the Sunni community was framed by the same primordialist, ethnic and sectarian lecture of Iraq. In a nutshell, Arab nationalism and Pan-Arabism had been the ideological vehicle that allowed the empowerment of the Sunni within a modern Iraqi predatory State. The rise of the Ba'ath and of Saddam had only radicalised this sectarian reality of one community governing at the expenses of the two others. The image, somewhat true, of Saddam governing with a small clique of cousins and close tribal relatives was obviously reinforcing this vision of a country dominated by a racist and totalitarian regime. Therefore, in the mind of many within the US Administration, the Army was Sunni, the State was Sunni and the Ba'ath was Sunni. In this frame, the Sunni were seen as the ones who would have the most to lose with the invasion and regime change. And logically, “...in Iraq, the post-invasion political settlement was shaped by the perception of the Ba'ath Party and beyond that the Sunni community as enemies to be excluded” (Dodge, 2012:470).

Interestingly, it is the practical application of the De-Ba'athification within the context of the ethno-sectarianisation of the political life and the privatisation of State that would contribute to transform the perception into a quasi-tangible reality. In his theoretical development about the practice of lustration, Meierhenrich approached De-Ba'athification as a practice of lustration applied by the US occupiers during the period of the CPA. The lustration being the practice of “purification of state institutions from within or without” (Meierhenrich, 2006: 99), but which as a “form of administrative justice” also

266 It was even worse for Allawi as he had been a Ba'athi in his youth.
267 On this question see 1.2 The ‘Ancient Hatreds’ Theory.
268 For instance, this is exactly one of the arguments employed by Bremer and his security adviser Slocombe to justify the eradication of the Iraqi Army. See (Bremer, 2009; Ferguson, 2007)
269 He elaborates three principles, prudence, proportionality and publicity that should contribute to the foundation of an ethic of lustration and “assess the justice of lustration” (Meierhenrich, 2006).
affects and contributes to “the reconstitution of the public sphere” (ibid, 102). Ideally, the lustration should be a form of transitional justice that would permit “...the accommodation of victors and vanquished in a decent society.” (Ibid, 104). However, his analysis of the De-Ba'athification shows that the US occupier’s practice of lustration contributed “to transitional injustice” rather than transitional justice, notably by failing to empower Iraqis, holding power tightly, and concealing the procedures and motives of decision-making.” (Ibid, 110). In his study, Meierhenrich provides a simple sketch of the dynamics that preside at the process of lustration under occupation and that is constrained by deep conflicts of interest:

“The occupant will seek to remove leading representatives as well as sympathizers of an ousted regime from leading positions in politics and society. The population of the occupied territory, in turn, will fear excesses in the administration of lustration and the loss of public employment. Members of the ousted government, finally, will generally resist the administration of lustration, and seek to regain positions of influence.” (Meierhenrich, 2006:104)

Beyond, the ideological background, the De-Ba'athification was a tool also crafted to maintain and even foster US influence on the transitional process that they had launched. It was devised against the “diabolical enemy”, the Ba’athist, but more largely against the rejectionists, that could have disrupted the transformative project of the US. However, the De-Ba'athification did not stop with the end of the CPA and would be pursued directly by the new Iraqi elites. Accordingly, a few months after its inception, the De-Ba'athification programme was transferred to an Iraqi body, the Higher National De-Ba'athification Commission (HNDC) headed by one of the exiled political figures that had returned with the US Administration, Ahmed Chalabi. With the “Iraqization” of the process, the ideological tenets as well as the conflicting dynamics of the lustration would remain, but in a radicalised form. The question was not anymore to remove “representatives and sympathizers of an ousted regime”, but to ensure the encroachment of the new elites and political parties into power and to fill the new State with their sympathisers. The question was not anymore to keep influence on a transitional process, but to mould it. The De-Ba'athification would be a formidable tool in the hand of the commission in charge of it. Therefore, Ahmed Chalabi would even push the ideological stance of the De-Ba'athification further (Saghieh, 2007). Worst of all the commission would dispose of its barely monitored authority to implement a programme of De-Ba’athification extended even further (Zeren, 186).

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270 After 2006, the HDNC would be renamed into the Accountability and Justice Commission, (AJC). But for the sake of the reader I will keep its former name HDNC.

271 “The people affected were party members from the level of ‘Udu Ferqa’ and above, those who held civil service or equivalent positions from the level of director-general or above, members of “oppressive institutions,” or were known to have participated in stealing national wealth,
from 2003 until 2012, Ahmed Chalabi and its staff would constantly seek to enlarge the power of the De-Ba’athification commission and the scope of its process (Sissons & Al-Saiedi, 2013). The HNDC was allowed to demote any civil servant in all administrations and State apparatus, even in the new army, and also to prevent suspected Ba’athist to exercise political rights. Moreover, it was also supervising the appeals and the reinstatement of unjustly accused ‘innocents’ (Sissons & Al-Saiedi, 2013). Hence, for the ICTJ, the De-Ba’athification programme and its commission (HNDC) was a ‘monster’ created by the American occupiers that would quickly get out of their control. In this frame, the HDNC, and later on the ACJ, would perpetually produce new lists of people to demote from civic or military service or would prevent political figures from participating in electoral races because of alleged suspicion of Ba’athist membership (Zeren, 2014).

One important factor reinforced considerably the power of the HDNC and its head, Chalabi. In reality, nobody, Iraqis and foreigners alike, had a comprehensive picture of the organisational chart of the Ba’ath Party and of the real numbers of Ba’athist members and sympathizers in Iraq when the regime was ousted in April 2003. Despite its bureaucratisation and its role as an organ of control and mobilisation of the Iraqi society, the Ba’ath Party had keep its secretive nature and a quasi-clandestine modus operandi, based on “hierarchical cell-based structure” (Sissons & Al-Saiedi, 2013:4). As Dina Khoury put it, many years after the end of the Ba’ath, “...trying to disentangle the complex web of structures within the Ba’ath” remains a challenge (Khoury, 2013:16). This lack of knowledge about the organisation structure and its membership would be compounded by the prevailing chaos of the first month after the invasion. For instance, both the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Interior had been completely ransacked (ICG, 2003; Zeren, 2014:180), and with them hundreds of public offices all over the country, and tons of archives had disappeared. Of course, other archives existed, but they would be disseminated and kept by multiple actors, private and corporate. For example, The Iraq Memory Foundation led by Kanan Makyia succeeded in obtaining around 3 million diverse Ba’ath-related documents that were transferred to the US after 2003 (Khoury, 2013:13). Meanwhile the US military had found records of the whole Ba’ath membership among the old Iraqi army (Sissons & Al-Saiedi, 2013). In reality, there are no comprehensive lists or records, except for the Iraqi Army, that established who was a full Ba’athist member (Uduh el

aggression, or other crimes. These last three categories were not previously part of de-Ba’athification.” Sissons & Al Saiedi 2013)

272 On different occasions, the new executives of the Iraqi State being formed would attempt to restrain the power of the HNDC and reverse some effects of the programme. For example under Interim Minister Allawi in 2004 and then during the first months of the Maliki government in 2006. Both attempts were failures.

273 In their study Sissons & Al-Saiedi had sketched one based on interviews and Batatu works about the Ba’ath until the sixties. (2013:6)
furqa) or above—therefore a subject for the De-Ba'athification commission—and who was a simple sympathiser. In a similar vein, except for the upper strata of the Saddam regime, there were no comprehensive records establishing the chain of responsibilities, organisational and individual, for the numerous crimes of the regime. In many cases, De-Ba'athification procedures were opened against individuals on the base of written accusations by other Iraqis (Zeren, 184), a practice which should have been considered as a fundamental problem in the practice of Transitional Justice. The protocol calling for cautious procedures in order to keep a fair process was transformed into a formidable tool by Chalabi and its allies. As recalled by many analysts and scholars, the work of the HDNC commission was characterised by its general lack of transparency and complex procedures of accusing, vetting and reinstating alleged Ba'athists. In reality, beyond the HDNC itself, no one knew exactly how the commission worked, with regard to its procedures, what kind of material, records and proof they had to establish their judgement (Zeren, 2014; Al Ali, 2014).

As recalled by the ICJT, no Iraqi lawmakers and “...almost no politicians understood De-Ba'athification's complex procedures and framework” (Sissons & Al-Saiedi, 2013:18). It is commonly admitted that there were between 1 and 2 million Ba’ath members and supporters under Saddam’s regime. As such it represented a small fraction of the Iraqi population, but in itself it represents a huge number of people whom only the HDNC had the power, and supposedly the knowledge, to name, exempt or purge and in some cases reinstate. In a sense, no Iraqis, even exiles, would have been really immune against an accusation of the HDNC. Therefore, it was a mighty weapon in the political and institutional struggle that Chalabi would use repeatedly to secure and advance his own political position and blackmail or even destroy political rivals. And it was also used collectively in order to foster the position of the Shi'i political block, and principally the close allies of Chalabi within the State institutions (Sissons & Al-Saiedi, 2013).

In this frame, the De-Ba'athification would be a central mechanism linking the ethno-sectarianisation of both the political and the State institutions. First it was employed in the political space by constraining the political debate and by preventing directly hundreds of political opponents, mainly Sunni, to participate in the electoral races. Hence the HDNC would intervene in both December 2005 and March 2010 elections by dismissing 170 candidates the first time, and 511 candidates in the second election. In both elections, the parties and candidates disqualified by the HDNC were overwhelmingly Sunni and secular (Sissons & Al-Saiedi, 2013; Zeren, 2013). But in 2010, most of the Sunni candidates that were dismissed were those belonging to the trans-

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274 Where Ahmed Chalabi and its deputy Al Lami were also candidates!
275 However, this sectarian hue of the HDNC did not prevent Chalabi to also use the De-Ba'athification to blackmail or prevent close partners/rivals among the Shi’a sectarian block.
sectarian list led by Ayad Allawi. This massive dismissing of candidates, particularly in 2010, would enrage the Sunni community and definitely increase the sectarian tensions (Dodge, 2012).

Second, the double function of purge and reinstatement of the De-Ba'athification within the State and public offices would contribute to the reinforcement of its privatisation and the sectarianisation. In fact, the first years of the De-Ba'athification policy from 2003 and 2005 corresponded with the purge of dozens of thousands of civil servants (as there is no actual public figures, the estimates vary largely, between 45,000 to 200,000)\textsuperscript{276}. And around 80,000 military personnel were demoted as Ba'athists (which means that they were not eligible for reintegrating into the new army, nor to receive a pension). In any case, these people, from the top to the bottom of the administrative ladder, were indifferently removed from all ministries and public offices, but also universities, schools, hospitals, State-Owned Enterprises and so on. These thousands of newly opened positions needed to be filled in order to get the state functioning again.

However, as I said, the new political space was organised around the principle of Muhasasah, the division and the balance of the political space between the three communities. The reconstruction of a new federal state would follow the move engaged by the IGC, that is the partition and the privatisation of state structures, and notably in the ministries, among the victorious political forces. The ministries, and at their top the ministers and their deputies, would be responsible for the recruitment of the workforce. Therefore, starting from 2005, the political elites and the parties in charge of ministries and within ministries would engage in cronyism, nepotism and corruption at the expense of the state, in order to obtain material rent, secure the position of their party and to finance, maintain and obtain advantages their own constituencies. The example of such trends is widely acknowledged. For instance, Rathmell and Perito had described the encroachment of SICRI and its militia, the Badr Organisation, within the Ministry of Interior (Rathmell, 2007; Bailey & Perito, 2011; Perito: 2009). For its part, Cockburn describes in length how the Al Sadr movement used the ministries of health and transport to offer positions to its members and followers and offer services to its supporters in local communities (Cockburn, 2008:172-173). As these parties were based on ethnic and sectarian constituencies, (mainly Kurds and Shi‘i) it meant that in general, Arabs Sunni would be excluded of these positions.

But the function of reinstallation, would be tainted with an even more clear bias against the Sunni. As I said earlier the work of the HDNC was characterised by the complexity of its procedures and above all by its opacity. That means that if the HDNC was able to accuse and purge without having really

\textsuperscript{276} The estimations are provided by the ICJT. (Sissons & Al Saiedi, 2013:22)
to provide proof of its accusation, it could also exempt or reinstate people that had been subject to the De-Ba'athification without having to motivate it. In reality, the whole procedure relied on the bargaining power of the institutions or the parties that were willing to defend or protect an individual that had been De-Ba'athified. Here again, the parties in power were Kurds and Arabs Shi'i not Sunni. Therefore, the ex-Ba'athi, or people that have been accused to be Ba'ath, that would be able to be reinstated or protected from the De-Ba'athification were the ones that had the support of the Shi'i parties, mostly ex-Shi'i Ba'athi. Here also there are multiple examples of reinstatement and protection of Shi'i Ba'athi. For instance, Zaid Al Ali cites two famous figures, who were in top positions under the Al Malaki government, the ex-interior minister, Jawed Bolani and the major general Qassem Atta, who were ex-Ba'athi but Shi'i (2014:71). Lieutenant General Gharawi, ex-high ranking officer in the infamous Republican Guard during Saddam’s regime would be in charge of the Ninewah province during the second Malaki government between 2010 and 2014. But maybe the most ironical example would be provided by the HDNC and Chalabi himself. As recalled by ICJT:

“In a move widely interpreted as one designed to embarrass Prime Minister Maliki, in the last weeks of February A JC publically asked the government to remove 376 military and security officers from their positions. It made sure that the names were published, including the director of military intelligence, the general commander of the federal police, and 18 other prominent figures. Maliki, furious at being publicly broadsided, was stuck between looking soft on the Ba’ath Party or infuriating the vital security apparatus. In the end he only partially complied, protecting a number of high-ranking Shi’ite officers.” (Sissons & Al Saiedi: 20)

Indeed, the establishment of De-Ba'athification had been a mechanism of transitional injustice that aggravated the politicisation of ethnic and sectarian identifications and affiliations. And it reinforced the sentiment within the Sunni community of being outcast and paying collectively for the Saddam regime.

277 Yet, in different cases ministries or political elites in power resisted the accusations of the commission. Some individuals even contested it and went to the tribunal to contest the charges brought by the commission. But in the majority of cases, the accusations of the commission were unchecked. See for example the study of De-Ba’athification within the Ministry of Finance by the ICJT.

278 “As discussed in previous sections, formal reinstatement criteria were vague. Collegial and political support appears to have been extremely important elements in favor of a successful application. Reinstatement processes were cumbersome and open to manipulation. They varied significantly according to the politics of each ministry and governorate; reinstatements could be accelerated for important cases.” (Sissons & Al Saiedi: 23)

In many of my interviews with Iraqi Sunni refugees in Syria who had been either civil servants for the Iraqi State or officers in the Iraqi Army, there were strong feelings of injustice and humiliation. These people considered that they had been demoted or replaced without having even the chance to defend themselves or having the possibility to defend their work and their commitment to Iraq as a nation state. Worse, they knew and saw that many of their Shi'i counterparts were being recycled while they were still living as ‘pariahs’. In this sense, the De-Ba'athification was symbolising the increasing marginalisation of the Sunni as a community. As recalled by Saghieh, many Sunni were equating De-Ba'athification with “De-Sunnification” (Saghieh, 2007). I provide here the fragments of 2 interviews with one ex-officer of the Iraqi air forces. It seems to me that it is a good illustration of such sentiment:

“Ibrahim: Look, I am in Damascus as a refugee. I registered with UNHCR but because I was a Colonel in the Air Force They didn't allow me to move. ... I am here like a pariah. And I cannot get back to Iraq to reclaim my job. Because they will kill me.

ThSom: Who will kill you?

Ibrahim: The Iranians and the militia that are with them. They took revenge on the officers, because the army fought against Iran. They began to kill them one by one. And they were taking revenge especially on the pilots. You know, during the war against Iran, during these 8 years of war, the deadliest body of the Iraqi army against Iran was the Air Force and the pilots. So, the pilots became open targets for these militias. They killed a huge number of them and other officers. And nobody protected these people, neither the government nor the Americans and their allies. So many of us we just left in Iraq with nothing. ... Look! Here I am sitting without payment. Why? I served my country for 38 years, from 1956 until 2003. 38 years! Why didn't I receive anything until now? God help us! It is very tough! Almost six years, not one month or one year! ...You know after 38 years of service... Now they are equating the people serving with the government for 3 years or 5 years with the people who served 40 years. Even they get paid more. Now the officers who retired are getting less than the soldiers on the road. How they can do that?

ThSom: Did you fight the ‘67 war?

Ibrahim: No, at this time I was in the Air Force academy, I joined the Army in ‘66. But I fought in ‘73. Then the Iran war, the ‘91 war...why should I not receive my wages? All over Iraq, all the officers, the Syrian, the Egyptian, even the Israelis, all of them are receiving their wages so why not us?

ThSom: In our previous meeting, you were saying that you were not receiving wages but other officers did receive them. I mean the officers of the new Army are getting paid but not the ones of the ex-Army, right?

Ibrahim: No no, after 2003, Bremer destroyed the Iraqi Army. Then he built a new one, and after him Allawi, Malaki built a new one. And then they chose who will be a soldier, who will be an officer or not. But us, we were discarded because they accused us of being Ba'athist. So, the only thing we could do was to retire. But even that they refused. They even refused to pay us our official officer pension, because we were Ba'athist. But tell me which officer was not a Ba'athi under Saddam? If you wanted to be a cadre in the Army, you had to be
a Ba’athi. In truth, we are punished because we are Sunni. Not Ba’athi. They
don’t care whether you’re Ba’ath or not Ba’ath, they are punishing the Sunni. I
’ll show you. Do you know General George Sada? He was one of my superiors
during the Iran war and during the Kuwait war and the first war against the US
in 91. Then after that, he had been sacked by Saddam, like many old officers.
Saddam got them in check, he was afraid of them. Anyway, he was a good
general. Today he is living in Baghdad with full retirement. Why? Why am I
living like a beggar in Damascus and he is living in Baghdad as retired general.
Why? What did I do that he did not do? Do you think that General Sada was
not a Ba’athi? There were millions of Ba’athi under Saddam! No, the difference
is that I am Sunni and General Sada is not. That’s it. And I can find many other
examples in the new army or in the government. I’ll give you another famous
example. Jawed al Bulani, this one was also in the Air Force. He was not a pilot
but an engineer, I think. He was also an officer and he was a Ba’athi. Now he is
the Minister of Interior! Can you believe? He is the Minister of Interior of Ma-
laki! But he is Shi’i and I am a Sunni.” (Interview with Ibrahim in two sessions
in Qodseia, Damascus suburb in February 2009.)
2.5.4 Culturalisation of politics and boundary making

The reconfiguration of the state and political space based on the *muhasasah* system, belong to a general movement of Culturalisation of Politics which gained momentum during the post-2003 period in Iraq. Building on the work of Mamdani (2007), Brown describes Culturalisation of Politics as one of different sources of “discursive depoliticization” (2008:17). Its background could be found in what has been defined by Mamdani as “Culture Talk” which “assumes that every culture has a tangible essence that defines it and then explains politics as a consequence of that essence” (2007:17). However, in Iraq, Culturalisation of Politics led to the transformation of cultural identifications and representations into political identities and of ethnic and confessional communities into political constituencies. There is here a projection of the discursive perspective into a practice of governmentality. It is not the first instance of such movements arising in the region. As described by Makdisi, the “Culture of Sectarianism” that emerged in the late 19th century in Lebanon, was mainly a product of an Orientalist colonial and hegemonic discourse adopted and imposed in the law by both the Ottoman government and European powers in competition/collaboration for the control of the country. Hence the introduction of the *mutasarrifiyya* and of the *Règlement Organique*—written by European diplomats—by the Ottoman government in Lebanon was in fact the consecration of sectarianism as a political and social order. As recalled by Makdisi: “Every article in the *Règlement* indicated that this new order was to be sectarian.” (2000:161). Of course, such a practice of governmentality could exist because of the active participation of local elites in the struggle “to keep their privileges intact…” and because it “reflected popular visions of the future…” (2000:166-167).

In Iraq, the Culturalisation of Politics was the result of two convergent movements on which the imposition of a neoliberal order weighed heavily. First, it was a projection of a particular element, the ethno-sectarian divisions of Iraq, on a general ‘Western World’ Culture Talk—the primacy and decisive role of primordial identities (tribal, ethnic and confessional) in the definition of the whole Middle East. As noted by Brown and Mamdani, but also by Makdisi in his case study on Lebanon, such discourses are asymmetrical permitting hegemonic power—and in the case of Makdisi, the European colonial powers and the Ottoman empire—to define itself as the upholder of Modernity.

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280 Obviously, Mamdani’s powerful study builds on the seminal works of Edward Said, and other intellectuals who had definitely dissected and challenged the Orientalist tradition of the ‘Western World’.

281 The new administrative status of the Mount Lebanon in June 1861 by the Ottoman government.
and to compel peripheral or subaltern cultural and territorial areas to “reform” through the adoption of the norms established by the dominant. As noted by Drolet, in reality this was just how neoconservative circles around the Bush Administration were conceiving the relations between the US and the Arab world, despite generous discourses about the rights of Arabs to have democracy and human rights. (Drolet, 2011). In other words, it was a “civilizational struggle” that should result into the transformation of the Arab world (ibid).282

In any case, and as recalled in different parts of this thesis, such a vision of Iraq, as a country deeply divided among ethnic and sectarian lines, was shared largely among different circles of the US establishment and within the media.283 This was without doubt greatly influenced by some exiled Iraqis and other American Arab elites close to the neoconservative circles.284 And as I show in the subchapter 2.5.2, it is through this lens that the US occupation authorities attempted to rebuild the Iraqi political space, but also a new Iraqi civil society.

Second, the ethno-sectarian discourse had been already adopted by a part of the exiled opposition, in particular Shi’i exiles, in the late 1990s and on the eve of the US invasion.285 However, such oppositional trends had few, if any,

282 Gregory analyses such entanglement between culture and power, the power to define, give meanings and classify, “the power to narrate”, and to project these “imaginative geographies” and “territorializing” them as the mark of the Colonial Present. See Gregory, Derek. The Colonial Present, Blackwell Publishing, 2004.


284 See for instance the hearing of Fouad Ajami and Peter Galbraith in September 2006 before the U.S. House of Representatives. Although Fouad Ajami disagreed with the proposition of Peter Galbraith to divide Iraq in three, his intervention is full of generalisation and even essentialisation toward Arabs and Iraqis, and in particular toward Sunni Arabs who were allegedly seeing themselves as “martial race”, and Arab nationalism as an ideology concealing the “ethnic supremacy of Sunni Arabs”. U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Government Reform, Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats, and International Relations on: Sectarian Violence, Day 2, September 20, 2006. https://www.c-span.org/video/?194318-1/sec-


resonance in Iraq before the invasion (Al Ali:2015:40-44, Haddad 2011:195.fl14, Dawisha, 2005: 227.fl25;). Moreover, in the same period, the Islamic Shi’a-based opposition to the Saddam regime (the al Sadr II movement) was emerging in Iraq, which would be revived later in 2003. It was led by the Shi’i Marja’ Sayyed Mohamed Sediq al Sadr, and even if the core of this religious mobilisation and opposition to Saddam was confessional, it relied on a staunch nationalist and anti-sectarian discourse (ICG, 2006:5). Yet, as I show above in sub chapter 2.5.2, the ethno-sectarianisation of political life would be swiftly embraced by an important part of the Iraqi political elites who entered the political process led by the US Administration.

In fact, in the context of political fragmentation, lack of constituency and grassroots support for political parties and Political Entrepreneurs—in particular for the exiled class—the adoption of sectarian identity politics represented a strategy to rapidly build grassroots support and legitimacy. As noted by Al Qarawee, SCIRI and Daw’a Party for instance “… [were] putting more emphasis on Shi’a communal solidarity so that the groups could present themselves as communal representatives.” (2012:153). On the Sunni side, the Iraqi Islamist Party (IIP) and other leaders like Adnan Al Duleimi or Tareq al Hashimi were also embracing the ethno-sectarian political division of the country. For instance, in his thesis Haddad reports an interview with the leader of the IIP, Moshen Abdel Hamid, in the newspaper Al Sharq al Awsat in 2004. In the interview, Moshen Abdel Hamid was not contesting the principle of the ethno-sectarian power sharing, but only the share that was given to the Sunni community on the unverifiable claim that the “Sunni were the majority in Iraq” (quoted in Haddad, 2010: 204-205).

Thus, an interesting picture emerges during the first two years of occupation. On one side, two Islamic movements Sunni and Shi’a, the AMS and the Al Sadr II Movement— representing mostly ‘insider’ elites enjoying strong popular support— refused to accept the political process led by the US Administration. They were collaborating and promoting Islamo-nationalist and anti-sectarian rhetoric and attitudes. On the other side, different political, mainly Islamic, organisations—representing mostly exile elites and lacking and more generally on the ethno-sectarian discourse among the exiled opposition, see amongst others, (Allawi, 2007:74-76; Ismael & Ismael, 2015: 86-90, Haddad 2010: 194-198, Osman, 2012:161-163)

286 As I show earlier, it was not the case for all. Although the INA led by Iyad Allawi, the Iraqi Communist Party, had accepted to be part of the IGC built on an ethno-sectarian quota, they would stick to patriotic and anti-sectarian attitudes and practices.

287 Obviously, this will change after the siege of Najaf and Fallujah in spring and winter of 2004, and the referendum of the 2005 constitution. In their own ways, both the AMS and the Al Sadr Movement would integrate the ethno-sectarian dimension as an integral part of their political strategy. (ICG, 2006; Cockburn, 2008; Mejier, 2006)
strong popular support—were participating in the political process. These organisations were actively promoting the ethno-sectarianisation of political life.

In reality, the ‘new’ elites, if incapable of mobilising previous political constituencies, were able to tap into ‘cultural’ constituencies and mobilise them to their benefit. And they were reorganising a fragmented and disfranchised society into ‘homogenous’ cultural and political blocks. Obviously, such movement could resonate with popular sentiments, fear and grievances. And especially, it resonates with popular religious piety and practices. But as recalled by Dawisha, who noted the novelty of the phenomenon:

“What happened in the post-2003 period was that ethno-sectarian identities were reified into fixed political cleavages. Particularistic identities were fused into the concept of parties, so that national issues were now viewed from an ethno-sectarian perspective, and sub-national concerns would generally define national policy.” (Dawisha, 2008: 227)

Moreover, as Political Entrepreneurs and community leaders are driving the competition of communities within the new political institutions and for the appropriation of resources; they are in competition for the control, the mobilisation and the representation of their own ethnic and sectarian communities. In a society characterised by a relatively important level of plurality and integration, this double competition requires intense Boundary Making to separate and mould each community and reinforce its identity markers. Obviously, the question of ethno-sectarian boundary making would be a central element of Iraqi political and social life during the whole period of the US occupation, but even more during the years 2003-2008.

As described by Haddad, the separation or the entrenchment of Iraqi communities revolved around the crystallisation of Myth-Symbol Complexes, and the assertion of distinctive and even aggressive sectarian identities in a context of rising violence and rising sectarian violence (2010:189-238). However, in my view, his account misses the reactivation and manipulation of such cleavages, memories and guilt by the political elites in order to mobilise their respective communities. In particular, the establishment of the ethno-sectarian political order, the muhasasah system, led to the marginalisation of the Sunni community by the victorious political elites of the two other communities, the Shi’a and the Kurds, and was condoned by the US occupiers. This “exclusive elite bargain” against the Sunni community was legitimised through the manipulation of traumatic memories such as those of the 1991 Intifada in the south of the country or the genocidal Anfal campaign of 1986 in the Iraqi Kurdistan.

As recalled by Qarawee, the question of “victimhood” is central in this context (2012). In fact, what were truly the crimes of the Saddam regime, were reconstructed, implicitly or explicitly, into Sunni crimes (ibid:154). In contrast, the Shi’i and the Kurds were considered on the whole as the true victims
of Saddam and of the Ba’ath regime. It is from this point, from the question of victimhood and guilt that the three main communities would be symbolically and politically separated and remoulded. And as I showed earlier, the De-Ba’athification process would be the central discursive and practical mechanism of such reconstruction. Yet, without denying the sectarian element present in the rhetoric and practice of Saddam’s dictatorship,288 this was a manipulation of the political history of the country.

In this regard, the example of the repression of the 1991 Intifada is symptomatic. As demonstrated by Haddad this would become the central element of the Shi’i sectarian narrative (2010). It would resonate strongly within the Shi’i community because it was linking the modern experience of suffering with the religious tradition. This revolt by the south and its bloody repression by the Saddam regime, portrayed as a Sunni regime, was seen as a modern enactment of the revolt and the martyrdom of Imam Husayn ibn Ali in the Battle of Kerbala in 680 AD. In the words of one ex-officer of the Iraqi army, a Shi’i raised in the vicinity of Basra, who had participated in the Intifada289:

“...In Kerbala, in Najaf, in Kufa, those who were barracking themselves inside the sacred shrines, and in the mosques, waiting for the last offensive of the Republican Guard, somehow they relived the martyrdom of Hussein”.

There is no doubt that the repression of the Intifada was horrendous, there is no doubt either that the Saddam regime used sectarian propaganda to legitimise the repression against the majority Shi’i in the south (Davis, 2005:227-270; Khoury, 2011). However, what is missing from the picture is that before it was a Shi’a rebellion against Saddam’s regime, the Intifada began as a popular uprising blending parts of the defeated Iraqi Army and southern populations, irrespective of their sects. As recalled by Faleh Jabar: “The first sparks of the rebellion were in the Sunni towns of Abu al-Khasib and Zubayr, about 60-70 kilometers south of Basra.” (1992). But more importantly, what had also disappeared from the picture is the fact that Shi’i members of the Ba’ath, or even outside of the Party were also part of the crushing of the Intifada (ICG, 2006:7, Khoury, 2010, 2011). As noted by the historian Dina Khoury:

“Clearly, there were large sectors of the Shi’i population of the South who stood on the sidelines of the uprising or worked actively with the regime to suppress it.” (Khoury, 2010)

Of course, the Sunni community and its elites would develop their own Myth-Symbol Complexes in order to confront the ethno-sectarian claims of the Shi’i and the Kurds. Notably, they would deny to Shi’i elites their Iraqi or Arab

288 On this question, see the Chapter 1.2
289 Discussion with ex-officer Saad in Baghdad in March 2003.
identity, associating them with Iran (Haddad, 2010:54). They would associate the Shi‘i popular masses to the old accusation and backward group, the ‘Shurug’. In reality, a part of the Sunni sectarian narrative intended to position the Sunni community as the (sole) historical founders of the Iraqi Nation State in opposition to a Shi‘i community, seen always as disloyal and unpatriotic.

In reality, beyond the question of ethno-sectarian identities, the principal sources of political mobilisations in the whole post-2003 period would be centred around dichotomist cultural couples: religion versus secularism or ethno-sectarianism versus anti-sectarian nationalism. What would be clearly absent in this new political space, was the political mobilisation and struggle of social constituencies concerning the question of allocations and distribution of resources and around concurrent economic policies. In other words, class politics. Initially, this is very surprising for two reasons. As I show earlier, the whole country was still plunging into severe economic and social crisis and under strict neoliberal restructuring policies. And this was at same time when the state-building process launched in Iraq after the fall of Saddam’s regime implied a redefinition of political boundaries.

Hence, the constitutional process and the redefinition of political space, and at its core, the question of the state, were renewing the primordial questions of Politics: who belongs to the political community and who is entitled to resources, or in other words what Woodward, studying the unfolding of the Yugoslavian crisis in the 90’s, calls “the political question of right to assets” (1995:68). In Chapter 2.2.3, I show that neoliberal rationality requires a radical depoliticisation of economic and social power relations. In other words, “the political question of right to assets” as a confrontation between politics and social constituencies cannot exist in such mode of governmentality. For his part, Parker considers that the ethno-sectarianisation of Iraqi political space, beyond the question of Culture Talk, was in reality actively sought by the US occupiers to protect the neoliberal order:

“Meanwhile, CPA officials sought to manage the residual sentiments of a political world beyond the market by channeling underlying potential for collective political action into a communal framework represented by intermediaries chosen from above.” (Parker, 2006:89)

290 The accusation of Ajami’ was also referring to the British mandate and the monarchy, where Iraqi Shi‘i clerics would be expelled from Iraq, under the false pretext of not being registered nationals. On this question see, for instance, Luizard, Pierre-Jean. La formation de l’Irak contemporain. Editions du CNRS, Paris :1991. And Al Khâlysî Cheikh Muhammad, la vie de l’ayatollah Madhî al Khâlysî par son fils. Traduction and annotations by Jean-Pierre Luizard. Editions Martinière, 2007.

291 See Chapter 3.4.2 on the ‘Shurug’ expression and meaning.
As a matter of fact, the new Iraqi elites, under the pressure of both US occupiers and International Institutions, would be incapable or unwilling to change or oppose neoliberal re-regulations. Hence, it is interesting to note that, for instance, the social mobilisations of the period 2003-2004, which were challenging the social and economic restructuring policies of the new neoliberal order, would not be transposed into the political space nor would they be supported by the main Iraqi political organisations. Years later, in the context of the 2010 elections and the banning of candidates by the De-Ba’athification commission, the director of Middle Eastern Studies at Mustansiriya University in Baghdad would describe such an absence of Politics:

“Our political parties don’t have real political and economic programs,” said Hazim al-Nuaimi, the director of Middle Eastern studies at Mustansiriya University in Baghdad. “So instead of struggling over programs and candidates’ capabilities, they are trying to exclude each other — even within the same party or alliance.” (Quoted in Myers, 2010)

Instead, the Culturalisation of Politics in Iraq, that is the redefinition of the political space in terms of cultural membership (sectarian or ethnic), allowed for the deflection of the political question of right.

In this system, the real holders of political membership became communities—led by sectarian political entrepreneurs—based on ethnic and sectarian backgrounds (Arab Sunni, Arab Shi’a, Kurds). Therefore, individuals and social constituencies (class) only have direct access to the political sphere through the mediation of the community. Accordingly, the struggle of individuals and social constituencies for the access and the redistribution of resources is transformed into a competition between communities. Furthermore, subchapter 2.3.2 shows that one of the counter effects of neoliberal reforms was the reinforcement of the State as the sole purveyor of employment and resources, in a context of the contraction of the economy and rising social insecurity. Therefore, the competition between the communities and their leaders for the access to resources and the different rents provided by the state, was even more acute. The redistribution of resources to individuals—whether by the direct attribution of positions and jobs within the state structures, or given in kind or money—takes place via confessional networks of solidarities and partisans affiliations within a fragmented and privatised state and outside of it. But other crosscutting contradictory trends in Iraqi society do not disappear, and are instead seen coming into play first within the community. And as I will show later in Part 3, such contradictions—class, regional, generational, etc.—would be instrumental in understanding the dynamics of violence of the post-2003 period.

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292 See precedent subchapter 2.4.1 on Social Insecurity.
293 I give different examples in subchapters 2.4.2 and 2.4.3.
In this frame, one can speak of a process—emergent and still strongly contested—of ‘Lebanisation’ of the Iraqi political space and of its institutions. For instance, it seems to me that it bears some similarities with the description of Lebanese power structures described by Fawwaz Traboulsi. In particular, within such a mode of governance, there is a tendency for the political space to be confined to the struggles, alliances and negotiations between the diverse ethno-sectarian elites who control or represent a part or the totality of their communities. For the Lebanon case, Traboulsi describes a “game” that is not very different from the one played in Iraq:

“In any case the sectarian system oversees a vast game: a competition over rent in and through the state and the struggle over the distribution of state services, public works and contracts, ... It is a competition that also includes the apportioning of state contracts and the division of various forms of rents between the sectarian blocs and alliances. We call it a “game” because the squabbles quickly peter out into a series of negotiated settlements and partnerships that ensure all warring parties are content, receiving outcomes that reflect the balance of power between them.” (2014:21)

Therefore, despite the institutions of democracy, people participation in politics is seriously limited. As such, the ‘confessional game’ is very similar to the polyarchic model promoted by neoconservative circles and which coexists perfectly with neoliberal rationality.

In any case, the Culturalisation of Politics contributed to produce dysfunctional and illegitimate political institutions. The result is the incapacity to solve fundamental political and economic issues that remained stacked upon each other since the beginning of the American occupation. I will just name them only: The Federal issue and the devolution of power between the federal state and the governorates; the hydrocarbon resources; the relation with the Kurds, the boundaries of the Iraqi Kurdistan and the question of Kirkuk; and finally, the question of National Reconciliation.

As I will show in the next part on Violence, if the new state and political system had begun to transform mostly the three main sectarian and ethnic communities (Arab Shi’a, Arab Sunni and Kurds) into political and economic competitors, it would be with the System of Violence—(and embedded within it, sectarian and ‘ritualised’ violence) that would engulf the country during the

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295 The period 2008-2011 is quite revealing in that respect. Hence despite majority and popular votes against the muhasasah system, in 2009 and 2010, ethno-sectarian elites were able to maintain their positions and the existence of the muhasasah. See subchapter 1.4.5 of this thesis.

years 2005-2007—that would physically separate the communities, and pro-
duce a traumatic cognitive frame, essentialising and mentally walling the dif-
ferent communities of Iraq.
Part 3 Violence

“No; from that moment I declared everlasting war against the species, and more than all, against him who had formed me and sent me forth to this insupportable misery.”

Frankenstein

Mary Shelley
3.1 Collective Violence, Unorganised and Organised Violence

In the present chapter I will focus on the question of collective violence in post-2003 Iraq, and notably on the relationship between organised and unorganised collective violence.

More than often, the Iraqi conflict as it appeared in 2003-2010, is described as a popular explosion of old common hatreds, the confrontation en masse of ordinary people in an orgy of violence and retaliations. Of course, the fact that the country was literally flooded with weapons (Dodge, 2012: 33), where nearly every family owned at least a Kalashnikov, the fact that nearly every man over 18 had been enrolled in military service and hundreds of thousands of men had been involved in three wars, jointly contributed to give the idea that effectively, in Iraq, widespread violence was fully collective. Organised and unorganised violence blended together as hundreds of thousands people would participate in episodes of bloodletting. These two images, the "old hatreds" story and the mass participation in violence, even if they were not always connected together by journalists or analysts, were very congruent with each other. Hence if people were hating each other so much, then it was not surprising that they would kill each other in massive numbers. On the other hand, the fact that the bloodshed was huge and collective was seen as proof that these people hated each other so much. In this chapter, I would like first to reflect on this image of a country drowning in widespread massive violence. In particular, I will use Tilly’s theory and analytical concepts to scrutinise and contrast two emblematic episodes of massive violence: the three weeks of looting that followed the Multinational Forces’ invasion of Iraq in 2003, and the week of violence that followed the bombing and the destruction of the al-Askari shrine in Samarra in February 2006.

Although they have often been portrayed in a similar way by the media and conflated as popular explosions of violence, I will show that they corresponded to different mechanisms of violence (Opportunism and Coordinated destruction), involving different kinds of mobilisations and polarisations, different targets and different interaction between two kinds of actors (‘the

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297 I recall that in 2004, as my colleagues and I were renting a flat in Baghdad for our team, we discovered that it was really ‘fully furnished’, with the usual Kalashnikov standing close to the TV. The owner explained us that it was the custom, but that it was forbidden to take it into the street. Obviously, we decided to remove it.
crowd’ and the Specialists in Violence). In reality, they represent two different points in time within the post-2003 Iraqi trajectory. The first episode corresponding to the destruction of the Saddam regime and of the old Iraqi State and the second, the symbolic and maybe culminating point of the system of violence, that was fully effective between 2005-2007, and that I will describe in detail in the next chapter. In this regard, the week of violence in 2006 present two emblematic characteristics. The first is the subordination of unorganised actors (the crowd) to organised networks (the Specialists in Violence). Hence if unorganised and organised violence may at some point co-exist, it is the organised violence that controls and structures the majority of the collective violence. The second characteristic is the primacy of sectarian polarisation over social polarisation.

3.1.1 The Riots, April 2003

There is no doubt that the seminal episode of the American occupation in Iraq, the ransacking of the whole country after the fall of Baghdad in April 2003, contributed more than anything else to give the image of a population drawn into an orgy of violence. The violence that roamed not only over Baghdad, but also in many cities and settlements of the country during three weeks, was caught by the cameras of all news agencies and international channels on the planet. Images that remained of this moment are either those of civilians plundering and burning ministries or hospitals until only the bare concrete remained, or those of people armed with guns, chasing criminals and looters out of their neighbourhoods (No End in Sight, 2007, mn: 22-23). The damage was of incredible magnitude and everything was ransacked, from the hospitals, the sewage water plants and the ministries, to the schools and the museums. As retired General Jay Garner put it:

"They not only took everything out of there, but they stripped the electrical wires out of the wall, and they stripped most of the plumbing out and then they set the buildings on fire". (Quoted in SIGIR, 2009: 59)

This destruction and looting, especially in the capital, were so dreadful that most Iraqis remember them as equally outrageous as the destruction of the city by the Mongols in 1258 AD. Salman Pax, for instance would use the term "Fahrud" to describe the events (2003:148). Of course, Iraq has had its

298 Fahrud, refers to the episode of riots and in particular the pogroms against the Iraqi Jews which happened after the collapse of Rashi Gailani government in 1941. On this question see,
share of riots or looting in the past. For example, during the 1958 revolution, in the intifada of 1952 and in Kirkuk in 1959 (Batatu, 1978), and during the intifada of 1991 and so on. But the scale and the span of the ransacking and destruction in 2003 were unprecedented in all the history of the country. In fact, this moment corresponds to the collapse of the Saddam regime and of the the old Iraqi State imposed by the impressive might of external forces.

Although, the military invasion of Iraq by the US-led forces would be quicker than expected and soon overshadowed by the ferocity of the conflicts that would follow, it was nothing but extreme violence. In the first three weeks of the operation, the Multinational Forces dropped no less than 29,900 bombs and fired more than 45,000 big calibre rounds and surface-to-surface missiles all over Iraq (Conetta, 2003:25, Moseley, 2003:10). They destroyed not only military sites but also civil infrastructure like telecommunication centres, electrical power facilities, etc. Then, columns of soldiers travelled to Baghdad without showing mercy to anyone, Iraqi soldiers and civilians alike, who would have dared to stand in their way (Reporters Sans Frontières, 2004:49; Human Rights Watch, 2003).\(^{299}\) During the four weeks of combat operations, conservative studies estimate the number of Iraqis killed as between 15,000 and 45,000, between 30% and 50% of these were civilians.\(^{300}\) Carl Conetta reports that between 3,000 to 4,000 civilians were killed (Conetta,2003:42 ), while IBC\(^{301}\) estimates them to be around 7,900 and Burnham et al. around 10,000 (Burnham, 2006).

As related by US media, the military doctrine that was guiding the combat operations had an evocative name, "Shock and Awe" (Chan, 2003). This doctrine had been elaborated at the end of the 1990s by the Pentagon and the National Defence University and bore the title Shock and Awe achieving Rapid Dominance. It may be worthwhile to produce here the principal concepts of the doctrine as defined by their authors:

"...Shock and Awe are actions that create fears, dangers, and destruction that are incomprehensible to the people at large, specific elements/sectors of the threat society, or the leadership. Nature in the form of tornados, hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, uncontrolled fires, famine, and disease can engender Shock and Awe. (Ullman, 1996:110)\(^{299}\) As the coalition forces refused to count the Iraqi dead, we have to rely on the world of NGO like IraqBodyCount (www.iraqbodycount.org) and different studies from medical and scientific publications like the Lancet or IIACSS (www iiacss.org).\(^{301}\) See also a Telegraph article, "The myth of 'shock and awe': why the Iraqi invasion was a disaster". (Sanders, 2013).\(^{300}\) As the coalition forces refused to count the Iraqi dead, we have to rely on the world of NGO like IraqBodyCount (www.iraqbodycount.org) and different studies from medical and scientific publications like the Lancet or IIACSS (www iiacss.org).\(^{301}\)
"..."Dominance" means the ability to affect and dominate an adversary's will both physically and psychologically. Physical dominance includes the ability to destroy, disarm, disrupt, neutralize, and render impotent. Psychological dominance means the ability to destroy, defeat, and neuter the will of an adversary to resist; or convince the adversary to accept our terms and aims short of using force. The target is the adversary's will, perception, and understanding. The principal mechanism for achieving this dominance is through imposing sufficient conditions of "Shock and Awe" on the adversary to convince or compel it to accept our strategic aims and military objectives. Clearly, deception, confusion, misinformation, and disinformation, perhaps in massive amounts, must be employed. (Ullman, 1996:XXV)

As one can understand, the target of such military doctrine is not only the military component of an enemy entity but its political regime and its society at large. In particular, it blurs the distinction between military and civilian targets (Schwartz, 2008). For the American administration, it was a success beyond expectation; in little more than a month, the totality of Iraq was conquered.

During the last decade of the Saddam regime, Baghdad (the capital), had remained the symbolic centre of a decrepit yet resilient, system of domination (Harling, 2007). But when it fell on 9th of April, it was not only the police and the army, but the whole political and social order structured by the Iraqi State and serving Saddam's coercive power that disappeared on this day. Hence, public services, electricity, communications, transportation, the economy, basically all structures of social life stopped to function normally, if they were functioning at all. At that time, no internal forces were prepared, with enough political power and legitimacy, to replace the old order. The country's population and society, already weakened by years of embargo and dictatorship, were in a state of shock. Hence, one could wonder just how extensive such a "Shock and Awe" campaign must have been in order to create a situation or a state of anomy. A situation so violent as to disrupt social structures, induce a breakdown of regulatory norms and lead to the massive episode of looting that would follow.

As we saw earlier, the American Administration refused at this point to take responsibility for the internal security of the country and ordered the Multinational Forces to stay idle. Therefore, a terrible social, political and security vacuum existed. There is here what one could consider a pure Hobbesian moment, "a state of nature", where social structures seemed either absent or impotent to limit or channel the spread of violence. In this frame, two elements emerged at that time in Iraq. One is the expression of revenge against symbols of the coercive system. The other is social polarisation. As one will see below, these two elements will somehow converge to fuel the spread of violence for nearly three weeks.
Opportunism

The three weeks of massive riots involved individual and collective violence. Using Tilly’s definition of collective violence, these events could be categorized as a massive episode of Opportunism:

"Most opportunistic collective violence occurs when, as a consequence of shielding from routine surveillance and repression, individuals or clusters of individuals use immediately damaging means to pursue ends that would be unavailable or forbidden to them under other circumstances. (Tilly, 2003:131)

There were of course numerous written accounts of the events either by foreign journalists, commentators and scholars, but also by Iraqis themselves. I will try to sketch all the different dynamics of violence that converged to produce this image of mass participation of the Iraqi population in the three weeks of rioting. At the beginning of April 2003, as the Multinational Forces were progressing and taking Iraqi territory, the remnants of the former Iraqi State security apparatus (police and army) were disappearing. Mainly, policemen and soldiers were leaving barracks and offices, putting civilian clothes and going back home (ICG, 2003:5; Pax, 2003:147). People were pouring into the streets, in small numbers at first, then more and more. They were in the streets for many reasons, to rejoice the end of the bloody regime that was crushing them for decades or from curiosity to see the Americans or the British soldiers.

Then, scattered attacks of individual or collective violence against symbols of the brutality of the former regime—infamous prisons, or the interior ministry in the capital—began. It was a mix of individuals and families looking frantically for information of relatives who had been imprisoned by the regime or trying directly to liberate them (Galbraith, 2007: 107-108), and people expressing their rage against the regime. But in a matter of hours, the violence was largely extended to many different targets. Organised crime, armed groups, some belonging to the Saddam regime or of its security apparatus, some belonging to oppositional parties (SCIRI/ISCI, INA, INC), were active among or beside the crowd. The main Iraqi banks were attacked and robbed by Mafia-like mobs, and millions of dollars in cash disappeared. Then, violence reached neighbourhoods and people were attacked in the streets. Some people and neighbourhoods began to protect themselves by erecting barricades and using weapons to chase thieves. All of this, without a single intervention from the coalition forces to prevent it.

In one interview in 2008 in Damascus, two of my informants, Adel and Hassan, who were part of the crowd that entered the Ministry of Interior in Baghdad in April 2003, would recall the strong mixed feelings of anger and pride that animated the people there:
"Going in the street, or entering and opening the prisons was like taking back our dignity ... then some people began to burn the interior ministry, as if we were burning Saddam himself..."²⁰²

Consequently, violence spread quickly to all public buildings, like museums, schools and hospitals. The violence was on the rise as the crowd blindly ransacked any public buildings. But it was also the expression of revenge and somehow the ‘re-empowerment’ of a sector of the Iraqi population, especially the poor and the youth, who had been dispossessed during the Saddam regime.

"And then suddenly 2003 was like... I mean, 2003 was really emotional, it wasn't related to facts. Even the looting and everything that happened, this massive scene that you saw on TV, it was really emotional. The people, they weren't able to recognize that they were stealing themselves or burning their houses or whatever... their establishments. For sure they were thinking that now we are free, let's do everything that we couldn't do before. They were bad, they were good... whatever, but it was a like a big jump this development ... People were thinking "I am taking my rights from Saddam, from the Ba'athists..."²⁰³

From this, and also from other accounts of the events, one can identify the emotional and unorganised characteristics of the mass participation of the people in the riots. Or to recall Tilly, the typical lack of coordination of most of the actors in the looting and arson.

Hassan and Adel were part of some of the attacks against the interior ministry and other places, like prisons and Ba'ath offices. For them, these buildings were somewhat "legitimate targets", places where they could express their rage and recover a sense of dignity that had been crushed for so long. But then, things ‘went big’ and the looting and burning went out of control. "People began to steal and destroy everything". Hence, they had recorded on camera the aftermath of the looting and burning of the Academy of Fine Arts where they were students. In the 15 minutes documentary they made, one could see the huge collection of foreign and Arab movies of their cinema department burnt and destroyed. All the pellicles and cartridges were torn apart and melted together on the floors and the walls of their department. For Hassan and Adel, it was their national treasure that went up in flames that day. But they could do nothing to prevent or stop it. And they felt the same for the hospitals, the museums or the schools that were destroyed.

Here, it is difficult to retrace the shifting moment. That is when and how the crowd, the non-organised collective actors, permuted from a position of violent polarisation against the symbols of the old order, to a position of opportunism with massive ransacking of every building available. In his description of opportunism phenomena, Tilly recalls four mechanisms: us–them

²⁰² Interview with Adel, Iraqi refugee Damascus 2008.
boundary activation; response to diminished repression; signalling spirals and selective retaliations, of which at least three seem very relevant to our case (Tilly, 2003: 132). Iraqi people who were looting were responding to an unprecedented opportunity in terms of absence of control and failed repression; they were able, at least at the beginning, to engage in selective retaliation against the previous regime, and finally respond to rising signalling spirals of feasibility and effectiveness of risky practices i.e. looting and arson.

Signalling Spirals

For our case, the question of signalling spirals is very interesting. In his description of signalling spirals in different cases of Opportunism, Tilly describes a "coercive" process that was induced by Specialists in Violence such as state Security Apparatus or state-linked Hutu militia in the case of Rwanda. For the ghetto cases, he does not really clearly spot a signalling spirals mechanism, but he recalls important elements that seem very close to the Iraqi case. Hence, Tilly cites Hannerz's description of two days of looting and burning in Washington DC ghettos in 1968:

"Some groups seemed to concentrate on going around "opening up" stores which had closed early – that is, they broke doors and windows to leave the way in open to looters. This made it possible for a great many to join in who had qualms about taking the first step themselves."(Tilly, 2003: 144)

Then, in Tilly's own account of the Detroit uprising in 1967, one finds that:

"Some professional criminals took advantage of the occasion to grab high-priced portable goods, but the bulk of the looters were local people who responded to an unprecedented opportunity."(ibid:148)

It seems to me that in Tilly's cases and more specifically in the ghetto cases, the signalling spirals mechanism is also the result of a loose connection, a contact between organised violence, or network of Specialists in Violence (criminal gangs, militia, etc.) and unorganised mobilisation, the ‘crowd’. Hence, Specialists in Violence take advantage of the mass participation of people in unorganised mobilisation with its unorganised forms of violence. They use it as a kind of cover in order to pursue their own specific agenda. Although Specialists in Violence are blended in with the crowd, they are pursuing their activities in full view of everybody, sending the signal that criminal activities are not met with retribution any more and with little if no social condemnation. In this regard, Specialists in Violence do not take the lead in mobilisation or the crowd, in fact they do not seem to care so much as long as
the crowd does not impede their activities. But they literally open the doors for the crowd to engage in opportunism. In Iraq, during the 2003 looting, it was no different. And in this regard, I disagree with Green and Ward who consider that the "The organized nature of much of this dual-purpose criminality [the looting] became apparent as early as May 2003..." (Green & Ward, 2009:52). I consider that the form of opportunism in Iraq’s three weeks of looting, corresponded much more to the Washington ghettos example portrayed by Tilly than the Rwanda or Chechen examples. Specifically, because of the unorganised nature of the mass participation of people in street mobilisation before the shift to opportunism.

As shown by different accounts that I provide below, networks of Specialist in Violence were actively present during the looting of 2003. These included criminal networks that have been active during the old regime or appeared when the regime collapsed304; Fedayeen groups that were on the run; militia that were following the Multinational Forces, like the Badr brigade305, the Peshmergas from the KDP and the PUK306, the Iraqi Free Forces307 (ICG, 2003); and so on. They took cover of these weeks of anomie to pursue different agenda. For example, some parties and their militia began to occupy public buildings or condominiums, transforming them into offices and residences for the high figures of the organisations (Pax, 2003:155). Other groups were already looking for Mukhabarat (one of the numerous organisations of Iraqi secret police) or specific Ba'ath members in order to settle scores.308 For example, in Damascus, we met one former member of the Mukhabarat who was from Najaf and active there during the last years of the regime. As soon as the old regime collapsed in April 2003, he hid in a village close to the city. But he had to leave a few days after as members of militia that he had identified as from, the Badr Brigade, were hunting him. He settled with his family in Baghdad for some months before being captured and tortured by the militia. His life and his family’s lives were saved through an agreement between his tribe and the militia.309

Other groups, maybe belonging to former regime secret service or organisations, were targeting specific buildings in order to destroy evidence or capture important documents (ICG, 2003:5, Alawi, 2007:115). But the most obvious were criminal gangs or networks of violence involved in direct criminal

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304 On criminal networks linked to the regime or post-regime, see for instance (UN, 2003) and (Williams, 2009).
306 Kurdistan Democratic Party, Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, the two main Kurdish political organisations.
307 Militia of the Iraqi National Congress led by Ahmed Chalabi at that time.
308 For more examples of reprisal violence and killings happening in Basra directly after or few weeks after the fall of the regime, see Zia-Zarifi, 2003:12-14
309 Interview of Abdel Karim conducted in Damascus 2007.
activities like the robbing of banks, commercial centres and museums. A few
days after the looting in Basra in the south of the country, Human Rights
Watch conducted a survey to assess the security situation. The interviews they
recorded and their account of the events point to the merging of organised
Specialists in Violence, who were prepared to attack the banks with welding
equipment and masks, and unorganised violence, the crowd. They also de-
scribe the incredible reaction of the British forces that stayed idle during the
events (the whole MNF-I would do the same in the rest of the country) instead
of fulfilling their obligations of preserving security and property as occupation
forces:

"The lawlessness that followed the fall of the city was created by roving
gangs of looters. Some were well-organized, others apparently opportunistic.
As in several other cities in Iraq, the looters focused on banks, government
buildings, and other major state and commercial institutions. ...Mutlaq Kitab
Hamud, a fifty-two-year-old cloth merchant with a shop in al-Ashar market,
described the chaos of the first two days after British forces entered the city. "I
was in my shop because I was trying to protect it. The first day that the British
came to central Basra, their forces stopped at the Ashar River [which bisects
central Basra from West to East]. They were stopped on the other side of the
river before noon. Their tanks were just waiting there. Then an hour or so after
noon, they crossed the river and went through the streets of the centre. At that
time, there were two or three hundred people waiting in groups behind them. It
was a big mob. Some of them had acetylene torches and welding masks, and
they headed straight for the Rafidain Bank [a branch of one of Iraq's largest
banking groups]. The British tanks were standing right in front, but they didn't
do a thing to stop the criminals. They were even encouraging them, saying "Go
in Ali Baba, go in." Human Rights Watch interviews with nearly a dozen shop
owners from al-Ashar market area substantially supported this account of Brit-
ish inactivity in the face of widespread looting. Muhammad Akhdar 'Abbud, a
forty-year-old tailor in al-Ashar market, described the scene thus: "On the first
two days after the British entered the city, the looters were everywhere. I think
many of them looked like criminals newly released from prison; they had tat-
tooos. They were using welding equipment to get into the Rafidain and Rashid
banks [in the centre of al-Ashar market]. There were maybe two hundred looters
there. A British tank was in front of the Rafidain bank but it did not do anything.
After a while, the tank just left. We asked the British to stay because there was
looting going on, to protect us, but they just left."(Quoted in Zia-Zarifi, 2003:8-
9)

Finally, I produce here an interview in Damascus in April 2009 with Jihad, an
ex-officer of the Iraqi Army, that wraps up all the different elements that we
described earlier:

"... And if you want me to tell you what happened during the first three or
four days of the occupation... at the end of my street, there is a bank. You know,
people were very frightened, because of the air raids. The whole government
collapsed, everything collapsed, no order. And the army was dissolved as well
as the police. Any criminal could do what he wanted to do, no one obliged him, nobody stopped him. He can go wherever he wants and he finds its way ... robbers came to the bank and they exploded the door, and they got in and took everything, the computers, everything. And they wanted to get to the vault. They tried to enter it, but they couldn't get in, so they also exploded that door. They exploded the door. And I was standing in my doorway. I couldn't move. And I saw them, kids between thirteen and eighteen years old, taking the computers and walking out of the bank. And someone came and asked me: "Do you want this computer?" I asked him: "How much do you sell it for?" He said: "10,000 Iraqi Dinar." "No, that is too much. I give you 5,000 Iraqi Dinar," I was joking. He said: "Okay, you can take it for five thousand." Because he just had taken it from the bank. And what is worse is that three hours after, I found bags of money in the street. Someone took them out of the bank and left them there, because he did not even have a taxi to carry them away. He took bags of money, bags of Iraqi money! And then I found my neighbour. Can you believe it? My neighbour who used to work for the municipality (baladiyyeh), he used to repair the cars of the employees. He put in his blouse seventy thousand US dollars, seventy thousand US dollars. He put them in his shirt! And he was walking in the street. And I swear to God that it happened. Two days after this, my neighbour left the neighbourhood. He bought a new house, his son bought a new car and another son bought a new car. And for himself, he just bought a new house because he is old. And he left the neighbourhood. That's how the invasion started. This is one of the first reactions of the Iraqi people to the dismantlement of the Iraqi police and the Iraqi army. No one prevented anybody from doing anything. There was no order."

Hence, one can identify here the general vacuum that prevailed at the time my informant describes, "there was no order" and "anybody could do what he wanted". There were also the Specialists in Violence who were able to blow up the vault of a bank. This is what I consider being the signalling spirals described by Tilly, which drove the unorganised, here, the kids or the neighbour Jihad to engage in opportunism, by participating in the plundering of the bank. In this kind of context, violence is spreading exponentially for two main reasons. First, because it does not stop at public buildings or properties but also targets private ones which people would find much more inclined to defend. Hence, as described by the HRW report about Basra, commercial centres and private shops were targeted, in other areas, private houses and cars were robbed or stolen. Therefore, in many cases, owners tried to defend and protect their assets and properties, with violence if necessary. Secondly, as hours and days passed, the easy and quick money-making targets, like banks or museums for example, were either being depleted or more protected or targeted by different groups, and inciting networks of Specialists in Violence to increase the level of violence in order to capture and control their targets. In his diary of this period,, Salman Pax relates a very good example of such a case:
"Thursday 1 May 2003 ...If you are an enterprising looter, you go to the weapon factories around Baghdad. The huge empty cannon shells you find there are very desirable items—the metal is melted and used. And there is an endless supply of these shells. There are big battles being raged around the Qa'qah factory every night to control it. There are now around thirty dead people and a number of wounded. The coalition forces are enjoying the scene and keeping their distance.” (Pax, 2003:160)

Boundaries, ethno-sectarian and class polarisation

The question of an available *us-them* boundary seems more difficult to identify. In Tilly's cases, these are quite clear. Hence, at the beginning of ghetto rebellions in the US, the racial boundary (black rioters against white policemen and owners) is quite obvious, although as the violence expands, Tilly shows that "opportunism crosses racial lines". But in Iraq, as counter-intuitive as it may seem, neither racial, ethnic or sectarian boundaries were obvious when the ransacking and the looting began. Indeed, there was polarisation against the Saddam regime and especially the symbols of its violence, the security apparatus offices and personnel, the ministry of interior, the prisons, etc. The polarisation and violence against the regime is not surprising, it was expected by many Iraqis themselves. As described by one field report from the ICG published in December 2002, Iraqi informants were expecting a "temporary", "redemptive" violence aimed against specific figures or symbols of the regime. It seems that it is exactly how the riots began.

Interestingly enough, for many Iraqis, the cause of concern as a possible source of enduring conflict was not sectarian or ethnic affiliations—although the question was mentioned in answers of some of the informants—but the socio-economic cleavages that worsened during the 1990s (ICG, 2002). And again, it is quite evident from the accounts and the interviews that we produced earlier that, as the circle of violence extended, there was a real class differentiation/polarisation between what remained of the Iraqi bourgeoisie and the impoverished middle class and underclass, or in other words, between "the haves and the have nots". Rightly, Cockburn describing the events speaks of "social revolutionary ferocity" that was extending beyond the well-known underclass ghetto of Sadr City (Cockburn, 2008:128). In another report written a few weeks after the events, International Crisis Group would divide the participants of the looting and arsons into three categories. These were the remnants of the Saddam regime, the criminals, and the "members of Iraq's underclass, impoverished by years of sanctions, unemployment and discrimination." (ICG, 2003:6). Moreover, this class polarisation could be identified also in the expression of different attitudes towards the events.

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It is striking to compare the responses of Hassan and Adel that I produced earlier with different accounts of the events by other Iraqis. Hassan and Adel were young students in their early twenties when the regime fell. Both of them came from impoverished middle class backgrounds. Hassan has a mixed family with Shi'i and Sunni members with a strong leftist and secular background. His father was a teacher in high school and his mother a civil servant. As many others, his family suffered economically during the embargo and in his own words his father's salary "was worth less than a plate of eggs". Coming from another area in Baghdad, Adel had a similar background. Adel and Hassan had many relatives living in even worse conditions in Sadr City. As one saw earlier, Adel and Hassan both took part in the attacks against security apparatus buildings in Baghdad in April 2003.

Yet they did not participate in arson attacks on targets which they considered 'non-legitimate'. Instead they tried to document the extent of damages in the city. They were repelled by the attacks on public or private buildings, on their university, the hospitals, etc. However, if they did not condone most of the looting and arsons, they did not condemn the people, and somehow were able to distinguish the 'criminals', who took part in it. Furthermore, one can see in their comments about the looting that both Hassan and Adel are showing a kind of empathy with the people. In their own words, there is an attempt to understand and to acknowledge the emotions—the urge to express the anger or to reclaim their 'rights'—that were galvanising the people that were in the streets at that time.

Interestingly enough, the reactions of the vestige of the Iraqi middle class—we are not speaking here of the top layers of the regime apparatus—but the ones who succeed to maintain middle or high social status, the 'well off', the high-civil servants, the merchants and the army officers, were completely different. I showed already earlier some accounts of merchants and an ex-officer, that demonstrate a clear condemnation of the events. I could produce many others, but I think it is even more striking to compare Hassan’s and Adel’s attitudes with the reaction of Salam Pax, a famous Iraqi blogger that I already cited earlier. Salam Pax was a 30 year-old architect working for an Iraqi company when the regime fell. He was from quite a wealthy background. His father, the head of the powerful Janabi tribe, was working for the Iraqi oil industry complex. His uncle was working for the Iraqi Central Bank. Like Hassan, Salam Pax was from a mixed secular Sunni/Shi'a family. Although Salam's family and relatives were well off under Saddam, they were not involved in the first circle of the regime and they were not pro-Saddam. Hence, his father would be able to enter into politics after the fall of the regime and anti-Saddam considerations and comments were quite obvious in Salam Pax’s blog. Yet, his reactions and comments toward the people who took part in the arson and looting are the opposite to those of Hassan or Adel:
"Thursday 10 April 2003. ...To see the city destroyed before your own eyes is not a pain that can be described and put into words. ...At the moment only what could be described as the government's property is being looted and destroyed -actually public property and they are only destroying what is theirs, but who is going to listen to this argument? (Pax, 2003:149)

...The looters. How to explain this? ...Try to rationalise and fail. The same crowd who jumped and down shouting 'long live Saddam' now shouts in TV cameras 'thank you Mr Bush!', while carrying away whatever they can carry. Thank you, indeed. This is not the people reclaiming what is theirs, these are criminal elements on the loose." (ibid: 152)

It is quite interesting to see that Salam Pax is making the same kind of analysis as Hassan about people attacking public properties and in the end robbing themselves. But where Hassan is showing empathy and trying to understand the motives of the people involved, Salam Pax is utterly condemning the events and conflating everybody as criminals. Is seems to me that this difference of attitudes originates in class polarisation. Hence, for many of Iraq's remaining middle class, the weeks of looting and arson were somehow considered as the signal of the violent irruption of a mythical Iraqi classe dangereuse on the public scene.

Nevertheless, I do not think that class polarisation as it appeared in the fall of the regime in Iraq could be considered as equivalent to the ethno-racial or sectarian examples presented by Tilly in terms of boundary activation. True enough, in some areas of Iraq, class positions and sectarian affiliations were partially overlapping. Maybe the better example of such overlapping positions and affiliations and at the same time a striking paradox, was Baghdad, the capital. Because it has been the historical capital of the country, a centre for the economic, political and even religious life even before the creation of the national-state, Baghdad was the most populated and the most integrated city of the country in terms of ethno-sectarian relations (Batatu, 1978; Slugget, 1991; Mahmud, 2006). The majority of the neighbourhoods of the capital were mixed as well as a place of work and with universities, public services, etc. Yet, it was also the place where the overlapping of social positions and ethno-sectarian affiliations were the most obvious at the two ends of the Iraqi social ladder.

Hence, the capital was the official residence of Saddam and the top inner circle of the regime, the vast majority of them being members of the Saddam-related tribe, nearly all originating from the vicinity of Tikrit, all of them Sunni. On the other side, Sadr City, on the edge of Baghdad, was one of the biggest densely-populated settlements in the world and was overwhelmingly inhabited by ultra-poor and young people.310 The vast majority of them were Shi'i. Yet, some Sunni, although a minority, as poor as the others, were also

310 Hence, Sadr City was ranked the seventh 'slum' in the world in 2005. See Davis, Mike. le pire des mondes possibles, La Découverte, Paris, 2007:31
living in Sadr City\textsuperscript{311}. Also, in Baghdad, the poor were neither all living in Sadr City nor were they only belonging to the Shi'a community. Conversely, the middle class was not only belonging to the Sunni or Christians communities neither Saddam’s regime favourites. And it was even less the case in Bassora or Nassarya in the south of the country or in Mossoul or Kirkuk in the north. As a matter of fact, ethno-sectarian polarisation or boundaries activation seem to have been absent during the three weeks of looting and ransacking of the country. We could not find any mention of ethno-sectarian relations related to the three weeks looting in all our informants’ interviews.

Moreover, in all the reports, accounts, newspapers that I could find about these specific events, we did not find it except for two occurrences. One is a vague mention from the BBC of a sectarian fight between Sunni and Shi'a neighbours in Baghdad without any mention of where and who was involved exactly.\textsuperscript{312} The second is the account by Galbraith of "reverse ethnic cleansing" done, not by the population, but by PUK and KDP militia against some Iraqi Arabs in the vicinity of Mosoul and Kirkuk (Galbraith, 2007:). Of course, I do not pretend to have exhausted all the literature on the topic, but if ethno-sectarian polarisation would have been one of the trigger mechanism of the three weeks of Opportunism that roamed all over the country, then it should have been salient in accounts of the events. It is not the case. Therefore, an interesting question remains to be answered by the ones who consider that the unchained violence that would plague the country after 2003, and especially during the years 2005-2007, take their source in decades, if not centuries, of ethno-sectarian, and especially sectarian polarisation and hatred in Iraq. How it is possible that such hatred and polarisation were not present or quasi-absent as the country was plunged into three weeks of chaos?

3.1.2 The al-Askari Shrine bombing and the violence of February 2006

Following the endeavour to understand the different configurations of organised and unorganised violence as the System of Violence has been structured, it is interesting to contrast the three weeks looting after the fall of the regime in 2003 and the events that happened after the bombing of al Askari Shrine\textsuperscript{313}

\textsuperscript{311} See for example the short clip aired in Al Arabia tv in 2008. http://www.veoh.com/watch/v6540285zAqXP7QB?hl=1000+Sunni+Families+Live+Harmoniously+in+Sadr+City


\textsuperscript{313} One of the most important Shi'a holy sites. Built in 944 AD, the site is composed of a mosque and a shrine with the remains of the 10th and 11th Shi'a Imams. It is also an extremely important
in Samara in February 2006. On Wednesday 22 February 2006, several men wearing Iraqi military fatigues from the new Iraqi Army, attacked and bombed the al Askari Shrine, considered as one the most holy places of Shi’ism. The destruction of the shrine enraged the Shi’a community and sparked days of extreme violence all over Iraq. Within a span of four or five days, dozens of mosques, the vast majority of which were Sunni mosques, were attacked and destroyed, while conservative figures estimate that the number of deaths, also largely majority Sunni, ranged between 1,000 and 1,300 (Knickmeyer, 2010; 2010). The level of violence and its sectarian salience was so striking that the American Administration, informed by US military assessments of the situation (ibid) was giving unusual signs that they were afraid to lose complete control on the unfolding of the crisis.

Hence, in a communiqué condemning the al-Askari mosque bombing as well as asking for restraint, the US President himself was warning against the prospect of Iraq falling into civil war (Knickmeyer and Ibrahim, 2006; Bush, 2006). Later on, the usual delusion and denial politics would return and the US Administration and Military would completely downplay the al-Askari events and the general violence that would still go on after it. Nevertheless, in the popular history of the Iraqi conflict it has been considered as the start of the sectarian civil war. Although I think and agree with many scholars and commentators that the sectarian conflict and the sectarian violence began much earlier (at the end of 2004 or early 2005), it can at least be considered as a turning point of the conflict toward full-scale violence and sectarian cleansing that will go on until the end of 2007 (Haddad, 2013; Al-khalidi & Tanner, 2006; ICG: 2006). Yet, it has been portrayed by newspapers and also the US Administration as large "riots", "protests", "bloodbath", "Day of Vengeance and Hatred" (Worth, 2006; Hurst, 2006; Lloyd, 2006)314, where different forms of public mobilisations and unorganised and organised violence had been conflated in an episode somehow reminiscent of the three weeks that followed the fall of the Saddam regime in 2003. To take one example among many, I produce here three paragraphs of a New York Times article written the very same day:

"BAGHDAD, Iraq, Feb. 22 -- A powerful explosion shattered the golden dome of one of Iraq's most revered Shiite shrines this morning, setting off a day of almost unparalleled sectarian fury in cities and towns across Iraq as protesting mobs took to the streets to chant for revenge and set fire to dozens of Sunni mosques.

...Shiite militia members flooded the streets of Baghdad, firing rocket-propelled grenades and machine guns at Sunni mosques as Iraqi Army soldiers --

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called out to stop the violence -- stood helpless nearby. By the day's end, mobs had struck 27 Sunni mosques in the capital, killing three imams and kidnapping a fourth, Interior Ministry officials said.

...In the southern Shiite City of Basra, Shiite militia members destroyed at least two Sunni mosques, killing an imam, and launched an attack on the headquarters of Iraq's best-known Sunni Arab political party. In Samarra, thousands of people crowded the courtyard of the Golden Mosque, some weeping and kissing the stones, others angrily chanting "Our blood and souls we sacrifice for you imams!" (Worth, 2006)

It is interesting to see the direct correlation in the first line between protests and arson of mosques. But in the second paragraph, the journalist describes armed militia members flooding the streets and actually attacking mosques with RPG and guns. The third paragraph is again mixing the militia attacking mosques in Basra and the crowd demonstrating in Samarra. This article is the perfect example of the kind of blurring of the different categories of Violence and between organised or unorganised perpetrators that I was mentioning earlier. The same kind of conflation was done by The Times, on the BBC, on CNN, CBS news, Le Monde, Liberation, etc... In one of the main French newspaper, "Liberation", the events were seen as "inter-community violence"315 (Perrin, 2006). Yes, no doubt that it was inter-community violence, but the question that they were not answering or even contributing to mislead, was about who were the perpetrators of violence. This confusing view about communities pitched against the others and regular people drowning in bloodbaths, perpetrating high levels of mass violence against each other, is not only characteristic of the perceptions of the events that followed the al-Askari Shrine bombing but of the whole post-2003 period, and something that continues to frame the general perception of the Iraqi conflict. Taking a different perspective, one can disentangle the register of different mobilisations and violence that were at play during the week that followed the al-Askari bombing in order to understand how the violence had been structured.

And as I will show, the al-Askari violence has been structured around organised networks of violence. In majority, the actors were belonging to Shi'a militia of the new state security apparatus, with sporadic attacks from Sunni armed groups. Interestingly enough, the US-led Multinational Forces, otherwise active and present either in massive pacification campaigns or tactical search and destroy operations all over the country during the post-2003 period, would remain mostly as spectators of these specific events316. For analytical clarity, I will divide the events of February 2006 into two parts, one being centred on the public mobilisations that followed the bombing of the al-Askari Shrine, the other centred on the violence.

315 Translation is mine.
316 Hence the Guardian was stating: "US forces were reported to be 'standing by'. Until now American troops have not wanted to be seen to be taking one side or the other". (Lloyd, 2006)
Mobilisations

The bombing of the al-Askari Shrine was an attack and a desecration on a highly symbolic religious institution of the Shi’a community during the holy month of Muharram. Furthermore, this came after a long series of similar and sometimes even more bloody strikes on Shi’a religious symbols. There is no doubt that this bombing was infuriating Shi’i all over the country. Hence, a few hours after, some people spontaneously stopped their activities to gather in the streets all over Iraq, mainly around mosques and Husseinia in order to express their anger, as in Najaf:

"In the holy city of Najaf, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the revered authority for millions and a key force for Shi’ite restraint in the face of Sunni insurgent attacks, made a rare call for protests and declared seven days of mourning. He insisted in a statement, however, that there must be no violence and in particular no reprisals against Sunni mosques. Outside his office, where Sistani was meeting his most senior colleagues, 2,000 demonstrators chanted: "Rise up Shi’ites! Shi’ites take revenge! Rise up Shi’ites!" (As Sharq al Awsat, 2006)

For example, in Al Sadr City, a Washington Post journalist described how men gathered in Sadr City neighbourhood in Baghdad:

"In Baghdad, Shiite boys and men abruptly abandoned classrooms, homes and jobs to muster outside the headquarters of the influential Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr in the heart of Sadr City, the slum named for the cleric's father. (Knickmeyer and Ibrahim, 2006)

Hence, CNN recalls 4,000 people demonstrating in Baghdad, during the morning only few hours after the bombing. The number of demonstrators would rise to around 10,000 during the afternoon. Similar numbers of demonstrators would walk the streets of Najaf, Karbala, Samarra and other cities during the same day. Yet, if these demonstrations and gatherings were massive, such street mobilisations were not unprecedented and far from being the biggest in the post-Saddam period. In 2003-2004, I personally observed different demonstrations in Baghdad, one of the biggest I saw gathered more than 30,000 people in Baghdad in March 2004. Moreover, one should compare this with the demonstrations called by Ayatollah al Sistani in 2004 where hundreds of thousands of people walked the streets, all over the country, in order to

demand elections. And of course, these demonstrations and gatherings of the Shi'a community in February 2006 were dwarfed by the processions of the millions of Shi'a pilgrims that would cross Iraq every year since 2003, walking between Samarra and Kerbala during the holy month of Muharram.

Hence, one should consider that despite the anger and violent emotion that the bombing of the al-Askari Shrine caused, only a limited percentage of the overall Shi'a community decided to take to the streets on the day of the bombing and even less during the days that followed. As reported by the journalist Garrels, most of the Iraqis, Shi'a included, closed their shops or stopped their activities, went and stayed at home rightly fearing the violence that would come (2003). Finally, on 24th of February the Iraqi government would issue and try to enforce an extraordinary curfew in Baghdad and elsewhere in a bid to restore some order and control of the situation. Despite being partially followed, it would be extended for 4 days and may have contributed to stopping the mobilisations and protests, but not the sectarian attacks and violence.

Furthermore, if the gatherings of the morning of the 22nd of February were mostly spontaneous, the demonstrations of the afternoon and of the days that will follow would be called and organised by religious authorities, like Ayatollah al Sistani319, or Al Sadr II movement (Knickmeyer and Ibrahim, 2006). There is not so much visual evidence of the events of February 2006, yet there are some videos accessible on the Internet showing some of the gatherings and demonstrations in Samarra and elsewhere in Iraq during the 22nd of February.320 The first video I found displays images of the destroyed al-Askari Shrine, the gathering of people around and in the shrine after it was bombed and some demonstrations that happened afterwards.321 The second video shows a meeting between Ayatollah al Uzma al Sistani and three other high authorities of the Hawza of Najaf322 and some demonstrations that followed.323 On these videos, one can see the organised nature of the demonstrations with people walking in line behind religious and tribal or political leaders and the armed security people in charge of their protection. One can also find pictures

318 “...the curfew bars vehicles, not pedestrians, and will last until 4 p.m. in the capital, Babil, Diyala and Salaheddin, home of the al-Askariya "Golden Mosque" that was bombed Wednesday. The rest of the nation will observe an overnight curfew ending at 6 a.m., emergency police said.” (CNN report, 2006)
319 "We call upon believers to express their protest ... through peaceful means. The extent of their sorrow and shock should not drag them into taking actions that serve the enemies who have been working to lead Iraq into sectarian strife." Quoted in The Independent (Cockburn, 2003).
320 Both videos are compilations of images aired by the Lebanese Hezbollah Tv Al Manar and the Iraqi TV Al Forat owned by the Iraqi Islamist Party ISCI.
321 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c9cN5taOXvY
322 Rarissime event, Al Sistani accepted to have the meeting recorded without sound and aired on Iraqiyya TV. On the video the soundtrack is the recitation of the declaration that was issued by Sistani after the meeting.
323 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KrVmlbyCmAA
of a demonstration in Khazimyah neighbourhood in Baghdad on the 22nd of February and see the first line of the demonstration composed of religious sheikhs and local dignitaries from the neighbourhood. Other pictures show protestors carrying banners and flags while religious leaders are addressing them in the Karadah neighbourhood of Baghdad during a demonstration the 23rd of February. Another shows women with banners during the same demonstration in Karadah the 23th.

There are also diverse pictures of demonstrations and gatherings in Sadr City in Baghdad, although seemingly less disciplined, but nonetheless under the direction of the local branch of the Al Sadr movement and its militia the Madhi Army. One last example of the organised nature of the demonstrations is a picture published in New York Times the 23rd of February which showed that “Armed members of the militia of the Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr guarded trucks filled with protesters on Thursday after demonstrations in Baghdad against the attack on a Shiite shrine in Samarra the day before (Wong and Tavernise, 2006). Therefore, these video and images show, in general, a very different kind of mobilisation compared with the spontaneous, unorganised mobilisations of the people that took to the streets during the three weeks of riots and looting that happened after the fall of the regime in 2003.

To sum up, the mass mobilisations involving thousands of people had mostly stopped after two days, on 24th of February. And the majority of the protests were not spontaneous but called and organised by religious authorities or political movements. That is the first important difference between the 2003 riots and the al-Askari mobilisations and violence. In 2003, as I noted earlier, there was a loose connection, between unorganised mobilisations and Specialists in Violence, that was one of the trigger mechanisms, the signalling spirals, of the massive episode of Opportunism. In February 2006, except for the few hours of spontaneous gatherings, the vast majority of the mobilisations from Al Sadr City to Najaf were under the lead of religious authorities and political movements and in fine under the direction, if not the total control, of the Specialists in Violence, militia and security apparatus, in charge of their protection.

324 http://www.gettyimages.fr/detail/photo-d%27actualit%C3%A9/iraqi-shiite-men-protest-the-bombing-of-a-shiite-photo-dactualit%C3%A9/56907045 Incidentally, I recognised on the right of the picture the sheikh Al Joubouri, one of the religious scholars teaching in the madrassa of the religious and influential figure Sheykh Jawed Madhi al Khalissy. On his left is the Mu’ezzin of the mosque of Kahdhimya.

325 http://www.gettyimages.fr/detail/photo-d%27actualit%C3%A9/iraqi-shiite-men-chant-slogans-as-a-picture-of-iraq-photo-dactualit%C3%A9/56917811

326 http://www.gettyimages.fr/detail/photo-d%27actualit%C3%A9/an-iraqi-shiite-girl-attends-a-protest-against-the-photo-dactualit%C3%A9/56917816
Violence, the ‘battle of the mosques’

I will not review in detail all incidents of violence that happened during the week that follows the bombing of al-Askari Shrine on the 22nd of February 2006. As usual concerning the Iraqi conflict, there is a great disparity between the different statements and accounts of the attacks, kidnappings and deaths by different authorities, Iraqi ministries, different US Administrations and Iraqi political or religious authorities. Hence, on the 23rd, The Iraqi Accordance Front was announcing that more than 90 Sunni mosques all over Iraq had been attacked or damaged (Cole, 2006). On the 24th of February, the Association of Muslim Scholars identified 184 Sunni mosques attacked or captured and 25 Sunni clerics kidnapped or killed (ibid), while the Iraqi Islamic Party established that around 100 mosques had been attacked and at least 6 Sunni imams killed.327 Yet, the same day, the Iraqi government confirmed that only 19 mosques had been attacked in Baghdad"(BBC, 2006).

Finally, on the 25th of February, the Ministry of Defence would announce that only 21 mosques were found to have been attacked and only 119 people killed. If the previous accounts made by Sunni organisations like the Association of Muslim Scholars or the Iraqi Islamic Party may have been overstated, the Iraqi Government was obviously downplaying the whole episode. The Washington Post's journalist Knickmeyer wrote an interesting series of articles about the statistical battle that was waged between the different Iraqi ministries and US departments about the body count of the conflict in general and of the violence following the al-Askari bombing in particular (Knickmeyer, 2006). This tension was putting a heavy pressure on the Iraqi Health Ministry and the Baghdad Central Morgue in order to downplay the victims of conflicts (Knickmeyer, 2006).

Hence, during the week of violence from the 22th to the 28th of February, one could estimate at least a hundred Sunni mosques and at least 3 Shi’a shrines attacked, burned or captured. Around a dozen Sunni imams were kidnapped or killed, a dozen attacks and car bombings made on neighbourhoods and dozens if not hundreds of people killed or kidnapped in streets or at checkpoints because of their sectarian compositions or affiliations. The number of victims killed, the majority Sunni, ranged between 1,000 (according to the Iraqi Health Ministry, non-official account) and 1,300 (according to the Washington Post journal).

Another question concerns the actors of the violence during this time. The actors of the violence against the Shi’a community, the bombing of the al-

327 Healing Iraq blogspot reproduced a press release of the Iraqi Islamist Party which was giving a more precise account of the mosques attacked, with their name and localities. http://healing-iraq.blogspot.se/search?updated-max=2006-04-06T23:58:00%2B04:00&max-results=40&start=58&by-date=false. Unfortunately, the website is not accessible anymore.
Askari Shrine and two other smaller attacks—the car bombings or attacks with mortars on some Shi’a neighbourhoods—were identified as Sunni armed groups, insurgents or Al Qaeda, (all Specialists in Violence), specifically because of the military means and methods that they employed. But concerning the attacks against the Sunni community, its mosques and imams, the Sunni neighbourhoods, households or individuals, there is much more debate and confusion. As I said earlier, at the beginning, it has been portrayed by many commentators, but also the US Administration and even Iraqi actors, as riots that turned into bloodbaths.

Nonetheless, different testimonies and reports pointed clearly to Specialists in Violence, in particular the militia of the Al Sadr movement, the Madhi army, as the perpetrators of the majority of the violence, especially during the days that followed the establishment of the curfew (ICG, 2006). Yet, it remains to be understood how much of this was a spontaneous or at least unorganised participation of the masses in the violence, and how they would have connected with or merged with the Specialists in Violence into a massive episode of Opportunism. In other words, how many similarities did the events that occurred between 22nd and 28th of February 2006 share with the three weeks of looting that followed the fall of the regime? Answering this question should allow me to identify some structural elements on which the violence has been organised on the post-2003 period. We already partially answered the question, by saying that spontaneous and unorganised mobilisations mainly stopped after a few hours. However, one could consider that the people that were in the streets were so enraged that they engaged themselves with violence and in fine obliged the Specialists in Violence to act in a kind of reverse role to the cases of Opportunism that we saw previously. Then, it would not have been the Specialists in Violence that opened the door to signalling spirals and Opportunism but the crowd that pushed the Specialists in Violence into violence. In short, enraged Shi’a descended in mass more or less spontaneously into the streets in order to take revenge. They were willing to attack Sunni mosques and neighbourhoods. Under the pressure from the crowd, Shi’i militia engaged themselves with the crowds and began to attack Sunni mosques. Al Sadr defence cadres said that they could not control or barely control the enraged masses (ICG, 2006). Local Madhi militia commanders interviewed by Cockburn, explained that "they tried and failed to calm their people down." (2008:180).

However, the same accounts provided by Cockburn, show that in any case the organisational structure of the Madhi Army (within the Hussayniah\footnote{See also (Cockburn, 2008; Khalidi and Tanner, 2006; Benraad, 2007).} and

\footnote{Hussayniah are firstly Shi’a religious sites of worship of the life and the martyrdom of Imam Husayn. They can be big or small and built as a permanent or temporary place. As any mosques and religious places in Iraq, they are also centres of social activity and charity within the Shi’a community.}
the mosques controlled by the movement) were involved in the events, by providing youngsters with weapons. Some commanders even gave precise orders: "They gave orders to burn cars and take away Sunni in cars to the Sada region ..., where they were killed ..." (Cockburn, 2008:181). In one of its reports, IGC recalled different accounts of the events from Madhi militia commanders, one of them recalling a direct order from Muqtada al Sadr himself: "Muqtada ordered us to take over the Sunni mosques for an hour. Only after that did he call for calm. This was a very confidential directive: only the principal Jaysh al-Mahdi leaders knew of it" (Quoted in IGC, 2006a: 13). But another element clearly designates the principal role of the Specialists in Violence in the attacks of the Sunni mosque and neighbourhoods. It is the accounts of the receiving side.

Cockburn and others provide different accounts of the events from Sunni families and neighbourhoods (Cokburn, 2008:181). I also collected some accounts from Sunni Iraqis who were refugees in Damascus and had witnessed the events. They all describe the same series of events. In these accounts people are speaking of attacks against neighbourhoods and civilians by Specialists in Violence, people either belonging to Jeish el Madhi militia or belonging to the new state security apparatus and wearing police uniforms. My informants spoke of local battles around mosques mostly happening during evenings or in the middle of the night. Often the people that were defending their mosques or neighbourhoods were either directly belonging to Sunni armed groups or were helped by such groups, which notably provided them with weapons and munitions. What does not appear in the large majority of these accounts is the presence of non-armed people, unorganised crowds of civilians who would have participated in the fights. Even if the crowd may have been present around the Specialists in Violence, the core of the violence was organised and executed by established networks of violence. Hence, the characteristic here is the subordination of the unorganised violence toward organised violence. In reality, the vast majority and the responsibility of the collective violence that would follow the bombing of al-Askari Shrine will be assumed, directed, if not completely controlled, by Specialists in Violence belonging to religious or political movements.

community. Since the post-2003 period, such places became strategic objectives and the mark of territorial encroachment of Shi’a Islamic parties, especially of their militia. http://healingiraq.blogspot.com/ published forum board messages, Sunni mosques call to defend them and accounts of local battles fought during the following days after the shrine bombing. What appears clearly in these message boards were the central role of Sunni armed groups like the Islamic Army in Iraq or the 1920s Revolution Brigades, and of some tribes, in the attempt and the failure to defend Sunni neighbourhoods during the events. Unfortunately, the blog is not publicly accessible anymore.


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Furthermore, one can identify four main targets of violence during this time:

- Mosques and shrines attacked, captured or burned
- Imams kidnapped or killed
- Neighbourhoods or households attacked
- People kidnapped or killed in the streets or at checkpoints.

That is a second important difference in comparison with 2003 where the main targets of the violence were mostly governmental buildings, factories, hospitals, banks, wealthy neighbourhoods, and finally individuals related to the old regime. As I was writing, in April-May 2003, the three main elements that were framing the weeks of riots and looting, were the revenge against symbols of the old regime, social polarisation, and access to resources. In the last week of February 2006, the targets of the violence were completely different and related by one characteristic, their sectarian affiliation. Hence mosques, imams, neighbourhoods and people had been attacked or killed because of their sectarian affiliation.

The main shift here is from social polarisation to sectarian polarisation. That does not mean that the social polarisation that was existing in 2003 disappeared. As I will discuss in the next chapters, I still consider that it is one of the structure of the Iraqi conflict. But as the main framing element for the deployment of violence and as a symbolic narrative to explain it, it has been superseded by the sectarian polarisation. In this regard, one should not consider the week of violence in February 2006 as the factual moment of the shift from social polarisation to sectarian polarisation. In reality, as I discussed in Chapter 1.4 and Chapter 2.6, the whole of the year 2005 accelerated the projection of Iraqi communities into a violent encounter. However, the February 2006 events marked the moment where everybody, outside and inside Iraq, would acknowledge the reality of the sectarian civil war.

Because of the symbols that have been attacked—one of the holiest shrines of the Shi'a community, the magnitude of the retaliation with hundreds of Sunni mosques attacked, hundreds of deaths—all of this compressed in a small span of time, the events of 22nd-28th February 2006 became the markers of a change in the Iraqi cognitive frame where sectarian polarisation became the main narrative. As Benraad states:

"Symbol of the effects of the postwar communalization process and the gradual disintegration of the Iraqi social fabric, the Samarra attack confirms above all a dynamic of confessionalization of cleavage lines around a now very clear confrontation between Shiites and Sunnis." (Benraad, 2007:14. Translation is mine.)

332 On this question, see Chapter 3.3 Centrifugation, Fragmentation and Sectarianisation.
In conclusion, the 22nd-28th February 2006 violence corresponds to an episode of Coordinated destruction that has magnified and compressed in time, all the characteristics (the sectarian polarisation, the control of the violence by Specialists in Violence, the targets and main forms of violence, the symbolic destruction and assassination) of the System of Violence. In the next chapter I will describe and analyse when this would be at its peak and that it has been described as "a war for sectarian and ethnic control of the space" (Cordesman, 2007.) In this system, "The violence is neither spontaneous nor popular ..." (Al Khalidi & Tanner, 2006:11).
3.2 A System of Multiform Violence

As I began to show in Chapter 1.4 and Chapter 1.5, one can identify three periods within the Iraqi trajectory. The first, the rise of collective violence from 2003 to 2008, with the deployment of different types and forms of violence, and embedded within the expansion of sectarian violence, the proliferation of networks of violence (involving Specialists in Violence and Political Entrepreneurs) and the stifling of the political space. A second period from 2008 to 2012, is characterised by a contraction of violence. That is to say, the reduction of general violence with the diminution of the number of its actors, a return to politics and the downplay of ethno-sectarian rhetoric and identity politics. Finally, a third period which starts with the crushing of the Iraqi Spring in the spring of 2011, with a re-expansion of collective violence, a second wave of ethno-sectarian violence, and the rise of new networks of violence or the awakening or rebranding of old ones. In this frame, I consider the period between the years 2005-2007—which many commentators call a period of civil war or of “civil wars” (Stansfield, 2007)—crucial for different reasons. First, as a period of Coordinated Destruction of the whole repertoire of collective violence established by Tilly—Opportunism, Violent Rituals, Scattered Attacks, etc.—from the lowest coordination between actors and the lowest damage inflicted to the highest coordination and damage inflicted, has been deployed during this period. Second, it corresponds to an episode when massive sectarian violence and cleansing was concentrated.

Obviously, the rising tides of violence and their short-lived backflow since the American invasion are difficult to interpret except maybe in René Girard’s terms of cataclysmic and contagious waves of violence (1972). Yes, Girard’s coherent thesis highlights and develops the deep and fragile relation between violence and the religious phenomenon, the unstoppable propagation of violence because of the “sacrificial crisis”, which is nothing else than the collapse of the socio-religious order. But in Iraq, since the fall of Saddam, nobody could deny that the religious phenomenon, here Islam, is central to the political and social life, in a context of re-Islamization of societies in the Middle East. Then, for many commentators and scholars, “religious and ethnic identities are today the main political dividing line” (Wimmer 2003). It is so for Luizard:

“It looks as if a secularized form of Islam, whose vocation is primarily to confer an identity and which has become impervious to any religious code, is likely to fuel the fighting, which is all the more inexpiable because each person believes
that he is fighting for survival as a member of his community.” (Luizard, 2008:855)

Therefore, it does not seem that a collapse of religious phenomenon and order per se can be the central explanation of the surge of violence in Iraq. One has to look somewhere else to understand its origin. Unfortunately, many commentators, even academics, were often trapped within the illusion that the main problem of Iraq was the inherent blood feud and the inclination for violence of the Iraqi society. In order to give satisfactory and simple explanations for the Iraqi conflict, many were resorting to the ‘old hatreds’ theories and appetite for violence theories that had been so ‘successful’ in Ex-Yugoslavia. Yet, in the case of Yugoslavia many scholars would discard these essentialist or old hatreds theories. Moreover, as the fog of war was slowly disappearing in the “new Balkan States”, many ex-Yugoslavian scholars and authors were finally heard when they denounced these Western discourses and representations as Balkanism. For instance, Bjelić & Savić denounced Western representations of “the Balkans”...as the fulcrum for Enlightenment Europe's self-image, or the means by which “progressive” Europe projects its anxieties and forbidden desires onto the other, … who constitute its antithetical periphery.” (2002:3).

With the Iraqi conflict and the violence, there is the same kind of distorted perception. As rightly denounced by Al Rashid and Méténier, “Iraqi violence” became a lieu commun (a common place), “of a society perceived as a whole through the prism of political violence” (2008:17). For the sake of fairness, the two authors acknowledged that this perception of a society plagued with a quasi-genetic violence had origins that can be traced in a long tradition of Arabo-Islamic cultural representations that has lingered to this day. However, they also acknowledge that these local representations and clichés had been absorbed and recycled by the West to form:

“... [A] mode of apprehension, where the paradigm of violence forms a constant veil through which are perceived Iraqi political and social realities, and remains characteristic of a historiographical tradition that could be called orientalist ....” (2008:17. Translation is mine)

Therefore, I do not think that one could explain and understand the rise of violence in the post-2003 period in Iraq by trying to find their hypothetical genetic or religious markers in the society. In Iraq as in Ex-Yugoslavia, to understand the violence, one must study it in relation to the power structure and the political institutions as they have been reconstructed after the fall of the Saddam regime and the destruction of the old Iraqi State. One must begin

333 See Chapter 1.1 Methodology
by understanding what kind of forms it took, who its actors are and what kind of social process it represents.

In the course of this chapter and the two followings chapters I will rely on different works previously elaborated either on genocide or ethnic cleansing. It is therefore necessary to make a few clarifications concerning theories about genocide, ethnic cleansing and sectarian cleansing, and post-2003 events in Iraq. As far as I know, there are no academics considering that genocide happened in Iraq after 2003\(^3\), but mainly sectarian cleansing, from the year 2005 and onward, that did not provoke the explosion of the country into new sectarian or ethnic countries or new territories. One may say not yet, but the reality is that Iraq as a country still holds. As Haddad pointed out, the sectarian conflict has been always mixed with Iraqi nationalism and has been more about the competition of sectarian narratives and the redefinition of Iraqi nationalism and Iraqi identity than anything else (Haddad, 2011:278). Therefore, one may ask how can I use theories and works that were specifically written about genocidal violence, or about ethnic or racial conflicts like in Ex-Yugoslavia or Rwanda, when I am studying mainly a sectarian conflict based on religious ascriptions and representations, and not an ethnic or racial one, except between Turkmen, Kurds and Arab population in the north of the country? But as Bozarslan recalls and as I will show later, sectarian identities could be essentialised to a point where they are transformed into a kind of ethnic ascription, ergo I subscribe completely to Haddad’s statement: “

“The dynamics of sectarian identity are no different from those governing ethnicity or race.” (Haddad, 2011:11)

In addition, although there were no establishments of concentration camps or mass killings of thousands of people at the same place and at the same time, I consider that the cleansing, that is the forceful eviction of civilian populations by terror, began on a very small scale in 2004-2005 with the establishment of the first death squads and militia with clear sectarian motivation and practices of violence, peaking in 2006-2007 and receding in 2008. Thus, we have, embedded in the general System of Violence that I will describe, a low grade or quiet sectarian cleansing in comparison to what happened in other conflicts like Ex-Yugoslavia, but in a much longer span of time. On the question of categorisation, definition and conceptual difference between genocide and ethnic cleansing, I follow scholars such as Martin who consider that ethnic cleansing and genocide belong to the same \textit{continuum}, but differ in term of intentionalty and practicality (Martin, 1998: 822). Others like Sirkin similarly call for “Expanding the Crime of Genocide to include Ethnic Cleansing”:

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\(^3\) Although some like Doubt are speaking of “Sociocide”. See, (Doubt & Boucher, 2009).
“...once international courts and tribunals recognize that genocide and ethnic cleansing cause equally permanent and destructive effects, they can properly interpret the crime of genocide and apply its provisions. Ethnic cleansers who knowingly deprive an ethnic group of the opportunity to return or reconstitute itself permanently dismember that group. This permanent removal fulfills the meaning of destruction originally contemplated by Lemkin and the drafters of the Genocide Convention, for driving an ethnic group out of a region so that its members will never truly return denies the group’s existence. In this way, ethnic cleansing satisfies both the actus reus and the mens rea elements of genocide.” (Sirkin, 2009:526)

From a different aspect, but finally drawing similar conclusions where boundaries between genocide and ethnic cleansing are blurred or absent, Mirković develops a definition of ethnic cleansing that implies notions of classification, separation, demonisation and ethnocide, that finally lead to or encapsulate genocide:

“To sum up, the term “ethnic cleansing” overlaps both genocide and ethnocide (“where a group disappears without mass killing”). “As shown earlier, in its broader meaning, it implies differential treatment and discrimination with a view to putting on pressure to comply, to emigrate, to give up and to assimilate, and in its narrower or restrictive meaning, it denotes destruction, which, through acts of terrorism, forceful relocation, and expulsion, leads ultimately to genocide.” (Mirković, 1996:8)

Therefore, I consider fair and very relevant to rely on different works that have been previously elaborated either on genocide or ethnic cleansing to study similar mechanism of violence in the case of Iraq.

3.2.1 Globalisation, State and Violence

The fact that all varieties of violence were often interwoven and happening nearly in the same period of time makes it difficult to use ‘conventional’ categories to classify the violent conflict in Iraq. Therefore, scholars like Bozarslan and Harling were questioning the use of terms like civil war to analyse what was happening at that time (Bozarslan, Harling, 2007:9). Rather, they were rightly insisting on the diversities of the actors and violence at play and the fluidity of oppositions and contradictions that were at work inside Iraqi society and the political field. Yet, I consider that their Hobbesian description of the Iraqi conflict, the war of all against all—although pointing to the fundamental question of the fragmentation of the state—was putting a veil on the question of the “drivers of violence” (Dodge, 2012) or what I call the structures of violence. Moreover, it gives (volens nolens in Bozarslan and Harling
case) weight to the image of a country where the overall population was actively participating in the violence. Which is, as I have shown in the preceding chapter, a distorted image of the Iraqi conflict.

More importantly, Harling, in another study, used the concept of “state of violence” and applied it to the Iraq conflict for the post-2003 period. For Harling, the military occupation associated with state collapse, coercion and the introduction of sectarian politics contributed to create a “state of violence” that should be opposed to a “state of law” (Harling, 2011). Hence, the new Iraqi ‘State’ was unable to “…provide peaceful mechanisms for addressing political conflicts, to form a common frame of reference, and to enforce its monopoly over the use and legitimisation of violence” (Harling, 2011: 45).

Although I agree with Harling’s identification of the main institutional and structural problems plaguing the post-2003 period, the contention here concerns the question of the state. By using the concept “state of violence”, Harling but also Bozarslan (2014:3), refer to the philosophical work elaborated by Frederic Gros. In his important study, Gros declares that “War does not exist anymore” (2006:7)—War being the public and centralised violent resolution of conflict, linking politics, morality and law. And where the development of the State—the question of sovereignty—and War are mutually dependent.

As noted by Bozarslan, “By this [the end of the War] Gros means the “end of discontinuities” between war and peace, periods of mobilisation and demobilisation, domestic law-keeping and external war making operations” (2014: 5). Therefore, the duality War/Peace has been replaced by a new duality: Intervention/Security. In the framework of this new duality, it is the whole structure of War as centralised violence that is recomposed or, more aptly said, decomposed within a multitude of actors, state and non-state, private armies and armed groups; where there is not anymore a delimitation of battlefields, nor their localisation to the periphery. On the contrary, battlefields are now everywhere. Instead of the separate temporality of War and Peace, the new duality Intervention/Security produces an endless succession of interventions and deregulated violence, the purpose of which is to establish or re-reinforce a new legal and institutional security, whether deemed international or local. In such a configuration, it is the whole construction of the Nation State as the centre of the realisation of political conflict, and the monopolisation of coercion, that enter into a process of decomposition. In other words:

“The transformation of wars into ‘states of violence’ appear less as the erratic explosion of generalised conflicts and more the outcrop of the limits of the state’s realisation of political conflictuality, and as the acknowledgement of the failures of the economic and judicial regulation of power relations between communities.” (Donégani, 2008:150. Translation is mine)
Yet, as noticed by Joxe, even within this frame, the main proponents and actors of “states of violence”, as “politically coordinated activities”, remain empires and states, the most notorious being the “Empire Nation-State of the United States” (2006). In a sense, one understands that behind the exploration of the “states of violence”, Gros is sketching what could be a liminal position of the old Westphalian States confronting the profound and corroding effects of neoliberal globalisation. It is describing the gradual decomposition of the Westphalian order and the Weberian State—which encapsulated in its centre the elaboration and the resolution of politics and the monopolisation of violence.

But just as I tried to discuss in earlier parts of this thesis, the US neoliberal experimentation in Iraq ended in the construction of a new Iraqi (failed) State—a non-functioning state, privatised and fragmented between different centres of power. Above all, the US nation state-building attempt in Iraq has been, since its very first day, flawed by a complete lack of legitimacy, internationally and in Iraq itself, and its substitution with coercion (Herring & Rangwala, 2005; Arato, 2009). And the result was that the new Iraqi State, although being internationally recognised as a legal sovereign state, fails to reach the three other constituents of the sovereignty as defined by Krasner—Westphalian, domestic and interdependence (1999). Yet, the difficulty remains to define exactly what it is. I think that Herring’s description of a “US-dominated hierarchical governance state within a neoliberalised global political economy” (Herring, 2009)—where: “The Iraqi State is not representing Iraq in a globalising world: it is representing the globalising world in Iraq” (Herring & Rangwala, 2006: 258)—remains the best way to approach the question. But it does not matter how one identifies the new Iraqi polity: a “Failed State” (Baker 2004; Ismael and Ismael, 2013); an “Absent State” (Davis, 2011); a “Fragile State” (Monten, 2014); a “Frozen State” (Al Ali, 2014). The reality is that it is a state in name only. It seems to me that such a characterisation puts the Iraqi case beyond Gros’s framework. In any case, in a configuration where there is no legitimate political centre able to produce politics and negotiate plurality, the resort to violence in order to acquire or negotiate resources and positions—and in fine to survive in a fragmented and unstable environment—is not very surprising. And all the more since Violence—as a substitute for legitimacy and politics—would become the principal means of determining and governing the political goals of the majority of the actors.

335 On this topic, see Chapter 1.4 and Chapter 2.5 of the thesis.
336 In 2004, Dodge considered that to be successful, the new government in Iraq would have to reach such thresholds of sovereignty as defined by Krasner (2004:40). Many years later, one can answer with confidence that it was not successful.
337 I refer here to Arendt’s consideration of the relations with Politics and Violence since the dawn of the nation state and “modernity”. See Chapter 1.3.3 State-building Violence and Politics on this question.
of the Iraqi conflict—whether they belong to the new political order or remained outside it.

In this context, and in particular when all forms of violence would culminate in Coordinated Destruction between 2004-2008, one could observe the emergence of a System of Violence. A system, and not a state, where Violence is the centre around which different bases of power are orbiting. If one should remain within the conceptual duality established by Gros, the new paradigm established by the System of Violence is not based on War and Peace, neither on Intervention and Security, but on Violence and Protection. Here, Violence is deregulated and extended and Protection against it is fragmented and limited in time and space. Then, this System of Violence corresponds to what Kaldor defined as the “new wars” (Kaldor, 2006). In the context of the contested construction of a new fragmented and privatised political order, the Specialists in Violence are state actors and non-state actors (militia, armed groups, gangs), yet are all linked with the new political elites within or outside the political process launched by the US. This conflict is at the same time transnational and very localised. As Kaldor mentions: “the new type of warfare is a predatory social condition” (1999:107), while non-state actors and state military factions were directly plundering assets of people living in gained territories and neighbourhoods.

Hence, during the peak of violence, between 2005-2007 in Iraq, the System of Violence that would have not only the characteristics that I mentioned just before but develop specific trends of territorialisation or and, to a certain degree, of autonomization of violence (Gulden & Steinbruner, 2007; Tripp, 2007, 2008). This means that the main actors of the wars were at that point not as much fighting to inflict a political or military defeat to the enemy than to primarily control a territory which would in turn provide the resources needed by the militia or the armed group to survive.

As described by Ali Ali, the territories under the control of the networks of violence became “spaces of coercion” (2012). Within such space, the networks of violence were enforcing a debilitated form of sovereignty. They were extorting money from the subjugated population, and collecting taxes (Looney, 2005; Gregory, 2008). They were controlling local facilities, such as power plant or ice factory. As reported by Al Zaman, some networks of violence, mainly Shi’i such as the Badr brigades or Jeish al Madhi would quasi officially negotiate directly business contracts between private company and the central State or the regional governments.

Last but not the least, embedded within the System of Violence, Culturalisation of Politics is translated into Culturalisation of Violence. Hence, militia and armed groups were legitimising their violence as a part of the mythical

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338 See sub-chapter 1.4.4 Territorialisation and Sectarian Violence.
struggle between ‘eternal enemy communities’. The rhetoric and the actions of Al Qaeda/ISI in the period are clear illustrations\textsuperscript{340} of the violent transposition of a “political mobilization of basis of identity” (Kaldor, 1999:110). Obviously, Shi’a militia would also develop and focus on ethno-sectarian violence. In reality, ethno-sectarian cleansing carried out by militia and armed groups were the main way of enforcing the control of territories and neighbourhoods. However, the testimonies of civilians which were caught in the middle of the ‘Battle of Baghdad’ indicate that it was just as much a direct assault by the militia against the population to push Sunni or Shiites out of their neighbourhoods than a fight between the militias themselves.\textsuperscript{341} As I will show in the next chapters, the System of Violence will replicate the fragmentation and the sectarianisation of political space into the physical and social world.

In this frame, the System of Violence is producing in Iraq what Tilly calls a regime of Fragmented Tyranny which combines:

"low governmental capacity with little democracy. We can call that zone Fragmented Tyranny because in such a regime warlords, bandits, and other political predators typically work their ways in collusion with or in defiance of nominal rulers". (Tilly, 2003:43)

The ‘confessional game’ as it has been constructed by the US occupiers and the majority of the new Iraqi political elites can be considered as a dysfunctional and depoliticised– where the economic and social power relations are deflected– regime. But within the System of Violence, any politics are absent. As I discuss in the chapter 1.3, Violence cannot produce Politics or Legitimacy, therefore the only things that the System of Violence is able to produce are “facts on the grounds”. But precisely what the new Iraqi State and the political institution are missing are Legitimacy and Politics. Ultimately such a system is self-consuming. And starting from 2007, the System of Violence would recede, partially because the main actors of the violence of the period 2003-2007 had destroyed each other’s, partially because the ethno-sectarian cleansing which provided the main resource for the networks of violence stopped.


\textsuperscript{341} See for example the testimony of Hissam in the next chapter.
3.2.2 Forms, actors, society

Within such a System of Violence as this, the violence would spread all over Iraq at different times, affecting different locations through different forms. As recalled by Bozarslan “The Iraqi situation illustrates how a conflicting process can lead to a plurality of forms of violence.” (ibid:225. Translation is mine). Previously, I used the typology elaborated by Tilly and from which I qualify the period of civil war, between 2005-2007, as a period of Coordinated Destruction, and which overlaps with other elements such as Opportunism, Scattered Attacks, Violent Rituals. But here I develop a more descriptive typology on the forms of organised collective violence as they were deployed during this period:

_A mafia-like violence that plagues the entire country and affects all strata of society and corresponds to the destruction of the Iraqi State just after the invasion of coalition forces
_ A political violence carried out by and against political parties or individuals because of their political opinions, affiliations or previous affiliations
_ A guerrilla or counter-insurgency type of violence carried out by insurgent groups, coalitions forces and the new State security apparatus
_ A sectarian or ethnic territorial violence. It aims primarily to expel members of the ‘enemy’ community of a given territory or to conquer one occupied by the enemy community. This was the case from 2004 to 2007, where Sunni and Shi’a led militia or armed groups were targeting the opposite community especially in Baghdad. But they were also targeting the Christian minorities, Sabaean or Yazidi. Lastly, it also opposes Arab, Turkoman and Kurd Specialists in Violence in the north of the country
_ Intra-community territorial violence. This aims to provide leadership to, and/or control of, a territory already homogeneous or cleansed. It can oppose armed groups, militias or political parties of the same community or sect (for instance, between Al Qaeda and the Islamic Army in the neighbourhood of Baghdad University as in 2006) but it can also be specifically targeted against individuals or families because of their professions (DVD sellers, barbers, etc.).

Within this set, the different forms of violence are not exclusive of each other, on the contrary they will tend to become entangled or to combine with

342 See the account of such a fight given by one of my informants, Hissam, in the next Chapter 3.3.
each other. For instance, a person kidnapped by a mafia gang has been sold to an insurgent group who will use the kidnapped person for its political goals. Two different forms of violence combine here, mafia violence and political violence. Similarly, when a militia controlling a district of Baghdad, has been negotiating with a mafia group, buying weapons needed to attack a neighbouring district dominated by an enemy armed group, and that is connected to funds distributed by the US-led ‘coalition forces’, etc. In a very interesting paper, Green and Ward, using the concept of “dual purpose violence”, describes how the boundaries between political and private, non-political violence are blurred to the point where “as in other civil wars, much of the violence is ‘dual-purpose’, simultaneously serving private and political goals” (2009:). In fact, it was so blurred that in July 2006, The Brookings Institution decided not to refer its statistics of crime-related deaths in its Iraqi index anymore, considering that it was then ‘no longer practical to differentiate between acts of war and crime’. And of course, in the mind of many Iraqis, unusual or suspect enrichment were the signs of militia membership. In many of our interviews with Iraqi refugees, the connection between the militia and crime or suspected crime was obvious:

“Amir: ...Who knows if this one is not working with some militia or gang? For example, I know that one of my neighbours, he was from Jaysh el Madhi (Al Sadr militia).

ThSom: How did you know?

Amir: It was well-known in the neighbourhood. Before the war they were very poor. Then suddenly they began to have lot of cars. They were buying a lot of stuff for their house. Their women were wearing gold and this kind of things.343

In this context, violence was ebbing and flowing and deployed according to different temporalielities and locations, but also with different forms and targets depending on whether it affected the Iraqi people indiscriminately or if it was exercised against specific individuals or communities or localities. Hence, during our fieldwork in Syria, we met Iraqi refugees that were living then in Yarmouk, a suburb of Damascus, and had fled the city of Fallujah during its siege by the American-led forces in November 2004. Others informants fled from Baghdad later in 2006, when they were driven out of their houses in Khazamia by Shi'a militias, because they were Sunnis or Christians. Others fled from Basra in early 2005, because they were small shop owners and targeted by gangsters. In the same way, we met Shi'i refugees in Saida Zeinab that had been expelled from the Dora neighbourhood in Baghdad after witnessing the murder of one of their own family by a Sunni militia. Thus, almost all Iraqis (which was the case for all refugees that we met in Syria, Jordan and

Lebanon from 2006 to 2009) were in one way or another confronted with violence, but they had not all faced the same kinds of violence. In this System of Multiform Violence, conflict and plurality are absorbed and recycled by violence. And criminal, economic, sectarian, political and military violence were effective and happening every day and night, everywhere in Iraq. In a sense, the whole country seems to have been sucked into a period of widespread violence.

However, if I use the term of widespread violence, here it does not refer to Girard’s concept of “violence généralisée”—that is the participation of everyone in a kind of ‘mimetic’ violence as one could understand from the reading of *La Violence et le Sacré* (1972), but as a System of Violence affecting everyone and being effective everywhere. And as I showed in the preceding chapter, it is important to understand that the rise and extension of collective violence which is the prime characteristic of this System of Violence is that the collective violence remains structured by the networks of violence (Specialist in Violence and Political Entrepreneurs). The main actors of violence, the networks of violence, during the period of US occupation until 2011 and after are numerous in Iraq. I will not describe or even cite them all, it would be a tedious attempt to describe an ever-changing web of networks. But instead I will sketch a general picture of the 2006-2008 period, when the violence has been at its peak. I will regroup the networks depending on their transnational, national or local characteristics. On the whole, if one adds up the diverse estimations of the Iraqi networks that I describe below, either local or national, they represent around 1 million men at arms, something like 1/30th of the entire population, in any case less than ten percent.

**Transnational Networks of Specialists in Violence:**

_**US-led Multinational Forces Iraq (MNF-I) or ‘Coalition Forces’.**_

The Multinational Forces were supposed to form the military implication of the large “coalition of the willing” (the 46 nations that supported at least diplomatically the US decision to invade Iraq). During the occupation, around 40 nations would provide a limited number of troops to the multinational forces. In fact, the three main contributors to the force were the United States, United Kingdom and Australia. In 2006-2008, their respective numbers amounted to around 160,000 for the US, 40,000 for the UK and 2,000 for Australia, in a total number of troops barely over 200,000 men and women at arms. The US-led occupation army was commanded by US General George Casey Jr. from 2004 to 2007, then by US General David Petraeus from 2007 to 2008.

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344 See also two interesting and lengthy studies about different networks of violence in Iraq during the period (Williams, 2009) and (Mardini, 2010).
Private Military Companies/Private Securities Companies (PMC/PSC).

As noted by many commentators, the US occupation of Iraq had a tremendous impact on the International Private Security Business. Somehow this has been the natural outcome of a neoliberal framework applied to the US Army by the Bush Administration (Spearin, 2003:29). These policies promoted outsourcing of costs and the subcontracting of logistics and non-combat operations. Hence, dozens maybe even hundreds of thousands of private contractors belonging to US-based multinationals like KBR or Halliburton, were providing the US army with the required infrastructure to maintain the occupation of a country of around 35 million inhabitants (Singer & Biason, 2004). Among them, more than 10,000 were private security personnel working directly for the Department of Defense or the Department of State and the US Army. Around them, 20,000 more were working for the Iraqi institutions, private industries and international organisations. In total, more than 30,000 private men at arms belonging to 50 companies and dozens of different countries were assuming a vast array of tasks. As such, their numbers put them as the second or third military contributors to the US-led coalition. They were providing intelligence services, static and convoy security in Iraq and high ranking personal protection (for the CPA, the UN, etc.) and have even been part of active operations with the MNF-I. Obviously, the thousands of security personnel were in everyday contact with the Iraqi population and they have been involved in one way or another in an important part of a major violent crisis during the occupation period. Despite their increasing implication in military operations in Iraq, the PMC remains in a legal grey area, outside of International Law, and immune to Iraqi Law by the CPA order 17. However, after the Nizoor Square incident in 2007 where private guards from Blackwater International—on contract with the Department Of State—killed 17 civilians, the Iraqi government imposed the Iraqi ‘primacy jurisdiction’ over US Defense contractors and exclusive jurisdiction over contractors that were not covered by the withdrawal agreement (US-Iraq SOFA), signed in 2008 and came into force the 1st of January 2009 (Elsea & al., 2008).

Al Qaeda in Iraq-Mesopotamia/Mujahedeen Shura Council/Islamic State of Iraq.
Al Qaeda in Iraq was formally created in March 2005, when the jihadist group (Jama'at al-Tawhid wa'al-Jihad) led by Al Zarqawi pledged allegiance to Al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia. The group quickly gained strength and influence in the region, attracting fighters from around the world to join its ranks. By 2007, Al Qaeda in Iraq had become a major player in the conflict in Iraq, carrying out numerous attacks against US and Iraqi forces and infrastructure. The group was particularly active in the Najaf and Ramadi areas, where it operated under the command of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who was later killed by a US special forces operation in June 2006.

345 Well known companies are KBR, Academi ex-Blackwater International, DynCorp, Custer Battles, Aegis, Eyrinis International.
346 Housing areas, institutional or private buildings, as well as military camps or the Green Zone for example, Army logistics convoy, etc.
347 For example, during the US offensive against the Jaysh al Madhi in 2004. Blackwater International was directly involved in the military operation against the militia in Najaf, during the attack of the Spanish-led camp Andalous. The event has been recorded live by a member of the private security company. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a8ydzon_ydA
Al Qaeda. The organisation was gathering mainly foreign fighters, some of whom had previous experience and training in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Under the leadership of Al Zarqawi, Al Qaeda in Iraq promoted a staunch sectarian anti-Shi'a rhetoric, as well as a jihadist ideology focused on ousting the US forces from Iraq and imposing its own extreme interpretation of Shariah (Hasim, 2008). They specialised in the organisation of spectacular attacks and forms of violence against the occupation forces and international organisations. Notably they claimed responsibility for the bombing of the UN headquarters in September 2003. They also had embarked on a campaign of suicide attacks against the Shi'a community and places of worship as well as the recorded beheading of hostages. After the death of Zarqawi in 2006, the organisation merged with smaller jihadi groups and some Iraqi tribes in the centre of the country, under the Mujahideen Shura Council. In October 2006, the group changed its name to Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) focusing on four objectives: the ousting of the American occupation; the removal of the Shi'a/Kurdish-led government and the establishment of a Sunni Islamic State with the imposition of the Sharia and the eradication of all apostates, the Shi'i being the first. Between 2006-2008, the organisation was estimated to gather between 5,000 to 10,000 fighters, mostly Iraqis, with a few hundred foreign fighters. However, the attempt to enforce their rule in the centre and the north of the country, in particular in Al Anbar and Salahuddin, was met with fierce opposition from the local tribes and also Sunni armed groups (Benraad, 2008). These contributed to the creation of the Sahwa movement against them. The Islamic State in Iraq entered into an all-out fight against the Sahwa, the Shi'a militias, the Iraqi government and the US troops in 2007. From 2008 to 2011, the largely weakened organisation would enter into a low-profile phase.

National Networks of Specialists in Violence:

**New State Security Apparatus (2008-2009):**

**Ministry of Interior (MOI)**

_**Iraqi Police Service (IPS):**_
Around 275,000 members that are under the direction of the provinces. Their purpose is to provide main police services.

_**Facilities Protection Service (FPS):**_
Around 150,000 members of largely autonomous units responsible for protecting government ministries and other Iraqi institutions. The FPS are under the direct command of each of the ministries they are protecting.

_**Iraqi National Police (INP):**_

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348 Beside Hashim and Benraad, see among others (Fishman, 2006, 2007; Guidère, 2007; Kirdar, 2011; Lapointe, 2010)
349 The figures are from Perito, 2009:4.
Around 32,000 members that are mainly deployed in Baghdad and other parts of the country. The INP’s main purpose is counterinsurgency operations in liaison with the MNF-I and Iraqi military forces.

**Iraqi Border Enforcement Service (IBES):**
Around 38,000 members stationed along Iraq's borders to prevent infiltration and illicit traffic.

**Ministry of Defence (MOD):**
The Iraqi army consist of 14 divisions and a brigade of Special Forces under the direct command of the Prime Minister Maliki, for a total of 260,000 soldiers.

There are a few things that should be considered with the new state security apparatus:

The figures that I am reporting here should be treated cautiously as they were produced by the different ministries in charge and not assessed independently. As I discussed in an earlier part of this thesis, the level of corruption and nepotism in the different ministries but also the haste with which the different security apparatus has been assembled raise important doubts about the accuracy of estimations provided by the different Iraqi ministries. Moreover, after the debacle of the Mosul battle in 2014, the new prime minister Al Abadi would recognise that at least 50,000 registered soldiers were ‘ghosts’ that have either never existed or were part of a scheme devised by officers and Iraqi officials to extort money from the Iraqi State. Besides, there is also a possible redundancy between the figures of the state apparatus and figures of the Shi'a militia, notably in the services of the MOI. The massive infiltration of militia inside police services has been largely documented. In particular, the infiltration of the Madhi Army through the FPS units under the command of the Ministries of Health and Transport that was controlled by Al Sadr Movement, or the infiltration of the Badr Brigades, inside the FPS, INP and the IPS under the command of the Ministry of Interior controlled by the ISCI. Eventually, the implication of the Ministry of Interior forces in ethno-sectarian cleansing and assassination campaigns would be denounced by journalists, analysts and human rights NGOs during the entire post-2003 period (Cerny, 2006; Mcnamara, 2006; Human Rights Watch, 2006).

**Sunni Armed Groups:**

_1920s Revolution Brigades (Kita’ib Thawrat al-’Ishrîn)_

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Created around 2003 by members of the ex-army and the Zuba'a tribe, a Sunni sub-branch of the Dulaim confederation based in Al Anbar province between Baghdad, Khan Darih and Fallujah. Until 2007, the alleged leader of the group was Abdel Rahman Tahrir al Darih, the nephew of Sheikh Harith al Darih, the chairman of the Association of Muslim Scholars. In the beginning of 2007, following tribal fights that involved the Zuba'a tribe, the group entered into a fierce fight against the Islamic State in Iraq. The 1920s Revolution Brigades fought also against the Iraqi government and Shi'a militia.

**Organisation of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq / Hamas in Iraq (Harakat al Mugawama al Islamiyya fi al Iraq)**

Created around 2003 by Islamist and nationalist officers from the ex-Iraqi Army that were emulating the eponymous insurgent organisation in Palestine. The Hamas and the 1920s Revolution Brigades had close ties, and for a few years the 1920s Revolution Brigade were the official armed group of Hamas, until they split in 2007 over the question of collaboration with US forces against Al Qaeda and against Shi'a militia.\(^{353}\) Hamas in Iraq which seems to have been a proponent of such collaboration is considered by different analysts to be linked with the Iraqi Islamist Party, one of the few Sunni parties that entered the political process initiated by the US occupation (Roggio, 2007; Crenshaw, 2010).

**Islamic Army in Iraq (Jaysh al Islami fi al Iraq)**

Created at the end of 2003, by former Ba'athists, nationalist and Islamist members of the ex-army and intelligence forces. The organisation has a staunch Islamic-nationalist discourse and also refuse to have foreign fighters in its ranks. It opposed American occupation as well as Iranian ‘presence’ in Iraq. They also fought the different Shi'a militia and the Ministry of Interior forces.

**The Nahqbandi Army (Jaysh Rijal al-Tariq al-Naqshbandia)**

The group is named after the Naqshbandi Sufi branch. It was created in 2006, following a different split among the underground Ba'ath party. The alleged leader is Izzat Ibrahim al Duri, ex vice-chairman of the Iraqi Revolutionary Command Council, under the Saddam Hussein rule. Because of its clear Sufi orientation, the organisation had violent contact with Al Qaeda and other Salafi jihadists groups, while it was also part of the Sunni insurgency against the US occupation as well as the Shi'a-led Iraqi government.

Overall, the different Sunni resistance and armed groups were estimated to be able to assemble around 100,000 combatants during the period 2006-2008.

\(^{353}\) [http://uruknet.info/?p=m35715&s1=h1](http://uruknet.info/?p=m35715&s1=h1)
Shi'a Militia:

_The Badr Organisation / Badr Brigades/Badr Corps (Munathamat Badr):_ 
Militia of the ISCI Party, founded by the party in Iran during the eighties. The Badr brigade has been rebranded as the Badr Organisation for Reconstruction and Development. It is accused of having infiltrated many security apparatus, especially those of the Ministry of the Interior, where it formed death squads responsible for sectarian and political kidnapping and assassinations. It is also accused of having been involved in sectarian cleansing. In 2003-2004, the Badr Brigades were estimated at around 20,000 fighters. Yet, the militia has been massively integrated into the different services of the MOI and has recruited quite extensively. For instance, the militia has been denounced for having formed special commandos (the Wolf Brigade; the Scorpion Brigade) within the Iraq National Police and the Ministry of Interior. Therefore, it is difficult to assess its number.

_The Madhi Army (Jaysh al Madhi/JAM)_
Militia of the Al Sadr II Movement, founded in 2003. At the beginning, the militia was essentially a loose gathering of youngsters and inexperienced fighters. After 2005, The Madhi Army is widely accused of being involved in the sectarian cleansing, especially in Baghdad. The militia would be officially disbanded by the Al Sadr II movement in August 2008. Yet, in November 2008, the Promised Day Brigades were installed as the new official militia of the Movement. The organisation was supposed to be able to gather around 60,000 fighters during the period 2006-2008.

_The League of the Righteous (Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq)_ 
The group was created by Qais el Khazali, a religious Shi'a sheikh who was a former member Al Sadr II movement and a former student of Ayatollah Mohammad Sediq al Sadr. Qais el Khazali was officially expelled from the Al Sadr II Movement in 2004. In 2006, he formed his own breakaway group from different units of Jaysh al Madhi, in particular in Basra. The group is accused by the US Administration to be one of ‘special groups’ controlled by the Iranian Al Quods Forces and with strong ties with the Lebanese Hezbollah. The group is also accused to have been heavily involved in assassination campaigns and sectarian cleansing. The group was estimated to be a 3-5,000 strong force.

Local Networks of Specialists in Violence:

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As mentioned earlier\(^{355}\), the Sahwa movement is a loose gathering of mostly Sunni tribal fighters under the command of tribal sheikhs and that would be under direct US payroll during the years 2007-2008. Well-known Sunni armed groups such as the 1920 Revolution Brigades, part of the Islamic Army, and part of some secular nationalist groups integrated with the Sahwa. At the beginning, the Sahwa had three main goals: crushing of Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, being a counterweight to the Shiite militias and influencing the political balance in favor of the Sunni community. However, Al Maliki, the Prime Minister pushed for the creation of similar tribal gatherings under his patronage in the south of the country and in Baghdad in 2007-2008. Overall, the tribal gatherings are estimated to be around 100,000 fighters in 2008; \(^{355}\)SIGIR, 2008: 7; Clayton & Thomson, 2014; Benraad, 2011).

\(^{355}\) See Chapter 1.4

Pesmergas: 'Peshmerga' is the name given to the fighters of the militias of the two Kurdish Parties (KDP and PUK) during the fight for independence against the different Iraqi governments. After 2003, the Pershmerga became the official security apparatus of the Kurdish Regional Government. They are active in the Kurdistan as well as in some provinces in the north of the country, notably in and around Kirkuk. They are estimated to be around 80,000 fighters.

Obviously, this short survey of the different networks of violence is far from being exhaustive. In fact, the post-2003 period has been characterised by the proliferation of dozens if not hundreds of armed groups and militia that would regroup and form military and sometime political alliances or blocks for a short period of time. These blocks or alliances but also some of the networks of Specialists in Violence (armed groups/militia/sub-groups), would cyclically split or disintegrate according to local or national circumstances and political decisions, but also according to access to local, national or trans-national resources. For instance, in 2004, the Madhi Army and the 1920s Revolution Brigades were fighting and supporting each other against the US Army, but from 2005 and onward they would fight against each other. In 2006, during the “Battle of the Mosques”, the Madhi Army, the Badr Brigades and their counterpart within the Iraqi security apparatus would launch the offensive against Sunni areas in Baghdad and elsewhere. But in 2008, Prime Minister Al Maliki would launch the “Charge of the Knights” against the Madhi Army in Basra, mobilising the Iraqi security apparatus (army and police) with the support of the MNF-I, the Badr Brigades and the direct intervention of Iran (Cochrane, 2008; Iron, 2013). However, it is important to note that as a whole they form a web of networks that integrate trans-national, national and local.
levels and reflect the globalisation or trans-nationalisation process at play in Iraq.

In this frame, the System of Violence represents also the continuation of the brutalisation and the humiliation of the Iraqi society. What comes immediately to mind when speaking of brutalisation and humiliation is the Abu Ghraib scandal of torture by US personnel. But in reality, it would be the emblematic event of the whole period of occupation where the US authorities and Army would show a real contempt for International Conventions and Protection of Human Rights (Kramer & Michalovski, 2005; Whyte, 2006). This excessive use of coercion against not only enemy combatants but also civilians is considered by Bonds to be a form of “terrorizing violence—targeting civilians in order to create fear or cause intimidation” (2014:365). In any case, US authorities would be publicly questioned by NGOs such as Amnesty International for their actions in Iraq (Amnesty International, 2013). However, the Iraqi actors of the conflict would follow a similar pattern of violence against the Iraqi society. Furthermore, successive Iraqi governments would develop their own web of jails and torture chambers. In 2011, Amnesty International estimated that around 30,000 Iraqi men and women were detained without any judicial guarantees nor regard for Human Rights (Amnesty International, 2011). The diverse factions in power in the successive Iraqi governments and ministries would create their own “special commandos” and death squads among the Iraqi police and the army (ICG, 2008; Tripp, 2007). And obviously armed groups and militia would principally target civilians and create a “space of coercion” under their control (Human Right Watch, 2005; Ali Ali, 2011). Therefore, this brutalisation and violence is inflicted by the actors of the System of Violence against the Iraqi society. In this context, the people, the civilians, do not have so much as a possibility for resistance, but only the pos-


358 They would be also the main actors of the sectarian cleansing and the ritualisation of violence. On these questions see the next Chapters 3.3 and 3.5.
sibility of navigating between the “spaces of coercion” and the different networks of violence. However, it does not mean that there is a watertight border that would separate totally the victims from the perpetrators, the civilians from the Specialists in Violence, and society from the networks of violence. In reality, in this conflict as in many others, what exists is more of a grey zone. Ahmed Beydoun perfectly shows in his reflections about the civil war in Lebanon, that a multitude of solidarities—family, neighbourhood, tribal, etc.—which are parts of a general and diffuse resistance against the violence, coexist with more individuals and egoistic attitudes of support and interest vis à vis the Specialists in Violence (1993). Indeed, the militiaman, the policeman, the insurgent, may be the one who subjuggates and who can kill, kidnap or steal, but is also the one that can have access and provide the information, the goods or the means essential to live or survive.

3.2.3 System of Violence, social contradictions

As I will show in the next chapters, the System of Violence is reproducing and extending the fragmentation and the sectarianisation of the political institutions into the social realm. In other words, the ethno-sectarian coordinate that has become the main coordinate driving the Iraqi political institutions and the new Iraqi ‘State’ would also become a structuring coordinate of the violence. Hence, in the preceding chapter on collective violence, the switch from class polarisations to sectarian polarisations as main elements of the mobilisations and crystallisation of violence is very clear. However, if the main apparent trend in this overflowing river of violence was ethno-sectarian polarisation, the deeper trends carrying the other contradictions and oppositions—class, regionalism, tribal, generational, status groups—that were crosscutting Iraqi society, were still very active below the surface. To give one example among many others, one cannot understand the rise of Al Sadr movement and the Madhi Army without taking into account the question of class that is crosscutting sectarian boundaries and obviously at play in Shi’a community. On this question, the study of Davis comparing the Madhi army with Italian mafia (Camorra and Ndrangheta) is enlightening. It shows precisely that even if embedded in sectarian practices and religious credo, the success and the rise of the Madhi Army reflected “… a particular sociohistorical conjuncture of events.” (2010:102)

Accordingly, it was opposing the ultra-poor dwellers of Al Sadr city and from southern tribes and the religious bourgeoisie established in the centre of the holy cities of Qadhamya, Najaf and Kerbala. These social polarisations were not born out of the US occupation, but had already a long history. Obviously, it was on these “popular bases” that Al Ayatollah Mohammed Sediq Al Sadr built its constituency before being murdered by the regime in 1999.

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This popular network of followers, middle ranking sheikhs and tribes that has been a religious and nascent social movement was “naturally reactivated” by his son Muqtada and his aides when the regime fell in 2003. Moreover, the rise of the Al Sadr II movement militia, the Jaysh el Madhi was also due to a generational rift. The fierce discourse of the movement against the occupation but also against the old and complacent religious Shi’a institutions was resonating with the young disenfranchised and ultra-poor Shi'a who grew up under the plight of the embargo and Saddam regime. With the US occupation, they found themselves relegated into the same corner because they did not have the necessary connections or level of religious or academic education to find a place in the new system brought by the occupation (ICG, 2006:5). Jaysh el Madhi, did not ask for any religious or academic diploma or family connections, and on the contrary the militia was opening its arms to every destitute youngster ready to fight and to defend Muqtada's movement (Davis, 2010). But the class issue or age polarisation were not only effective within the Shi'a community, and as I said earlier it was crosscutting communities. Therefore, one element of explanation of the complex and violent dynamic of relations between Al Qaeda in Iraq and the Sunni community resides in the dynamic of class and social polarisations within the Sunni community. For instance, Benraad shows that as the general marginalisation of the Sunni community progressed during Maliki's years, the revival or the reactivation of Al Qaeda after 2010 and the fall of the Sahwa movement was partly due to:

“Dynamic (is) reported to be especially true of younger, unemployed and disenfranchised members of the movement, who are sometimes former al-Qaeda affiliates, have lost confidence in the future and are attracted by al-Qaeda's anti-system rhetoric, whereas most elder tribal leaders have regularly rejected al-Qaeda's recruitment calls” (Benraad, 2011: 124)

Similarly, one needs to understand why the loose sectarian fronts that progressively coagulated between the years 2005-2006, pitting Sunni nationalist and


361 It is interesting to mirror this statement with a quote from one teacher from Nasyriah, explaining the rise of the Al Sadr II movement. “In the words of a Nasiriya teacher, “if the Americans had taken care of the south and created jobs for unemployed youth, the Sadrist phenomenon would not have grown as it did. What happened after the war is that the social elite and those with university diplomas easily found work while the more destitute had nowhere to go but the Sadrist movement”. Quoted in (ICG, 2006:10)
jihadists groups against Shi’a militia and groups from the new ‘State’ security apparatus, disintegrated in 2007 and 2008 in violent internal communal fights. As I stated in different chapters, one element of the answer lies in the autonomisation trends inside the System of Violence, that is, the economy of violence, or the fights for resources procured by the control of fragmented territories, were spiralling out of control. But obviously, behind the economical appetites of middle ranking leaders of militia or armed groups, or the cynical calculus of the political establishment, the splintering of the sectarian fronts was also the result of the full expression of class, tribal, urban-rural or regional contradictions. Hence, the rise of the Sahwa movement was driven by the necessity for some tribes to reaffirm their authority and legitimacy over their constituency and their territorial control of different economical resources, illicit routes and the black market, that were challenged by Al Qaeda’s attempt to create its own Proto-State and impose its hegemony on the Sunni community of Al Anbar and Salahaddin provinces (Benraad, 2008).

In the south, the internal fight within the Shi’a community was driven also by a mix of class relations, tribal and regional interests, and contradictions pitting loose alliances of extended families, or clans, tribes, militia and political movements against each other (Williams, 2009:70-95; ICG, 2007). However, the disintegration of the sectarian fronts and the internal fighting were not preventing or stopping the sectarian cleansing and the sectarian violence. But even during the worst period of sectarian cleansing, between 2005-2007, Harling shows that, in Baghdad and other areas, “class cleansing”, “…where local notables were not only kidnapped for ransom, but also assassinated for no other discernible reason than their mere status,” was happening as much as sectarian cleansing” (Harling, 2010:58). This is also clearly evident in Sassoon’s study about Iraq refugees, which provided breathtaking numbers and estimations about Iraqi academics, intellectuals and professionals that were targeted and assassinated during the post-2003 period. The ‘brain drain’ that was affecting and is still affecting Iraq was not only due to the terrible economic situation but maybe even more because Iraq had become “killing fields for academics” (Sassoon, 2010:141). Interestingly enough, in his thesis, Ali Ali, quoting one of his respondents, shows that the uprooting and forceful eviction of the middle class in Baghdad by newcomers, hurrying their social ascension with weapons, was also happening in Kerbala, the Shi’a holy city where the Imam Hussein tomb is located. There, what was at stake was the control of the religious pilgrimage business within the Shi’a community:

“According to Hassan, different types of the old order were being displaced in Kerbala, families and clans who he described as the “deep-rooted” and “original” inhabitants of the city. He spoke of it as a second invasion. “Outsiders” were responsible, “scheming people” with huge financial resources. Hoteliers, shopkeepers, and others who had long owned businesses close to the shrines were being displaced, their capability to generate income depleted.” (Ali Ali, 2012:)

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As I said earlier in this chapter, the System of Violence became a social process reproducing the fragmentation and the sectarianisation of the new political system into the social realm. But as a social process, the System of Violence is also embedding and recycling all kinds of contradictions and polarisations on which Iraqi society lies. The fact that the sectarian fronts would disintegrate so rapidly shows that, during the US occupation period, the Myth-Symbol Complex and the sectarian relationships and solidarities were not substantial enough to maintain and solidify sectarian blocks within Iraqi society. On the contrary, these blocks would break under the weight of other contradictions and polarisations. As noted by Jabar, Iraqi social reality:

“...is far more complex in term of social organization and culture than the communal approach allows: the tribe, the clan, extended families, urban guilds, status groups, city neighbourhoods and city solidarities all split religious spaces and cut across such totalizing categories as Sunnis, Shi'i or even Kurds” (Jabar, 2003: 34).

However, as I will show, the impact of the System of Violence on Iraqi society, the moulding and the strengthening of sectarian blocks within it, will be tremendous.
3.3 Centrifugation, Fragmentation and Sectarianisation

In this chapter, I will begin the analysis of the relationship between the violence of the post-2003 period and ethno-sectarian identifications. However, there is a burning question that comes to mind that relates to the origin of the violence that would plague the country. Was ethnic and sectarian violence the result of ethno-sectarian polarisation and "old hatreds", that may have structured the Saddam regime, but also social life in Iraq before the American-led invasion? I will show that I could not find sectarian hatred and prejudices at a social level that could explain the explosion of sectarian violence. Then I will concentrate on the different effects of the System of Violence on the Iraqi society. Here I will show that it involves a double mechanism. A mechanism of centrifugation, that is, the breaking of collective and individual social bounds and channels of communication. And at the same time, the System of Violence would enforce the consolidation of sectarian and ethnic homogenous blocks within this newly fragmented social space.

3.3.1 Sectarian relations

Firstly, to address the question of sectarian relations, one needs to jump a little bit forward and look to the effects on the Iraqi society of the post-2003 events. From 2006 to 2009, I conducted extensive fieldwork among Iraqi refugees—the majority in Syria, and some in Jordan—mainly Arabs from different sects (mostly Mandeans, Shi'i, Sunni and Christians). Despite the fact that many Iraqis that I saw at that time were still dreaming of a pluralist and maybe idealised Iraq, the reality is that most of them did not think it was possible to live anymore in their country. For even some of them, cross-sectarian relations were limited to the minimum or not existing anymore. One of my informants, a refugee in Syria, had these quite emblematic words about relations between Iraqis of different sects: “At best, we just salute each other in the street, that's all.” In an article for a Swiss academic journal, I was trying to describe this post-2003 reality:

“For many Iraqi refugees that we met in Syria or Jordan months and years later, the violence they have suffered has ascribed them to their sectarian status
of being Shi'a, Sunni or Christian. But more deeply, it seems impossible or at least very difficult, to consider or reconsider “a life in Iraq as before,” that is to say where communities could again mix or date in a Nation-State called Iraq, despite the fact that all the refugees that we met were defining themselves as Iraqi and were belonging to a country they call Iraq. The irreparable trauma that some Iraqis have suffered broke something that, according to our interlocutors, will take “several generations to heal”, “if ever Iraq still exists”. They lost perhaps the belief in an Iraqi society capable of creating the conditions for a common life. Or in other words, they lost the ability to imagine, in the sense that Benedict Anderson describes as a common national universe. To use Hobsbawm’s definition, national identification becomes problematic in the sense that identification with the nation Iraq shuns a direct light of what became an existential conflict between components and communal identifications once relatively integrated. (Sommer-Houdeville, 2009:189-207)

For many scholars and commentators, this new reality of sectarian relations confirmed the validity of the “ancient hatreds theory”. This was the story of people that were hating and massacring each other, because of ethnic or sectarian grievances and oppressions, since centuries ago, and that have been held together by dictatorship. Once the dictatorship was gone, these people went back to killing each other. The 'ancient or less ancient hatreds' story has the advantage to be short, powerful and seemingly sticking to the facts. Who could not see hate and anger in the unleashing of cruelty (mass rapes, tortures, humiliations and so on) displayed by all sides, governments, militias, and maybe by neighbours during the sectarian cleansing in Iraq between 2005-2007? If one was looking for hatred and grievances during the long history of this area, one may find plenty. In Iraq for example, one would begin with the *Fitna al kubra* that would bring to existence the two major branches of Islam, Shi'a and Sunna, after the death of Mohammed in 632 A.D, and where Mesopotamia, ancient Iraq, was the centre of the struggle. Then one could continue with the bloody repression of the 1991 Intifada, seen as the revolt of the Shi'a population against a Sunni regime. Others will insist, with reason, on the sustained over-representation of Sunni and the marginalisation of Shi'i and Kurds in the political sphere and state structures since the creation of modern Iraq in the 20th century. Therefore, relying on primordial ethnic or sectarian identities as a causal factor of the violence—the violence being a product of sectarian hate and resentment—could be attractive and give a plausible, nearly mathematical, explanation of the civil war in Iraq.

Yet, something was striking. There was an incredible gap between the new post-2003 reality and how many Iraqis were recalling the life and the sectarian relations before the US invasion, the unfolding of violence and the 2005-2007 civil war. Thus, when asked how their daily life was before 2003 in their

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362 On this topic see the Chapter 1.2 “The ‘Ancient Hatreds’ Theory”.
363 On the *Fitna al Kubra*, see Hichem,1989.
neighbourhood or with their colleagues at work or at school, the overwhelming majority of the answers of my informants were like these:\textsuperscript{364}

“Hissam: It was good, it was ok. I had Christians and Muslim friends, we were celebrating Christmas and Eid together, we were playing in the same team in school, they were good neighbours and our children were friends.”

“ThSom: Was the area you were living in mixed? How was the relation between the people?
Aisha: Excellent... we didn't have any problems between us. We even didn't pay attention to it. Christians, Shi'i or Sunnis, we didn't care. Now, it is like another planet. (After 2005) Ghazalia was cut in two part. With a Shi'i and a Sunni part.”

“ThSom: But how was al Mansour? Was it a mixed area?
Anas: Yes, I think that the most mixed area in all Baghdad was al Mansour! Al Mansour, Al Yarmouk, Al Daoui ... because the people came from different tribes, religions, and levels. The most important, in Al Mansour, until the last year of this war, there were nothing like racism or sectarianism in this area. Only, when the original people of the neighbourhood began to leave Baghdad and Iraq, people from other neighbourhoods came, and then the bad things started. The armed clashes and the killings, all these things.”

“ThSom: How was the neighbourhood, how was Karada?
Juman's husband: The neighbourhood was great. It was sweet to live there. But after 2003, the war changed everything.
ThSom: But before the war, Karada was a mixed neighbourhood?
Juman: Of course! We had neighbours from every sect; some were Muslims, Sunni or Shi'i, or Christians. Everything was fine.
ThSom: But how was the relation with these neighbours?
Juman: It was very good. It was normal. We had friends from every sect. We were sharing birthdays and special occasions. It was very nice. And it was not only in Karada, but in all Baghdad!”

“Hana: Yes, my family was from Baghdad Jeddida. Then when I married my husband, we moved to Al Zeyouna. But in 2007, we went back to Jeddida.
Thsom: So, in Baghdad Jeddida, how was the life? Did the area was mixed, with different religion?
Hana: We were not mixing. We just shared the street
Thsom: So, there were no mixing. It was like that also before the war?
Hana: Before the war? No, no, before the war there was no problem at all.
Thsom: Did you have friends in the area that were not Christians?
Hana: Well, most of them were Muslims. First of all, there were more Muslims than Christians in the area. Also, I went to the regular school when I was a child, so it was all mixed. Then, when I grow up, in Middle School I went to a school linked with the Church, so it was only Christians that went there.

\textsuperscript{364} These different excerpts come from interviews done in Syria between 2007 and 2009. Hissam and Anas interviews were done in Damascus in June 2007 and March 2008, respectively. Aisha interview in Qodseia in April 2008. Juman and Hana interviews in March 2009 in Sednayah.
Thsom: What about your neighbours? Did you have some relations with them?
Hana: It was normal. Most of the time, we were greeting each other’s.
Thsom: But did you visit them sometimes or were socializing with them? Like for birthdays for example?
Hana: Yes, of course. We had some occasions from time to time. In fact, we had nice relations.
Thsom: So when did the things began to be difficult between Muslims and Christians in your area?
Hana: After the fall of Baghdad [in April 2003].”

Yet, as I show in the next chapter, one could find here and there discourses and prejudices mentioning, for instance, the alleged lack of education of Shi'i, in particular those coming from the South of Iraq. Some of my Christian informants would mention the existence of old prejudices against Christians by Muslim people in general. Some of my Shi'i informants would recall that until the US invasion, there was a “Sunni rule” in Iraq. But when asked precisely how it had impacted their life before 2003, very few could give examples of direct prejudice affecting their life, work or education because of their sect or ethnicity. And for the people who had been affected, the main problem was more about the possibility for progress on the social ladder and where Shi'i or Kurds had to prove more loyalty to the regime. And furthermore, having to be much more cautious than Sunni Arabs, for example, when trying to have a military or civil servant career. Others were recalling that as Christians it was difficult or nearly impossible to have a military career.365

On other aspects, many of my Shi'i informants would explain that the public practice of Shi'a religion and traditions would be severely controlled and even repressed by the security apparatus of the Saddam regime. Yet, this was understood as an effect of the political structure of the Saddam regime, and not as a social characteristic of the Iraqi population. Even more compelling, nearly none of them were able to retrace sectarian or ethnic confrontations before the post-2003 period that could explain the violence that would follow. In terms of social mixing, for instance, many of the Arab Muslims that I met had Sunni and Shi'i direct relatives and even sometimes Kurdish ones. Therefore, if 'ancient hatreds' and more generally ethnic and sectarian identities were the causal factor for the explosion of violence and the civil war, how is it possible that it is so difficult to find traces of such hatred and prejudice at a social level before the sectarian and ethnic cleansing? Also, how to explain that these people were living together, inter-marrying, having common tribes, mixing at work and so on for so many years?

365 Yet, there are famous examples of Christian officers in the Iraqi army even during the Saddam regime. On the topic of the sectarian composition of the Iraqi army see, for instance, Al-Marashi & Salama, 2006.
Here again, the argument of the dictatorship forcing people to live together does not hold for very long. First, because the Saddam regime has been described, with some reason, as a discriminatory regime against the Shi'a and the Kurd populations of Iraq. Therefore, it is difficult to imagine that such a regime which was imposing, more or less, political and cultural discriminations toward some part of its own population, would also at the same time oblige Shi’i, Kurds, Sunni, Christians and others to intermarry, to belong to the same tribes or confederations and mix at work and in the neighbourhoods. Second, to this date, there is no study, article or testimony tracing the existence of such official or non-official policies during the Saddam regime or even before. That is why, as counterintuitive as it may be, I consider that “old hatred” or primordialist theories cannot explain the unfolding of violence, or the System of Violence that I described earlier. Furthermore, this is not the first time that a conflict has been categorised as an ethnic or sectarian conflict, as scholars would show that the ethnic or sectarian dimension, although salient, was but one explicative element among many others, and certainly not the causal explanation of the conflict and the violence. For instance, writing in 2000 about the Yugoslav conflict, Oberschall is confronted with the same kind of gap between the sectarian and ethnic social reality produced by the conflict and previous social practices and relations between the different people living in Yugoslavia. Thus, in his article Oberschall analyses and describes the concatenation of different explicative elements, especially the activation of a cognitive crisis frame—opposed to the normal cooperative frame that existed prior to the crisis—in order to understand the Yugoslav conflict and the unfolding ethnic violence:

“On the eve of the wars, Yugoslavs reported cooperative interpersonal ethnic relations and opposed a breakup of the state. Nationalist leaders succeeded in manipulating ethnicity by spreading fear, insecurity and hatred, which ad-

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366 Even more striking is the nearly exact correspondence between the interviews that Oberschall recalls in his article and the ones I am publishing here. More than a decade and thousands of miles apart, a different country, language...Yet, they look like the same, almost word for word: “...the human rights activist, talks to refugees in a camp:

“How was it before the war?”: “Before the war it was super...my neighbours were Muslims, Croats. We celebrated our holidays together. A few months before war broke out, people started separating. It was after Bosnia's independence was recognized. Our neighbours avoided us.”

“...On the contrary, as a bewildered Muslim refugee from Prijedor stated, In Prijedor there were no conflicts between nationalities. ‘We didn’t make the distinctions. My colleague at work was an Orthodox Serb, we worked together. When we were children we went to the Orthodox church or the mosque together...I don’t understand. Before there were never any problems between us. We lived together. My sister is married to a Serb, and a brother of my wife is married to a Croat’ (Mazowiecki 1993, §24).” (Oberschall, 2000)

367 “A cognitive frame is a mental structure which situates and connects events, people and groups into a meaningful narrative in which the social world that one inhabits makes sense and can be communicated and shared with others.” (ibid: 986-988)
vanced their political agenda of separate national states. To explain their success, I draw on elements from the primordialist, instrumentalist and constructionist views on ethnicity and on the theory of ethnic violence originating in fear and insecurity. To these I add the concept of a frame which clarifies elite-grass-roots linkage and ethnic manipulation. Nationalism, ethnic identity and attachment alone, however intense, do not explain grass-roots ethnic actions. Yugoslavs possessed two frames on ethnic relations: a cooperative frame for normal, peaceful times, as in the decades of the fifties to the eighties. They also possessed a dormant crisis frame anchored in family history and collective memory of wars, ethnic atrocities and brutality. Threats and lies that were implausible and dismissed in the normal frame could resonate when the crisis frame was switched on: they became persuasive, were believed, and inspired fear. In the waning days of Communism, nationalists activated the crisis frame on ethnicity by playing on fears of ethnic annihilation and oppression in the mass media, in popular culture, in social movements, and in election campaigns. Elite crisis discourse resonated at the grassroots, made for ethnic polarization, and got nationalists elected. Once in office, nationalists suppressed and purged both moderates in their own ethnic group and other ethnics. They organized militias who perpetrated acts of extreme violence against innocent civilians. They conducted war according to the crisis script. Without the tacit, overt or confused support of the majority, the nationalist leaders could not have escalated ethnic rivalry and conflict into massive collective violence. (Oberschall, 2000:999)

Although happening in a different context, the civil war in Iraq was no less the product of a complex reaction chain. This was initiated by the international players, the US being the first, along with Iraqi elites building a political order in which sectarian relations and identities—Haddad's Myth-Symbol Complex—were first reactivated, manipulated and projected politically and economically by the different actors.

Yet, as I will show, this is the System of Violence that finally is moulding/transforming a social fiction into a social reality, and even in the worst case, essentialising the different Myth-Symbol Complexes. In Gregory's words: “...it has been a significant means of manufacturing identity in Baghdad as elsewhere (Gregory, 2008:14). As I discussed in the chapter 1.4 about Violence and Politics, Violence, among other things, imposes a double principle of separation and restraint by depriving men of the possibility to move, to act and to establish relations. Violence has a remarkable characteristic, which is “...to interpose its instruments between men's relations” (Arendt, 1995). Moreover, in the Origins of Totalitarianism, Arendt contrasts Tyranny and Totalitarianism and demonstrates that total terror is what comes after the violence. In this sense, Tyranny is pre-totalitarian and whereas Tyranny demolishes the fences and channels of communication that exist through Law, totalitarianism makes disappear the Space, that held the possibility of movement and, Freedom itself.
“Total terror is so easily mistaken for a symptom of tyrannical government because totalitarian government in its initial stages must behave like a tyranny and raze the boundaries of man-made law. But total terror leaves no arbitrary lawlessness behind it and does not rage for the sake of some arbitrary will or for the sake of despotic power of one man against all, least of all for the sake of a war of all against all. It substitutes for the boundaries and channels of communication between individual men a band of iron which holds them so tightly together that it is as though their plurality had disappeared into One Man of gigantic dimensions. (Arendt, 1962:466)

What seems interesting to me here is the considerations about the boundaries, the channels of communication and the question of plurality in Arendt's demonstration. Of course, the civil war and the sectarian cleansing happened in a very different context and there is no question of a totalitarian state in post-2003 Iraq. Also, the years of dictatorship and embargo and the economic disaster of the US neoliberal experiment had already provoked social disaster in Iraq. Nevertheless, I think that the violence, when at its apex during the civil war of 2005-2007, was affecting the social structures in Iraq, upsetting if not destroying channels of communication as well as physically redrawing boundaries between individuals and communities. During my fieldwork in Syria and Jordan among refugees, two things were salient. First, very few of them had maintained any kinds of contact with neighbours, friends or even family members back in Iraq. At first, I was considering that this was a direct consequence of their refugee status and their often brutal departure from Iraq. But I realised that most of the time these breaks in social relations and bonds were actually happening and worsening while they were still in Iraq, and as they were living through the occupation, the civil war and its violence. Second, an interesting part of our discussions were centred on the question of normality and the impossibility of have a “normal” life in Iraq. What shows in the interviews that I am presenting below is the impact of the System of Violence on the capacity of movement within society, and a drastic restraining of access to spaces of socialisation even when it was not destroying them all.

3.3.2 Centrifugation

First of all, the widespread violence that I described earlier, (which may encompass social chaos, economic, political and criminal violence) was causing fear and mistrust at an unprecedented level. Furthermore, it was stifling any hopes of building a normal life—to continue studies in Iraq, to develop a business or to raise a family— because people stopped moving and interacting freely. For example, women stopped driving cars, which was considered normal behaviour before 2003, and because of the fear of kidnapping, many children (starting with girls) were not sent to school or to other activities. The
activities of a normal social life, like shopping, going to a cafe to meet friends or socialising outside of a nearby and secure environment, began to be nearly impossible or seemed so dangerous that it was avoided. For some, especially Christians or members of other religious minorities, it was also impossible or very dangerous to practice or visit places of worship. In fact, everyday life movements were restricted to those of absolute necessity, such as going to work (for the ones who had a job and could reach it) and going to buy food, and then, as one informant was to answer, 'flying' back home. A majority of my informants described how they were staying home most of the time and just venturing within their neighbourhood to buy the necessities to survive.368

“Carlos:369 No. I was living not so far from Karada. I had just a bridge to cross. So, I was flying [laughing] from home to my job and from my job to my home. Anyway, I didn't have choice I have to work, right? So, I worked there until I leave to Syria the 18th of September 2006.”

“Abdallah: You don't feel peace. You sit in the car; you go from one side to another. Maybe you will drive two or three kilometres and you will be stopped thousand times. Every time...inspections, checking, checkpoints, identities... and you don't know who is standing on the road. You don't know who are these people. When the government started hitting al Sadr militia, they began to shell from Al Sadr City to the Green Zone with mortars. Three bombs fell close to the building where I was staying. People died on my street. So, we were obliged to leave it and go to some relatives. Imagine, I was just in Baghdad for a visit and I had to move to the house of my relatives, for safety! There is no peace.”

“Najwa: It was not a normal life at all. We couldn't visit anyone. In fact, no one was moving and nowhere was safe. There was nothing normal at that time. The streets were dark and without light at night. We used to lock our doors and sleep early. We were always afraid that they [the militia] get inside the house. There was no possibility to go to meet friends or to go shopping or to the library.”

“Leyla: We just stayed most of the time in the house, except when we needed something from outside or when we went to work. There were a lot of problems getting the necessities to the house. We didn't even continue meeting our friends and I did not meet my brother for several months. My sons just went to university and went back home directly after. We were so afraid of kidnappings. They ask always for money to release the kidnapped people.”

“ThSom: Did you tell your Church of your plan to leave Iraq?


369 My informant chose to be called by this name.
Juman: The Church in Iraq? We couldn't go to the Church; it was too dangerous. Even for Christmas we barely dare go to mass. And when we were there, we didn't stay long.”

“Khalil: I stayed in the house and felt like being in prison, like being in jail. And I will tell you one thing what you might not believe. The jails and prisons in Iraq became safer and more secure than the world outside of prison. I couldn't visit my friends which lived five minutes walking distance away from my house. I could not reach them.”

Inside neighbourhoods, social relations were affected as neighbourhoods were reconfigured and cleansed by militias. The forced movement of the population inside cities and within neighbourhoods changed the pattern of social relations within areas that had been always traditionally considered as central parts of social life in Iraq. This reinforced the fear and mistrust and contributed to the breaking of links and social relations. Hence some of our informants would use these words to describe the general atmosphere in Baghdad at that time:

“ThSom: What was the mood in Baghdad at this time in 2005-2006?
Carlos: Not good. I don't know but something changed. Everybody was scared. Even the friendship was not the same. In fact, all the people were afraid of everybody. Every day you would hear from the family or the community that this one or this one had been killed or kidnapped.
ThSom: In your neighbourhood, too? Were you speaking of the situation with your neighbours?
Carlos: Yes of course. But I told you, everybody was scared. So, we were very suspicious. Who knows what this neighbour is doing at night? Who knows if this one is not working with some militia or gang ...? Then, as I told you in my neighbourhood, people were just looking out for themselves.”

“Khalil: We just stayed at the house and did not want to communicate with friends or family from the old neighbourhood and we did not make any friends in the new neighbourhood, because we were afraid of people. We cut the relationships and communication with all people, there wasn't any communication at all. We stayed just in the house in order to be safe. We didn't meet any friend from the old neighbourhood, neither we thought about meeting people in the new neighbourhood. We were so afraid, particularly in the new area which we did not know well. When a new person arrived, or settled down in the area, he was under observation, like in all neighbourhoods. So, we did not meet anyone, nor did we want to meet anyone.”

“ThSom: Do you have news from your neighbours?
Anas: No unfortunately, I don't have any news. Because some of them moved from the neighbourhood suddenly. You know, as the result of the bad situation in the last years they couldn't give their number or the new addresses to the friends because of safety and because they have to escape. This situation made us lose contact.”

370 However, Al Wardi described the culture of “neighborly relations” as weakened by the growing of individualism in the sixties (Al Wardi 2008: 82), See also Batatu, 2004.
However, one may think that these testimonies present a bleaker picture of a more contrasted reality and one may be biased because they originated from refugees, i.e. the fraction of the population that had been the most affected by the post-2003 events in Iraq. But there are numerous reports and news coverage and stories about violence in Iraq pointing to the same kind of testimonies from people that did not leave the country. Here I want to present an account from a French radio news story produced in 2013 portraying young Iraqis living in Baghdad. What is interesting is that their testimonies are comparing two periods of violence 2003-2008 and 2013 (which marks a new outbreak of violence), with the same kind of violence and effects on social life, and contrasts them with a period of relative appeasement (2009-2013).

“The young Iraqi remembers that ‘after 2008, things started to go much better.’ ‘We dreamed of finally being able to live in peace, but the situation worsened earlier this year: explosions have increased, as kidnappings,’ he notes, saying to be “lucky” to have escaped the attacks until now ... Sunday, when he learned that a bomb had hit a coffee house, Nawar hurried back home “before the streets are blocked.” “When there was an attack, we know that the next day there will be huge traffic jams, because there are security checks,” said the young engineer, “all of these, it paralyzes our lives “. In Iraq ... all the places and events that attract crowds can be targeted: football fields, weddings, mosques and cafes. “In Baghdad, said Nawar, there was not much entertainment, but we had cafés, where you can chat, play cards.” “It was our ‘breathing space’, ” sighs the Baghdad. But when more and more cafés have been the target of attacks, his friends stopped going. Not him: “at the beginning, I avoided the places that were attacked.” “When a bomb exploded, I did not go out of my home, but I told myself that if I did that all the time, I will not leave my house ever again. “...What also concerned Nawar was that the daily violence prevented him having a love life. “Having a social life, a relationship, sometimes it is prohibited outside Baghdad, but in Baghdad, it was tolerated,” he says, noting that with the increase of violence, minds are closed. “In Baghdad, it became more difficult to have a relationship. And when you’re with someone, you feel responsible for your partner and you cannot risk your life.” (Contenay, 2013)\textsuperscript{371}

The first images that come to mind when studying these testimonies and stories, is the rise of fear and the breaking of social bonds and relations, the impossibility to move and access spaces of socialisation, the breaking apart of pre-existing social circles, families or neighbourhoods, leaving people alone to confront the violence and the brutal changes within social life. If as Arendt demonstrates, the terror in the Totalitarian regime was binding individuals tightly together with an iron band, and here the first effect of the System of

\textsuperscript{371} Translation is mine.
Violence was to break them apart by reinforcing or even creating new boundaries, and destroying channels of communication among individuals. To adopt an analogy from physics, it is as if the System of Violence was producing an effect of the centrifugation of Iraqi society, isolating each of its members. This may also explain, as Bozarslan noted, why any resistance from Iraqi society against the violence was so weak. Yet, as illustrated by Carpenter, these attempts at resistance and resilience against the System of Violence existed. But she shows that they were most successful within neighbourhoods and areas where people succeeded in maintaining strong social bonds and communication channels (2014). However, the magnitude of the effects of the System of Violence and the willingness of the Iraqi political elites and foreign actors to benefit from it, were too strong to stop. Yet, it maybe this social resistance, as weak as it was, that helped to prevent the country from exploding completely.

3.3.3 Fragmentation and sectarianisation

At the same time, and it can seem paradoxical, the System of Violence was producing another effect which was the reinforcement and consolidation of sectarian and ethnic blocks inside a newly fragmented social space. Hence, one has to understand also how the violence applied by the different actors—US military, the new Iraqi State security apparatus, and the armed groups and militia—in particular the sectarian violence, were changing the spatial configuration of entire areas and cities, with Baghdad being the symbol of this spatial reconfiguration (Damluji, 2010). Here again, and despite the fact that the main actors of the sectarian violence were Iraqis, the American led coalition bears a huge responsibility in this particular dimension of the violence.

As shown by Gregory in his study of the US “culture-centric warfare”, the ethno-sectarian cleansing that happened in Baghdad, between 2004 and 2008, cannot be separated from the counterinsurgency strategy and tactics implemented by the US forces (2008). In reality, as stated by Gregory, US-lead MNF "has been complicit in and even capitalized on the ethno-sectarian restructuring of Baghdad" (ibid: 30), and one could add the rest of Iraq. In the same vein, Tripp considers that the US led multinational forces were instrumental in the fragmentation and localization of violence and politics. In particular, the strategy of the US military (based on French general Gallieni's Tonkin campaign) that focused on creating and enlarging, les tache d'huiles, (‘oiled spot’) built on local powers collaborating with the US-led MNF "encouraged the politics of the local" (Tripp, 2008).

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372 One could add the foreign nationals who were members of Al Qaeda/ISI at that time.
In Baghdad, but also in some other towns, one crucial element of the US counter-insurgency policy was the erection of hundreds of concrete walls separating neighbourhoods and districts on the base on their sectarian composition. (Gregory, 2008; Niva, 2008). And where there were no walls, neighbourhoods were blocking their streets with their own makeshift fences, because of the fear of armed groups, gangs and car bombings. Hence, in 2007, Baghdad was described by the New York Times as “...a capital of corrosive and violent borderlines (Cave, 2007). Therefore, not only were many people prevented from reaching their workplace because of the sectarianisation of the new Iraqi State, they were also not able anymore to travel from one neighbourhood to another, to meet friends, family or direct relatives. Here, as one of my informants explained:

“I couldn't even cross the Tigris river. It was too dangerous; I could only move to some of my relatives. Believe me, I have relatives everywhere, but I could only see three houses of them. I could not go to see the rest of my relatives.”

But this spatial reconfiguration produced by the System of Violence was not limited to the erection of walls and no-go zones. It transformed entire neighbourhoods and areas, pushing inhabitants out, importing new ones. Some neighbourhoods were cut into two or three areas, each one with its own militia, with its own leaders, with its own debilitated sovereignty—a fragmentation of space, power and politics that Tripp described in “The politics of the local in Iraq” (Tripp, 2008). And of course, the first coordinate, but not the only one, driving this spatial reconfiguration was a sectarian coordinate. There are many accounts and reports of the sectarian cleansings especially in Baghdad and more generally in Iraq (Gregory, 2008; Harling, 2011; Ali Ali, 2012; Khalidi & Tanner, 2006; ICG, 2007, 2008). Therefore, I will just borrow and reproduce, three maps from Michael Izady and hosted by the Gulf/2000 Project, that show the progression and the magnitude of the ethno-sectarian homogenisation of neighbourhoods in Baghdad. The green areas represent Shi'a majority neighbourhoods; the red, Sunni majority, the brown, mixed populations and the blue, Christian blocks.

373 See Part 2 of the thesis.
374 Interview done with Ibrahim, Iraqi refugee in Damascus in April 2009.
375 On the question of “class cleansing” see preceding chapter 3.2.2 on System of Violence and social contradiction.
376 Yet, there were some debate about the methodology of the construction of such maps, considering the difficulty to access the field. Other scholars produced different kinds of maps, using different methods. See for instance (Gregory, 2008) and also (Agnew et al., 2008). Nevertheless, all these maps are converging to the same point, the ethno-sectarianisation of neighbourhoods.
Figure 12 Baghdad Sectarian Composition in 2003 (http://gulf2000.columbia.edu/images/maps/Baghdad_Ethnic_2003_sm.jpg)
Figure 13 Baghdad Sectarian Composition early 2007

Figure 14 Baghdad Sectarian Composition 2009
It is interesting to contrast this with the demographic description of the capital published in January 2006 by Fadil Abbas Mahmud from the Iraqi Center for Research, and which corresponds roughly with the map of Baghdad in 2003. Literally his article describes the agglomeration of people of different sects and ethnic backgrounds in administrative neighbourhoods and districts\textsuperscript{378}, most of the neighbourhoods being mixed with Christians, Sunni, Shi'a, Sabeens, Arabs, Kurds, and with 5 of the 9 districts of the Capital without any kind of sectarian or ethnic majority. In these districts, non-Muslim minorities (of which Mahmud establishes the numbers of 318,000 Christians and 60,000 Mandeans) were numerically present in all districts but one, Al Sad'r City. Interestingly enough, the researcher concluded his article with this sentence:

“During the dark period {the Ba'ath dictatorship}, Baghdad had not seen latent civil war insofar as its inhabitants were accustomed to plurality and diversity. The capital is characterised anyway by an ‘anti-hégémonique’ consensus. It will, however, need a clear direction for enabling the participation of all sections of society for the foundation of the political process currently going on.” (Mahmud, 2006)\textsuperscript{379}

Yet, just a few years later, the maps of Baghdad in 2007 and 2009 show far more different and darker pictures. The mixed neighbourhoods and districts that formed the majority of the city have shrunk and nearly disappeared, except for tiny areas here and there, mainly close to the central banks of the Tigris river. They have been replaced by completely homogenous neighbourhoods, the huge majority of them being Shi'a and the minority Sunni. Hence, the Shi'a populations were pushed from the neighbourhoods of Al Dorah, Muradaya and Jabbur from the Al Rashid district, as well as those living in Khadra, Yarmouk, Firdaws, Amyria, Hay al Atba in Al Mansour district. For the Sunni population, it was even worse. Almost all of Al Rusafa part, (half of the city, on the right bank of the Tigris) had been cleansed of practically all Sunni inhabitants. Only small pockets with intermixed populations, and two Sunni blocks in the Old City remained (Gaylan and a small part of Mustansirya). The neighbourhood of Al Adhamya remained a Sunni bastion. On the other side of the city, Al Kharkh, the Sunni population had to flee the neighbourhoods of Saydyia, Hayy al Amal from the Al Rashid district, and Hurrya from Al Kadhamya district. Some neighbourhoods like Ghazalya and Al Jihad were cut in two, with a Sunni part in the South and a Shi'a part in the North. The Al Mansour neighbourhood was cut along east/west lines.

\textsuperscript{378} Baghdad is cut by the Tigris river into two parts, Al Rusafa on the right bank and Al Kharkh, the left bank. It is administratively divided in 9 districts, which are divided themselves in a total of 89 neighbourhood councils.

\textsuperscript{379} Translation is mine.
The non-Muslim minorities were not spared at all and in fact nearly disappeared from the capital, like the Mandeans that are now considered all displaced from Baghdad and Iraq, except for a few hundreds of families. The number of Christians in Baghdad also shrunk to at least less than half of what it was before 2003 (Yacoub, 2008; Brié, 2006), with the remaining ones trying to gather and stay close together, which can be seen on the map with the appearance of small Christian blocks. Surely, Baghdad, because it was the capital and with maybe a quarter of the overall population of Iraq concentrated in it, has been the symbol of the sectarian cleansing and seen the worst of the violence and fighting during the period 2006-2007. However, one would be mistaken to assume that sectarian cleansing only occurred in Baghdad. On the contrary such events happened all over the country, although on a lesser scale. Thus, Christians were fleeing Mosul in the North for villages in the surrounding countryside, while many Shi'a were pushed out of the centre and eastern provinces of Al Anbar, Baquba or Babil. In the meantime, many Sunni families that were living in the Southern provinces, especially in and around Basora were moving north toward Baghdad, Al Anbar or Mossoul. Of course, there was social, tribal and religious resistance against the cleansing. They may have succeeded to scale down or slow it. For instance, in 2005, Sunni members of the Dulaimi tribe fought hour-long battles against Al Qaeda groups led by Al Zarqawi around Ramadi in central Iraq, in order to protect Shi'i inhabitants of the area (Knickmeyer & Finer, 2005). In 2007, Al Sistani, the highest Shi'a religious authority in Iraq would release a communique urging the protection of Sunni Iraqis (Kuna, 2007). Nevertheless, the cleansing happened.

If one considers that the sectarian cleansing began on a very small scale as early as 2005 (Youssef & Dulaimy, 2005), exploded during the civil war 2006-2007, then was mitigated around 2008, this represents a huge movement of the population inside and outside of cities and the reconfiguration of entire neighbourhoods, areas and provinces. Obviously, an important part of the four million Iraqis refugees and IDPs estimated by the UNHCR during the years 2005-2010 (UNHCR, 2007) were, of course, the direct or indirect victims of the sectarian cleansing and the fights between armed groups, militia and security apparatus. And among the dozens of my informants in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon, a majority had fled sectarian violence. Interestingly enough, a significant part of them tried to stay in Iraq before leaving the country. They were moving to neighbourhoods and areas where they thought they would be protected from the violence. Most of the time, they relocated themselves in the houses or neighbourhoods of relatives, but either the violence renewed or the material impossibility to survive in their new environment pushed them to

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380 Yet, another important part involved people who had fled localities and areas subject to Multinational Forces pacification campaigns such as the “Operation Phantom Fury” in Fallujah in November 2004.
leave the country definitively. In fact, as demonstrated by Ali Ali, for a good part of these people the migration process began long before they quit the country (2007: 87).

Most of my informants described how militias, while attacking entire neighbourhoods, were targeting people on the basis of their sectarian affiliation. People would often receive at first oral or written warnings, ordering them to leave. Then they would be subjected to physical violence in the form of attacks against them directly or their house. Others would see members of their family, more than often children, being kidnapped. Until finally they left, sometimes under the dark cover of the night without telling anybody, because they thought or they knew that they were the very next to be targeted. I produce here one excerpt of one interview realised in Sednayah in March 2009. Hana is a Christian who was living with her family in the neighbourhood of Zeyouna in Baghdad. The events she describes happened in 2007.

“Thsom: Why did you left Zeyouna?
Hana: Well, we had problems there. Two brothers of my husband had been killed.
Thsom: Why, what happened?
Hana: In fact, my husband and his brothers they had this shop for electric and electronic stuff. At first, we received threats and then his two brothers were killed. My husband succeeded to escape. He left, so I had no more choice than to go back to Baghdad Jeddida.
Thsom: Who did that?
Hana: It was Islamic militia.
Thsom: But do you know if they were Shia or Sunni?
Hana: We don’t know from what sect they were belonging. But they were Islamic militia.
Thsom: But they sent you threats, what kind of threats? They were asking for money, or asking to leave?
Hana: We received every kind of threats.
Tshom: So after the attack you and your husband fled to Baghdad Jeddida?
Hana: No. my husband left the country.
Tshom : Ah, where did he go?
Hana: He went to Sweden directly. And me, I went back to Baghdad Jeddida in my parent’s house.”

On other occasions, people would run and barely escape being the ‘spoils of war’” after a militia of the opposite sect captured their area or their entire neighbourhood. Sometimes, the fear and the dark stories told by friends or families living in the vicinity would be enough for people to try to preempt the violence that they foresaw coming and left for what they thought would be a more secure place. Yet, for those who remained, being in the area of a militia from the same sect did not mean being safe.

As we saw in the precedent chapter on the organised structures of the violence, militias were keen to enforce their rule violently against anyone that
would seem disobedient or, and especially for women, not living in the strict
way that they deemed good for the people. In addition, many inhabitants of
Shi'a or Sunni homogenous neighbourhoods, would not be spared, caught in
the crossfire of intra-community violence between different militias of the
same sect battling for the control of those areas. Here, I will use a fragment of
the interview from a refugee that I met in June 2007 in Damascus. Hissam, a
professor from a Sunni background, tells how his neighbourhood, Al Jamya’,
in Baghdad once mixed and mainly composed of professors and intellectuals
before the invasion of Iraq in 2003, had been emptied of its original population
in the spring of 2006. What is interesting is that in his own words, my inform-
ant outlines what I am explaining. That is exactly the dirty work of militias
and the condoning of it by the US forces and the Iraqi security apparatus, as
well as the failed attempt of resistance against it by the inhabitants, with the
isolation of individuals. And also, the forced replacement of the people in his
own neighbourhood and his feelings of estrangement from it. In the end, the
fight between the two Sunni militias forced him to leave:

“Our district has always been mixed, my neighbours were Shiites, Sunnis and
even Christians. It was a quiet place; everyone knew and respected each other.
It began in 2006, after the events of Samara. Members of the Mehdi Army went
to our neighbourhood and started beating Sunni residents. Then it was Al Qaeda
who came and shot a Shiite resident. It became hell, on Monday the Mehdi
Army would kill a Sunni neighbour, on Tuesday it was Al Qaeda and the Is-
lamic Army ... Shiites, Sunnis, we were all terrified. We tried to organise our-
selves and to protect the neighbourhood. We tried to make fences in the street,
and prevent the militias to enter but the Americans and the police destroyed it.
Anyway, we were teachers not soldiers. From then on, it restarted, it was even
more terrible. And progressively as the one and the other were losing members
of their families or friends, everyone was on his own. Finally, all Shi'i neigh-
bours had to leave our neighbourhood and it became entirely Sunni. Al Qaeda
and the Islamic Army brought Sunni refugees who had been expelled from other
districts. It was crazy, we did not know half the people who lived in our neigh-
bourood, we had to be careful all the time. Women could not go out on their
own, even to go shopping in the neighbourhood. Then, Al Qaeda and the Is-
lamic Army began to fight for the control of our neighbourhood. Many people
were killed, some fighters were beheaded, their bodies exposed to the sight of
all. Finally, it was Al Qaeda who won our district and it became their strong-
hold. All those who were kidnapped by their militants were killed in front of
us. Our children had to step over bodies to go to school. We could no longer
live like that, so we left.”

381 Interestingly enough, Daniel Pécaut who studied in length the more or less 50 years of civil
wars and endemic violence in Colombia, describes essentially similar mechanisms. In particu-
lar, the destruction of social bonds and the enforcement of control by the paramilitary groups
applying terror directly on the population and avoiding, when possible, direct fights with enemy
guerrilla groups (Pécaut, 2005:261).
In any event, the people who remained or were reallocated to these transformed neighbourhoods and localities did not have any choice but to adjust to the newly fragmented reality. It became about finding work, or a way of earning some money in the neighbourhood or close by because the old job did not exist anymore or was impossible to reach. It was about trying to find a school for the children while it was still an option. It was about finding a doctor or a clinic nearby that will accept people from your sect or a shop where you will be able to find food or ice to keep food, as in the example reported by the New York Times journalist Stephen Farell. But nearly everything and everyone was tethered to a neighbourhood or a small labyrinth of walled neighbourhoods and areas considered more or less ‘safe’ and accessible.

“The Baghdad’s sectarian compartmentalization of ice is as rigid for customers as for deliverymen. Such is the universal fear of the gunmen that only this factory’s immediate neighbours can safely reach its doors. ‘People used to come here from Sunni areas - Taji, Amiriya and Jamia - to buy ice because they had no ice factories in their areas,’ Kareem said. ‘But the Sunnis cannot reach this area now, and I am the same. I am Shia and I cannot go to Yarmuk. Yarmuk rankles Kareem because until three months ago he lived in the Sunni neighbourhood and enjoyed a secure government job, until an Iraqi Army raid uncovered a Shiite icon on his wall. “They beat me up, burnt my house and forced me out of the area,” he said, squatting amid the nauseating smell of ammonium that permeates all ice factories. “I now live in my relatives’ kitchen. And I work here.”’ (Farell, 2007)

The danger of a misstep in ever changing territories controlled by opposite sectarian militia was real and always close. In the last resort, everything depending on the one, maybe a militiaman, an American GI or an Iraqi Defence Force soldier, that would let you cross a checkpoint and come back. Hence, this spatial reconfiguration into sectarian blocks and the impossibility of movement would have tremendous consequences on individuals and Iraqi society at large, as Damluji recalls in her study about Baghdad:

“By 2007, the segregation of Shi’as and Sunnis into separate urban areas also severely restricted physical, social and economic mobility. Civilian residents not only found it impossible to return to old neighbourhoods, but also to traverse the city safely through its proliferation of sectarian boundaries and checkpoints. Sectarian identity marked men, women and children as militia targets. According to a Red Cross report, people everywhere in Baghdad were cut off from normal access to jobs, education and social networks, forced to carve out new patterns of life, as they search for ways to stay in their Sunni or Shiite neighbourhoods.” (2010:79)

As he was traveling back in Baghdad in 2008, The Guardian journalist Ghaith Abdul-Ahad, who was born in the city, was writing:
“There is no such thing as a Baghdadi any more. Everyone now is identified with a particular walled neighbourhood, guarded by one of a dozen or so militias.” (Gaith, 2008)

In this new world, the diversity and the multiplicity of the former Iraqi social life, the relations and interactions, the mixing and the dating between the different communities would be reduced to a bare minimum, if not destroyed at all. Neighbours, old friends and relationships, mixed families, sometimes even husbands and wives, would be separated by walls and checkpoints because they are belonging to different confessions and communities. One of my informants who was a refugee in Syria, told me how his neighbourhood, Saydyah, had been cut into two parts, one Shi'a and one Sunni, by different militias. He then told me this story about an old couple that had been separated:

“There is a Sunni lady who is still living in my area. They [the Shi'a militia who was controlling his part of the neighbourhood] don't bother her because she is a woman. But her husband had to leave and went to the Sunni side of Saydyah. Now, the two sides are separated by a wall. So, she is staying alone in her house and then when she wants to see her husband she is moving to his family where he is staying. But there is no chance for him to come back in their house.” (Interview with Mohamed, Iraqi refugee. Damascus, Jaramana 2007)

Of course, many of these people would struggle bravely to maintain the links and the relationships, finding ways to sneak in and reunite despite the walls, the checkpoints, the bombings and the militia. However, in the context of the domination of networks of violence, such struggle is particularly unfair.

As I said earlier, the System of Violence is reproducing and extending the fragmentation and a sectarianisation of state and of the political space into social life. In a sense, the System of Violence produced these walls and these sectarian blocks where they did not exist before. It produced the fragmentation and sectarianisation of streets, places and buildings that had been before the physical and spatial markers of a social life characterized by its plurality. In his discussion about Pierre Bourdieu’s social theory, Brubaker notes that:

“Social life is materially grounded and conditioned, but material conditions affect behavior in large part through the mediation of individual beliefs, dispositions, and experiences. Social life exists only in and through the symbolically mediated experience and action of individuals, but these individuals have been formed under definite material conditions of existence, and their every activity— including their symbolizing activity— depends on social facts existing prior to and independently of that activity.” (1985:750)

In Iraq, the material and physical dimensions of the social life had changed brutally. In this frame, people were losing a sense of their environment, and as one of my informants would say, he was feeling like a “stranger in his own
city, stranger in his own country." For many of my informants such breaking of the Iraqi social life—as wrecked and constrained it could have been under Saddam tyranny and during the embargo—was unprecedented. They did not have experiences to which they could relate and that could mediate with the new reality. As I will show in the next chapter, such cognitive dissonance would be expressed around contradictory discourses and attitudes that would refer to two separate periods, before 2003 and after.

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382 Interview done with Salah, Iraqi refugee in Beirut. March 2007
3.4 Sectarian Violence, Sectarian Discourses and Attitudes

Before going further with the study of the violence and in particular the practices of cruelties as they happened during the conflict, I would like to focus on the elements of sectarianism and even of essentialisation as they have emerged within discourses and narratives among the Iraqi refugee communities at the peak of the sectarian violence in 2006-2007 and after. Here, I will provide four long excerpts of different interviews that were made in Syria between 2007 and 2009. They are quite representative of the different discourses and narratives that I collected in my different fieldwork. I think that they are very relevant to our discussion for different reasons. And considering that they were done a few months after these people left Iraq, when the memories of the events were still very fresh and where some of these informants were still bearing the physical and psychological scars of the violence they had faced. Furthermore, these interviews were done while the sectarian violence and the sectarian cleansing were still at play in Iraq.

But more importantly, these voices describe a social reality much more complex than the ones we are used to getting either from the Iraqi political elites or foreign actors and ‘experts’.

Consequently, I noticed the integration and reorganisation of discourse and positions about different contradictions inherent to Iraqi society, like class and sectarianism or regionalism and sectarianism. Then, I observed a constant tension involving two contradictory types of discourses and practices produced by Iraqi refugees during our fieldwork and even sometimes during the same interview. On one side, it involves a discourse of plurality, integrating multi-confessional cooperation linking with what Haddad defines as “Iraqi nationalism”, and on the other side a discourse of separation or in Haddad’s words, “assertive or aggressive sectarianism”. Also, one may find direct elements of essentialisation and ethnicisation of sectarian categories in some discourse and attitudes. Finally, all of these interviews are wrapped in, or held together by the social trauma provoked by the explosion of violence, the sectarian violence and the Ritualised violence that came with it. This tension between plurality and separation and its direct relation with Violence was a constant figure

383 For the definition of Iraqi or state nationalism and banal, assertive or aggressive sectarianism see (Haddad, 2011:34)
in the majority of my interviews. In my data analysis, the recurrence of the sub-themes and themes of Plurality and Separation and their spatial proximity with the theme and the sub-themes of Violence is evident. I provide here a diagram that illustrates it.

![Figure 15 Packed Code Cloud (Thematic Recurrences)](image)

In the following sections I will present briefly each of the informants and the context of the interview and then propose a short analysis after each of them.

3.4.1 Plurality, separation

Here I will produce two interviews that illustrate this tension between plurality and separation, between multi-confessional cooperation and aggressive sectarianism, and the relation with violence.

I recorded Omar in Damascus in 2008, he was working as a guard in the political office of Sheikh Jawad Madhi al Khalissy, a Shi’i cleric and a nationalist leader of a group, the Iraqi National Congress, that was firmly opposing the American occupation and the new political process. Before moving to Damascus, Omar was a shop owner in the neighbourhood of Saydia/Dora, a suburb of Baghdad. Omar was a Sunni, in his mid-thirties at the time of the interview.

**ThSom**: How was life in Iraq?
Omar: After the bombing of Samarra, all the Shi’a militias began to kill Sunni. But they were targeting the good Sunni people, the religious or the doctors and all the people with good manners and education [Muhathab wa Muthaqaf]. So, the good Sunnis had to leave or would be killed or kidnapped. The militias were saying they were terrorists, all. Like me for example, the militias first gave my name to the American forces, saying I was a terrorist. So, they came and searched my house in the middle of the night.... So, these narrow-minded people, they thought I was an extremist Sunni because my father was a famous Sunni sheikh, and my name was Omar and I was going often to the mosque!

ThSom: But what does it mean, ‘extremist’, like being a Takfiri?³⁸⁴
Omar: No, not like that, but somehow I was too Sunni for them! But anyhow, they didn't find anything, and also some of my Shi’a neighbours, they spoke with them. So, they left me. But at this time everything began to be very dangerous. Like there were an American base near our area, and the resistance attacked them lots of times. So, the Americans would in response be firing everywhere and at everybody. My house was full of bullets hole from that.... But the real things happened with militias. One day some of them came and try to kidnap me.

ThSom: Who were they?
Omar: They were saying that they were Jaysh el Madhi. But I know a lot of them. They were young thugs and Shurugs from our neighbourhood. Uneducated, on drugs or I don't know what, most of the time. I was going back from the mosque and I was near the Hussayniah, when they arrived and tried to grab me. Thankfully, one of my friends, a Shi’i, came out and tried to save me. And other neighbours tried to speak with the militia. Finally, they left but they said that I couldn't live here anymore, that I am Sunni, pious Sunni and so I have to go. My Shi’i friends, they were afraid. They told me: “what can we do? We like you, you are our friend, our neighbour, we will never harm you. But these savages, they will come back and they will kill you. We cannot protect you against them, you should go”. So, I left the same day.

ThSom: But you knew these people, these militias who threatened you?
Omar: Yes, I told you, I knew them, most of them were from Saydiah too, some I knew by their name.

ThSom: But I don't understand, how it is possible that some Shi’i people were your friends and defending you and other neighbours were attacking you?
Omar: It is life. There are good and bad people everywhere. In Saydiah we were living in a building built by the government. I think that it was built in the 70s by the Ministry of Health for its employees. So, the Ministry built the building and if you were working there, you could have a flat in the building. Then after some years if you want you can sell your flat and leave or whatever. So, it was like that when I arrived there. I bought a flat from a Ministry employee who was leaving. So Saydiah was a mixed area with mostly houses small or big, but my building was even more mixed with Sunni, Shi’i, Christians, lots of them working for the Ministry, even Kurdish. We were neighbours and friends. I mean, before the war you couldn’t differentiate between Sunni or Shi’i or even Christians. You had to ask. Then after the war they began to build a Hussayniah in Saydia.

³⁸⁴ Designates mostly extremists Sunni muslim who declares ‘takfir’ (apostates) and therefore condemn to death muslims that do not share their dogma and practices.
**ThSom**: Who built it?

**Omar**: Some people from the neighbourhood with the money coming... I am not sure, but I think the money was coming from al Sistani. Then things began to change.

**ThSom**: Like how?

**Omar**: It was like all these parties which came with the Americans, they were trying to spread the hate between us. Like they were saying about the Shi’i, that they were always oppressed since the beginning of Iraq, and so on and so on, that they had to rule this country, that they are the majority. That the Sunni were the ones who oppressed them...and so on. Also, the Americans worked on that, on dividing us. When they arrived here I was like the others. I didn't like Saddam. He killed my father. So, I thought that maybe we will have a new life with more freedom, more economic development. A better life. But it was all lies; they destroyed the entire country. I even lost my nephew, they killed him. And then they started to separate us, between Sunni and Shi’a, Christians and Muslims. Like... remember at the beginning just after a few months, there were a lot of demonstration against the Americans from the ex-officers or the unemployed people. It was a mixed demonstration and nobody was speaking about Shi’a or Sunni or whatever. Like there were demonstrations from Khadamyia to Adhamyia with Sunni and Shi’i demonstrating together. So, the Americans helped to create the militias, to make us busy with one another. They sent people to Husseinia and say to them rule the place. Then they began to bomb the area; one day an Husseinia, the other a Sunni place. Then, they destroyed the Samara holy shrine, and it was chaos. They spread rumors and lies. So, they fooled the people. But maybe now after all this killing the people are realising that they were fooled.

**ThSom**: And if the situation in Iraq will be better in the future, maybe if there is reconciliation, would you like to go back?

**Omar**: Of course, I would love to. This is my country. If I had the choice I would just go back. But I don't know. Look, in Saydyah, the Americans destroyed all the militias there and the situation now is calm. But the atmosphere is still bad. The people there, they know who killed whom. They want revenge. So, it is not finished. So it is still very bad. If I go back I would not go back to Saydyah. I will go to a place without hate, without revenge. It will be a Sunni place. Because in Saydyah, there is too much hate and we had too much fighting and they try to kill me. Too many things happened there. Reconciliation will be difficult, life with Shi’i will be difficult too.

**ThSom**: But what about your children? Will you accept for example, that in the future they will marry Shi’i?

**Omar**: Yes of course, why not. I don't care as long they are good people and with good manners and that my sons are happy. It will not be my life, but theirs, so they will have to choose and find a good one. Whoever they will marry I will be happy if they are. And I will be happy with grandchildren and I will be happy to be a grandfather. For the rest, it is their decision. I hope for them that they will have a life like we had before all this chaos. A life with happiness, with work and friends and money and a good house. I hope they will have that. But maybe it will not be in Iraq.

It is interesting to see that this interview encloses different frames and narratives that were described by Haddad and others. Hence, Omar recalls a time,
prior to 2003, of ethnic and sectarian cooperation and mixing in his neigh-
bourhood, even the kind of sectarian blindness385 or, its banalisation, –Haddad defines “banal sectarianism” as one of the characteristics of the Iraqi society prior to 1991 (2010:37). This would also correspond to what Oberschall de-
files as a cognitive frame of cooperation. In contrast, the post-2003 period corresponds to the rise of insecurity and sectarian division in the society. Omar contrasts the “good Sunni”, educated and well-mannered and the members of the Shi’a militia from his area, the “young thugs” [Shebab Harami], “unedu-
cated”, “on drugs”. Here, three things are agglomerated, a class, a sectarian and a regional categorisation, the “Shi’i uneducated thugs”, “the Shurug”386 that are often present in the words of many of our informants, Sunni, Chris-
tians and Shi’i alike. But these contrasts also with the description of his neigh-
bourhood as middle class-lower middle class and a mixed area, with Sunni, Shi’i and Christians, composed in the majority of civil servants living in build-
ings built by the Ministry of Health in the 1970s. Here the common denomi-
nator is the belonging to a common class or status group that transcend the sectarian background.

The second part of his discourse, concerning the oppression of the Shi’a, the assertion of the Shi’a being the majority and his expression of being “too Sunni for them”, all of this points to what Haddad describes as “the refusal of a new political order that perpetuated and nourished the politicisation of commu-
nal identity”. This is also the expression of the marginalisation and victim-
isation of a community, the Sunni, who have always been implicitly the dom-
inant community in Iraq. Here, the culprits are the exiled elites “the political parties that came with the Americans” and the Americans. These discourses of defiance vis a vis the exiled parties and the US, who were allegedly attempt-
ing to “separate Shi’i, Sunni and Christians”, was a common feature of the political arena during the years 2003-2010 and that was cross cutting the sec-
tarian or geographical spectrum. Finally, it is also important to see the descrip-
tion of the relations that he maintained with his Shi’a neighbours and friends. Some of whom would even try to protect and defend him, yet who remained like him powerless against the actions of the militias. Nevertheless, the inter-
view ends on a much darker tone as it seems impossible for him to return to his former neighbourhood which is cut in two by a wall. Worse, it seems that hate and revenge poison any possibility of reconciliation. In this rigid struc-
ture, only a Sunni place can be a place of peace. There is here the constitution of a frame of crisis with the experience and the memories of violence and

385 In Omar’s words” “...before the war you couldn’t differentiate between Sunni or Shi’a or even Christians. You had to ask.”
386 Shurug, is a derogative term describing the poor peasant coming from the south of Iraq...more precisely this was used to designate peasants coming from the district of Amara in the south of Iraq who came to the capital Baghdad in the beginning of the 20th century. See Batatu 2004:85.
atrocities and the fear of revenge as described by Oberschall on his study on the Yugoslavia conflict. 387

The second interview describes the kidnapping, the torture and the assassination attempt of one of my informants. I recorded Abdel in a restaurant in Damascus in the beginning of 2007. He had been presented to me by a mutual acquaintance of ours, who knew that I was trying to interview Iraqi refugees. Abdel was a former non-commissioned officer in the previous Iraqi Army. After the American invasion of Iraq and the disbanding of the regular army, he became a taxi driver. Abdel is a Sunni, in his mid-thirties. Before moving to Damascus, he was living in Husseinia, a neighbourhood of Baghdad and then for a few times in Khajdyia near Husseinia.

Abdel: It was during Ramadan 2006 [around October 2006], I picked up two women who wanted to go just outside of Kadhamya, in Ghahaid, just on the river. I had a cousin there who married a woman from a Shi'a family and they were living there in Ghahaid, so I said fine.

ThSom: But your cousin, he was Shi'a also?
Abdel: No, no he was Sunni. But before the war it was usual for the Sunni or the Shi'a to have mixed family. So, I dropped the women, then I thought that I had time to make a visit to my cousin. He was living in the house of his wife’s family. I knew that some members of his wife’s family were from Jaysh el Madhi, but I thought that it was not a problem. I knew my cousin and his wife and we had good relations.

ThSom: But the rest of the Shi'a family, the ones from Jaysh el Madhi, you knew them also?
Abdel: No. Not really. I mean, I saw some of them during the wedding and few more times after. But I had more of a relationship with my cousin. On the way to my cousin's house, some guys had made a checkpoint. They asked where I was going and I told them that I was visiting my relatives and gave them the name of the family, “Beit Kardwa”. I told them that I came to pay a visit then I will leave. They let me go. Then, I went to my cousin’s house and introduced myself. But he was not there, neither was his wife. I saw the mother of my cousin’s wife. I said “Salam aleikum”, and asked the lady to say hello to my cousin, then I left. When I was on my way back to the checkpoint, two cars began to follow me. One passed before me and the second stayed behind. When I reached the checkpoint, the car in the front stopped, just before the checkpoint. The driver from the first car came out and came to me. He had two pistols with him. He knocked on my windows and began to insult me, telling me that I didn't have the right to come here. I opened the windows and told him that I was just visiting my cousin. That he didn't have to insult me. Then the guy opened the door of my car and pulled me out. At this time, all the militants came out to my car, like maybe 25 people. They began to kick me. They took the keys of my car, they kicked me and punched me. I lost two teeth. Then, they put me in the back of one car and drove me out of the area, not so far but to some farm on the bank of the river. I was outside in the courtyard of the farm. And they tied my hands behind my back and covered my eyes. Then they asked me if I was Sunni or Shi'a. As I refused to answer, they kicked me in the head with their foot.

387 On the definition of a frame of crisis see earlier chapter 3.3.1 Sectarian Relations
Then they began to say that they were Sunni militia from al Anbar, from the Dulaymi tribe. I didn't believe them. I didn't answer. They began also to ask me if I was member of some resistance groups or some militia. If I knew how to make a road bomb, or if I was a sniper. They said “why don't you want to tell us if you are Sunni or Shi'a, what is your problem?” I told them that I was scared of them and that I didn't know what they were. So, that if I answered that I was Sunni and they were Shi'a they would have killed me. And it would be the same things if I answered that I was Shi'a and they were Sunni. Then, they tied me on a tree and one of the guys there told the others “I'll make him speak.” Then, he whispered in my ear “I just want to help you”, “Answer my questions and I will save you”. “Just tell me where you come from, why you were in our area, what is your job...”. “Don't worry” he told me, “I was a colonel from the Mukhabarat, min Al Amn al khas, [one of the ex-secret services of Saddam regime] and I still believe in Saddam”.

ThSom: But these people, they were not militia; they were belonging to the army?

Abdel: No, no I think that they were militia, from Jaysh el Madhi. Just civilians not soldiers. But really at this time I didn't know. Then the one who said he was a colonel, he asked me “why are you afraid?” I told him of course I am afraid. All these people with weapons, they are beating me. And maybe you will kill me. He said no. “We will not kill you if you are not guilty.” “But if you are, you will say the shahada and we will blow up your head.” I asked “Guilty of what? I don't have relationship with anybody; I am not guilty of anything. And I have already lost two of my brothers and their children. So, I think that I suffered enough already”. They began to beat me again for hours, maybe two. I don't know how long, but the night had fallen when they stopped. The colonel then left, but they didn't untie me and some people were guarding me. I asked for water. One of the guys told me “water? We will not give you water but poison, because you are a dog. Otherwise you should answer our questions, if not we will kill you. And it will take time.” I said him, what do you want me to say, what do you want me to confess? The guy again told me “tell us how you were using this roadside bomb, tell what is your organisation...” and so on. I told them that I was just a taxi driver, that's it. I didn't belong to any organisation. He asked where I was living. I told him Husseinia. He asked me if I knew some people from Jaysh el Madhi there. I knew some neighbours of mine, they were Jaysh el Madhi. So, I gave their names. Then they turned me on the opposite side, with my chest on the tree. Then they began to beat me with electric sticks. I was in shock and shivering. I screamed so much. During this time the cell phone of one of the guys was ringing. The tone was the same kind of song that the Shi'a used during arba' in (Shi'a religious commemoration of the martyr of Husayn) when they beat themselves on the chest or with chains. So now I realised fully that they were Shi'a and pretty sure that they were from Jaysh el Madhi. They asked me again if I was Shi'a or Sunni. They couldn't know it from my area because Husseinia was still a mixed place and I knew some people from Jaysh el Madhi.

ThSom: But you told them that you had relatives there, right? That you have a cousin and did you tell them about the family of the wife of your cousin there?

Abdel: Yes, but also I didn't know so much the people from her family who were from Jaysh el Madhi. And they were from another area. Also, I was afraid that if I told them exactly who I was and everything, they will find out that I am a Sunni. But anyway, they went on beating me again with their fists and their boots. At one point, I don't know how it happened but I found myself on the
They were beating me on the ground, jumping on my chest and kicking me on the neck and on the head. I couldn't breathe any more. Then they decided to take me to the river. They grabbed my feet and dragged me up to the bank of the river, some meters away from the farm. They pushed me with their foot until the edge of the bank, I could hear the sound of the water. They said “Let's kill him here.” One of them put his leg on my back and took his pistol and armed it. He told me “OK this the last time, are you speaking or not?” “Then he shot in the water just beside me. He told me “I think you are just a Sunni, a dirty Sunni. You deserve to die.” But another guy told the one with the pistol “Don't be in such a hurry, maybe he is not Sunni and we will regret killing him.” At this time the same phone rang, and the speakers were on, so I could hear. The guys answered and mentioned “mollai”, which is a term that some Shi'ite are using to mean sheik or Sayyed. The Sayyed or the sheikh asked them “how many sheep with you?”. The guy with the phone answered “only one.” So, the Sayyed replied “so what are you waiting for? Just finish it”. But the guy said “No, mollai, there is a funeral of some friends in Al Sadr City and we would like to slaughter this sheep for the funeral.” They went into some kind of argument about the way to go to al Sadr, because it was full of soldiers and checkpoints, but finally the mollai said “OK, find a chance to go there and finish it.” So, they didn't kill me, instead they beat me again and even more than before. They beat me with everything. I somehow passed out, then I heard some shooting. I didn't know if they were shooting me or something else. Then I heard them saying “Americans!” Then I heard the noise of some machine guns. And I could sense the bullets very close to me. Everything was very confused; the guys from the militia were running and shooting also. After a few minutes, everything calmed down. One of the guys kicked me in the leg like to see if I was alive or not. I didn't move. One of the guys was telling: “See? He's dead. Don't you believe that I could shoot him from that far?”. There was a lot of blood around me, and I didn't move; I couldn't move anyway. And they really thought that I was killed. 

**ThSom:** But did you tell your cousin what happened to you when you were tying to visit him?

**Abdel:** Yes, after I went back home. I told him what happened. And his wife's relatives find out who did that to me. They gave me the name of the gang who did that to me.

**ThSom:** So the member of your wife's family who was belonging to Jaysh el Madhi gave you the name of other members of Jaysh el Mehdi?

**Abdel:** Yes, they were not from the same group. And we are relatives and they felt sympathy for me. So, they gave me the names of the guys. I have their names, 6 names in all. But I don't think that I can do anything to them now. But I will wait and have my revenge in the future.

**ThSom:** What happened to you is a terrible story. But do you have an explanation about why Iraqis, Sunni or Shi'a are doing this to each other? Why?

**Abdel:** It is not all of the Shi'a or all the Sunni. The people who are doing this are uneducated people and they are manipulated by foreigners, by people coming from outside Iraq. Also, you can see here that many people from Iraq, whatever they were Shi'a, Sunni or Christians they were attacked like me. You see, it is not all the people. Just some gangsters who are doing that.

**ThSom:** Did your Shi'a neighbours from Husseinia hear about your story? What they were saying about that?

**Abdel:** After I recovered from the injuries in the hospital, I moved to Kharjdaya which is a Sunni area where my family had moved a few weeks before.
I was kidnapped. I never went back to Husseinia. And I never told them. But I think that if our neighbours would have seen me and heard about what happened to me, they would have felt pity for me. Because some were good friends and we liked each other.

ThSom: How is life here in Saida Zeinab? It is a mixed place, how are the relations between Sunni and Shi'as from Iraq?

Abdel: You know, all the people here are in the same position. We are all refugees. But we don't share so much. Everybody is busy with his own things. I have some friends, but just a few. We see each other from time to time. But I don't share [relations] with the others.

ThSom: But do you have relationships with Shi'a people in Saida Zeinab?

Abdel: No. First there is also a lot of Sunni here in Saida Zeinab. Then I don't know, I don't have relationships with Shi'a people. Ok, maybe we say hello, “Salam aleikum”, but that's it.

ThSom: Before the war, did you have Shi'a friends in Iraq?

Abdel: Yes of course. I had Shi'a friends. We were in the army. The people in the army were coming from everywhere in the country, from the north to the south of the country. So of course, we had friends coming from every sect or area of Iraq. It was 'routine'. We were sharing the same life.

Here, one can see that Abdel describes the same kind of banalisation and frame of cooperation than our first informant. He had friends coming from every sect, it was ‘routine’. His cousin, a Sunni, was married to a Shi'i, which was ‘usual’ prior to 2003. Then, the kidnapping, the torture that he describes and the plan to slaughter him at a funeral is part of what I call the ritualisation of violence, on which I will concentrate in the next chapter. But what is striking here is the intricacy of social relations in Baghdad at the moment of the explosion of the sectarian violence and the civil war. Our informant, a Sunni, after his kidnapping and torture by some members of a Shi'a militia, the Madhi Army, is able to enter in direct communication with other members of the same militia through his cousin and get the names of his alleged victimisers. This shows that even at that time, family or extensive family relations and bonds when they were still effective, were able to supersede sectarian ones. This is also an illustration of the localised and autonomous tendencies of the militia phenomena, where one group can denounce or betray a rival group of the same militia and also the ambiguous nature of relationships between the Iraqi society at large and the phenomena of organised violence (militia, insurgent groups or the new state security apparatus)\(^{388}\).

Finally, there is also an impressive discrepancy between his discourse and his attitude at the moment of the interview. So, he acknowledges the fact that victims of the conflict were from all sects and the perpetrators too. The perpetrators, the members of militia or armed groups do not represent all the “Shi'i or all the Sunni”, they are “uneducated”, “gangsters manipulated by for-

\(^{388}\) On these two dimensions, see the chapter 3.2 on the System of Violence and chapter 3.1 on Collective Violence, Unorganised and Organised Violence.
eigners”. Yet, despite his discourse, despite his old Shi’i friends and neighbours, despite the Shi'a member of his family, he does not anymore maintain any meaningful relations with Shi'a in Saida Zeinab. Interestingly enough, he is not able to rationalize this reality. Here, the answer “I don't know”, is interesting because it is a common feature that come again and again in many of our interviews and in narratives of our informants.

3.4.2 Essentialisation

I will produce now a second set of interviews that show direct elements of essentialisation and/or ethnicisation of sectarian communities. The interview of Carlos took place on May 2009 in the building of a charity-based organisation, Wahat al Rajaa, founded by the Greek Catholic Patriarch. At that time the organisation was helping around 2,500 Iraqi families; mostly providing medical help and supplies as well as basic furniture and goods for the families. Some friends of mine who worked in the association presented me and the aims of my research to some Iraqis who agreed to be interviewed. Carlos, a physiotherapist, is a Mandeans from al Baya, a neighbourhood of Baghdad.

**ThSom**: But finally you decided to leave for Syria, why?

**Carlos**: One night, I will remember all my life. It was the 13th of September 2006. We heard big noises outside the house. I got out of my bed and looked out of the window. There were 4 or 5 armed men with shotguns and Kalashnikovs. They broke the door and entered the house. They were shouting something like “You make Iraq dirty! This is a Muslim country. You must leave!” From their accent, I knew that they were from the south of Iraq. I am quite sure that they were Shi'a from the south. They beat us. All of our family were in the house, my wife, my parents, my sister and her kids, one son and one daughter. We were terrorised. Then they decided to take my sister’s daughter who was ten years old. My sister jumped to try to prevent them. We all tried to ask for mercy and pleaded with them to not take her. My sister kissed their feet. They threw acid on her. But finally, they didn't take her daughter. They gave us one week to leave or they would come back and kill us all. And the gang told us not to say anything to anybody.

**ThSom**: Did you try to call the police when they left?

**Carlos**: The police? In Iraq? All Iraqis know that the police don't do nothing at best. Or at worst most of them are the same kind of thugs like the militias. Lots of the police are working with the militias.

**ThSom**: So, what did you do afterwards?

**Carlos**: We decided to leave the morning just after. But first I took my sister to the hospital with my sister's daughter. She was in shock. Since then she has nearly stopped talking. And when she tries to talk she has real difficulties in doing it. She stutters now.

**ThSom**: And what about your neighbourhood, did you speak with them about what happened?
Carlos: Yes of course. The neighbours heard the noises and the cries. So, they asked what happened. They were very sorry and said that we were very peaceful and didn't deserve that. But what could they do? Everybody was afraid.

ThSom: Why did you choose Kashkoul, why not Geramana or Qodseia?
Carlos: No, because Kashkoul is cheaper.
ThSom: But is it cheaper than Saida Zeinab for example?
Carlos: But, Saida Zeinab, we cannot live there.
ThSom: Why?
Carlos: Because It is a Shi'a area. The people in Saida Zeinab, they are like the ones coming from the south of Iraq. Their minds are like stones. They are not like the Baghdadis; they are not educated, they are without manners. You know most of them they beat themselves during their religious festivities.

ThSom: I heard people using some names to call these people from the south, from Amara or other places. They were using a name like Shurug for example, do you know what does it mean?
Carlos: [Laughing...] Of course, I know. Yes, they are Shurug. Basically, it means coming from the east. But also, it means uneducated or retarded, something like that. So, the people in Saida Zeinab are Shurug, that's why we cannot go there.

Carlos: [Laughing...] Of course, I know. Yes, they are Shurug. Basically, it means coming from the east. But also, it means uneducated or retarded, something like that. So, the people in Saida Zeinab are Shurug, that's why we cannot go there.

ThSom: What about Geramana what do you think of this place?
Carlos: I like it. It is different in Geramana. Most of the people there are good people with education. And lot of Christians and also Mandeans. So, it is good place but little bit expensive for us.

ThSom: But do you think that all the Shi'i are Shurug?
Carlos: No. I don't think so. But lot of Shi'i are Shurug. A lot of them. But there are good Shi'a people. I had many friends in Baghdad who were Shi'i, they were doctors, professors. Very good.

It seems that this interview recalls former discourses corresponding to religious and class fractures in Iraq until the 1950s or 1960s. This is the old sociocultural opposition between an urban Iraq, educated and represented by a Sunni elite, and the Shi'a masses originating from the rural exodus, who would be poor, “uneducated”, “backward” (these masses were seen as “gullible” in the early 19th century by Ibn al Basri Sanad al Wa'iili, and described as superstitious by Habib Chiha in the early 20th century).\(^{389}\) Obviously, as shown by Batatu and others\(^ {390}\), across Iraq today, this ‘classist’ and essentialist representation of the two majority faiths is a far cry from a reality that has evolved drastically from 1930 and at least until the 1980s. Thus, the diversity of economic positions of the Shi'i, the general level of education and interfaith weddings within the Iraqi population, paints a reality a lot more complex than a simple juxtaposition of class positions and communal affiliations.


\(^{390}\) On this question see Chapter 1.2 of this thesis.
However, political marginalisation of the Shi'a community as a whole, not individuals coming from it \(^{391}\), during the Saddam regime increased notably during the 1990s. And the spread of poverty in the Iraqi population during the 1990s affected the Shi'a community even more. But what is interesting here is again the question of class. For Carlos, the good Shi'i are the doctors, the professors; in short they belong to the upper or middle class, the class he considers belonging to as well. But it would be a mistake to think that this kind of consideration about “low class people” are only mentioned in reference to the Shi'a community. I got the same kind of remarks concerning the backward origins of Saddam and his clan who were ruling Iraq before 2003. Thus, some of my informants were attributing the fate of the previous regime and the violence it was using against its own population, to the backward origins of Saddam and his clan, a poor peasant family from the outskirts of Tikrit. Although they were Sunni like Saddam, they were making a clear distinction between themselves, some of them coming from a long tradition of military or civil servants of the Iraqi State since its foundation, either from Baghdad or Mossoul, and “the savage peasants without education living in mud houses along the Tigris river”.

The last interview was conducted in Damascus in 2008, in the small house of Hassan, a young filmmaker and graduate of Baghdad Fine Arts Academy before 2003. Hassan was born in Sadr City, then his parents, both teachers moved into another neighbourhood later on when he was a child.

**Hassan**: I mean, these people, you can [easily] provoke them emotionally, it is like from their bodies. Tell them one piece of history, like: we were and we will... and let’s go! It is shame on you men!” and they will be driven crazy, completely crazy. So, I was talking about the second point which is the emotional point. After the war those kids, uneducated, frustrated, it was too easy to recruit them. And to give them like clean clothes, big new cars, weapons, lots of money. And brainwash them. It is so easy to do it. And they are believing they are doing the good things. You know you cannot kill...even the criminals... The criminal has to have something to believe in, you know? The thieves have to have something to believe in. You cannot do anything if you don't believe. They are believing completely they are doing good things.

**Hassan**: Like this scene. It happened with a friend of ours, he is a painter in Baghdad. His brother was killed. They are Shia living in Al Thawra. He was killed, it was horrible and Sunni did it. So, at his funeral, you know we have three days, people in the street expressing their sympathy... You know Abu Deraa\(^ {392}\)?

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\(^{391}\) About marginalisation of Shi'a community during the Saddam regime, see for instance, (Davis, 2005; 2010)

\(^{392}\) Abu Deraa was a quasi-legendary figure of the 2005-2007 civil war in Iraq. A member of the Shi’a Madhi Army, then allegedly expelled from it, he was renowned for the ferocity and cruelty against the Sunni armed groups and the Sunni population in general. Many in Iraq were considering him being the Shi’a equivalent of Abu Musab al Zarqawi, the leader of Al Qaeda.
ThSom: Yes, I heard a lot about him.

Hassan: So, Abu Deraa came by himself and stopped with 5 or 6 cars, big cars. People jumping from the cars with weapons, like that... he opened the back of one car and picked up two Sunni, a father and his son. And he gave a gun to my friend. To kill them. My friend didn't of course. It was a big fight. But my friend belongs to a good, big and strong tribe. And everyone from the assembly came also with a gun because they were expecting that, because it was happening often. So, they came with their weapons and it was like this close to have a war with those guys. You know, they don't care, they are always on drugs. They are high, very high always. And they are very tough and very strong, and really without hearts. And we took the [two] guys inside and later on I was with them when we took them back to Adhamya. We went with them to Adhamya.

ThSom: This is a great story. You know, someone told me a story from the opposite side. A Sunni guy was kidnapped to be killed at a funeral in Al Thawra.

Hassan: And the people said yes, they killed him?

ThSom: No, no. The point is that he was kidnapped on the other side of the river. So, in order to bring him back to Al Thawra, they would have had to cross nearly the entire city. So, they stopped on the bank of the Tigris and waited, trying to avoid an American patrol. Finally, they decided to kill him there. Not in Al Thawra. So, they shot him, and they left him there. Fortunately, he was not dead.

Hassan: Yeah... you know, it happens for sure, and some people [at funerals] do it because they are afraid of Abu Deraa. And if they don't do it with their hands and say ‘no, no’, then, Abu Deraa you know what he does? He just takes his gun, kills and goes. Leaving the two dead bodies. But my friend was strong enough to say ... he was saying ‘Fuck you’, literally! It was a problem later on. But the good part, when we went inside... I mean they took me to drive because I look like a Sunni, I am not too dark and I have those glasses, I can talk with a very good Sunni accent, like a Baghdadi accent completely. So, we went to Adhamya and when I saw his wife and the other kids... it was incredibly emotional. What he did was, he didn't let us go, and started calling people like that ... so, all his relatives came and they were thanking us. It was so...! I can't forget that! You know? You just try to do something against this. Maybe you cannot change the whole situation, but you changed something. Whatever will happen with this family I am pretty sure that they will not hold a gun against Shi'a. Because it was done to them. Afterwards, they took us outside Adhamya, with protection of course. We kept in touch for a while, but later on everybody followed his own path.

ThSom: There is something very new for me here. It is the first time I am hearing about the colour and the accent of the Sunni and the Shi'a like this. I mean, is it common to recognise a Shi'i or a Sunni by the colour of his skin?

Hassan: I don't believe in that either! I mean, I do not think that we are different. I don't know. Before the occupation, I don't think that someone would have spoken like that.

ThSom: What about going to Adhamya before 2003, was it possible for you?

Hassan: Yes, of course. Going to Adhamya was not a problem. No neighbourhood would have been a problem. But this is true that there were some at the same time. Although, there is no certainty about his identity and even about his existence, his name continues to inspire fear and loathing.
places where we could not go, like the Hunting Club for example. We did not have the money and it was for the rich and the Saddam regime.

His story is particularly illuminating for different reasons. Thus, it combines both a description of the sectarian violence that takes place in Baghdad, the power of the militia who rule there, but also the very narrow room for manoeuvre available to the Iraqi people to oppose the violence. Hence, his friends could refuse and oppose the militia violence only because they were belonging to a powerful tribe. In brief, they could threaten the militia and use powerful violence against it. It is very interesting, because it also mentions the description of a quasi-ritual of the slaughtering of kidnapped Sunni people at Shi'a funerals. But what should retain our attention is the essentialised and quasi-ethnic description of Sunni and Shi'i and which is connected with the localisation of two districts, Adhamya and Sadr City, which here became the symbols of the sectarian division and opposition.

Adhamya is a very old Sunni district of Baghdad, where the founder of the Hanafi Sunni juridic school, Imam Abu Hanifa, rests within the mosque that bears his name. Mainly composed of officers of the Iraqi ex-military, of the mid-level Ba'athist regime, Adhamya was always a bastion of the Ba'ath Party. For its part, Sadr City was the stronghold of the Shi'a movement Al Sadr II, after 2003. This area is the location of the poor Shi'a masses originating from the rural exodus back in the forties, especially southern Iraq and the province of Amarra. Yet, from the beginning, the masses who live there were pejoratively referred to by qualifying names such as al Shurug, al Shargawwiyyas (‘peasants’, ‘those of the east’) and finally, al Ghawgha (‘scum’) by Saddam Hussein’s regime during the 1991 Intifada. However, even if Sadr City is a high density and very poor neighbourhood-, it remains questionable whether its inhabitants are still representative of a freshly arrived population from the countryside. Moreover, one is probably right in thinking that in sixty years, this space, like other areas, had to be a place for the mixing of populations from different origins.

Despite this, the inhabitants of this area remain stigmatised by a segment of the Iraqi population, and with the rise of sectarianism it is the whole Shi'a Iraqi population, which is identified with Sadr City inhabitants. Most strikingly, in this extreme example, it seems that the essentialisation or even ethnicisation of the Sunni and Shi'a have been partly internalised by Hassan and his relatives in Sadr City. Thus, in this story, two characters emerge with quasi-opposite ‘ethnic’ traits, the poor Shi'a backward, dark-skinned and speaking slang, and the Sunni, educated and light-skinned, speaking the pure language of the capital.

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393 See for instance the different accounts provided by Batatu (2004).
These four interviews, and I could have produced many others very similar, are showing the constant tension between multicultural cooperation and mixing, or Iraqi nationalism, and elements of sectarianism and essentialisation, even ethnicisation for the last interview. Another gripping point in these interviews is that discourses of sectarianism or essentialisation are much less articulated or developed than in the ones produced by intellectuals or artists, or political elites.\textsuperscript{394} Of course, one may find implicit references or hints of essentialisation and sectarianism as it has been developed by sectarian intellectuals. Take for example Omar's discourse opposing the “good educated Sunni” and the “young Shi'a thugs”, yet they are immediately rejected by the reality of his interactions with his Shi'a neighbours and friends. Therefore, in his interview and in nearly all the interviews I conducted, the actors of the sectarian violence, the militia, the armed groups are not considered representatives of the communities. As Omar says: “There are bad and good people everywhere”. Hence, when asked about the responsibility of the Shi'a community, Aisha, a Sunni mother whose son was kidnapped by a Shi'a militia had this answer:

“No, no. They are like us. Maybe the people inside militias, yes they are responsible. But not the normal people whatever they are, Sunnis, Shi'i...whatever.”\textsuperscript{395}

Another, a Shi'i shop owner from Hilla would say:

“Al Qaeda, the Islamic Army, the Madhi army, the Badr Militia, are brain-dead criminals who received money and guns. The Iraqi people have been taken hostage by foreign powers, by mafias and backward leaders, what can we do?”\textsuperscript{396}

However, elements of sectarianisation and essentialisation are there. As recalled by Bozarslan on the Iraqi conflict, this should not surprise us:

“It is not surprising to observe that during periods of massive and multiform violences, the communal categories are internalized by the actors themselves until such a point that they are imposed as primary affiliations, an-historical and eternals. They are essentialized, even ethnicized.” (Bozarslan, 2007: 26. Translation is mine)

\textsuperscript{394} See earlier Chapter 2.5.
\textsuperscript{395} Interview conducted in Qodseia, Damascus Suburb in February 2008.
\textsuperscript{396} Interview conducted in Sayda Zeinab, Damascus, April 2008.
I could also see this tension between plurality and separation in the strategies of establishment of Iraqi refugees in Syria for example. There I found that economic factors or family networks were the prime drivers of choice for many people to relocate in specific areas in Syria. But others could afford to choose among different strategies of establishment, for some it was a purely class-related choice, people wanting to be in middle class or upper class areas. Others chose areas specifically because of their multisectarian characters. Yet some did choose the opposite, relocating in areas corresponding to their sect. Therefore, around Damascus, among the people I encountered, some Sunni chose Qodseia because it was a Sunni place, while some Shi'i choose Saida Zeinab because it was Shi'a, while many Christians went to Sadnaya because it was Christian. It was exactly the case for Omar, because for him a place without hate or revenge could only be a Sunni place. How can one then explain how people like Omar and so many others could remember a time of mixing and cooperation, even refusing to generalise against the Shi'a or the Sunni, considering them the same, and yet they could not consider living with people from a different sect anymore?

It is the same with Hassan's interview and the ethnicisation or essentialisation of Sunni and Shi'a. I knew him for a year before conducting this interview. He was a young filmmaker coming from a leftist and secular background, we were first hanging out in the same networks of friends, activists and artists coming from very different spheres, countries and religions in Damascus. We worked on different projects about Iraq together and had long discussions about his country. We finally decided to make a different series of interviews for my research, about his youth under the Saddam regime, about the history of the country, the tribes and the sects of Iraq, about the Communist Party, among a lot of different subjects. The fragment of the interview that I produced here was part of the last few we did. During this interview, the descriptions of different skin colour and languages of Shi'a and Sunni arrived unannounced and were very surprising to me, but considering his reaction, also to him. It seems that my surprise and my questions made him realise what he just said. All the same, he could not really answer well enough to explain the complete contradiction between his way of life, his beliefs and the reality of life in Baghdad in the post-2003 period. “I don't know”, “I don't understand” seem to be the words that best express his difficulty in explaining these conflicting realities and rationality of the civil war. For many of my informants there is a quasi-inexplicable gap between the descriptions of different lifeworld and sectarian relations before and after 2003. And this goes back inevitably to the question of the relations between the essentialisation of discourses and attitudes and the violence as a process of essentialisation that Iraqi society had to suffer during these years.

As we saw in the earlier chapter, the System of Violence is fragmenting social spaces and physically separating communities. Yet, there is another element that contributed to the process of crystallisation of Haddad’s Myth-
Symbol Complex as an operative cognitive frame by an important part of the Iraqi population. In other words, how the ‘social fiction’ of historically competing sectarian and ethnic identifications, values and mythologies, has been transformed into a ‘social reality’, ascribed to individuals and communities alike. In the next chapter I will try to show how a specific kind of violence, which I call ritualised violence, would result in the manufacturing of a new cognitive frame of crisis, a social trauma separating and mentally walling off the different communities of Iraq.
3.5 Practices of Cruelties, Ritualisation of Violence and Essentialisation

If earlier on I tried to sketch the structures of violence and its physical and spatial dimension as it was deployed in Iraq, I would like to reflect now on its anthropological and metaphysical qualities. And in particular, the qualities of one form of the System of Violence I describe, the ritualised violence. Our concern here, during the years 2006-2007, is that Iraq saw not only an upsurge of general violence, but more specifically the rise of ritualised practices of violence and cruelty. The practices of beheading, throat-cutting, and body desecration with acid or fire before or after the death, the use of rape and all forms of torture on civilians, men, women and children alike, have been used by all sides during these years. These practices of intense cruelty have been massive, repetitive and highly publicised and can be considered as a form of ritualised violence. And as in other conflicts, there is here an unreasonable or seemingly senseless part of violence, a cruel and brutish part that need to be interrogated. That is what I intend to do, in the light of previous important works of different scholars focusing on violence and ritualised violence in modern genocide and ethnic cleansing. Hence, from Françoise Héritier’s seminal reflections about violence (2005), I will focus on her explanations about the question of ritualised violence as an instrument of the moulding of identities and communal representations. I will also integrate Véronique Nahoun Grappe’s essential work in developing the political use and programme of cruelty outlined in in “L’usage politique de la cruauté” (2005). Finally, I will follow Catherine Coquio’s writings about “violence sacrificielles and violence génocidaires”, in particular her notion of de-regulation rituals elaborated from her reading, à “rebrousse poils”, of René Girard’s theory (Coquio, 2005).

3.5.1 Practices of cruelties

As I was writing at the beginning of this thesis, the general system of violence that I described produced unseen levels of casualties in Iraq between 2003 and 2008, between 120,000 deaths from more conservative estimates (Iraq Body
Count, 2012) to 1 million (ORB, 2008)\textsuperscript{397}, and around 4 million of forcibly displaced people (UNHCR, 2007). From an economical perspective, the losses have been tremendous, as shown by Hagan et al. who estimated the economical collateral losses of victims of humanitarian crimes and violations to be around 100 billion dollars for Baghdad and around 300 billion dollars for the whole country during the period 2003-2008 (Hagan et al., 2012). Here again, I want to insist on a point. When I am speaking of sectarian violence, one should keep in mind that it is embedded in a System of Violence. Hence, all victims were not victims of sectarian violence. In fact, thinking of the post-2003 period only as a period of ethnic and sectarian civil war is a mistake and would create a distorted vision of the chain of destruction that was unleashed with the US invasion of Iraq. It has been much more complex than that. Nevertheless, there are documents, estimations and testimonies that point out to massive and specific sectarian and ethnic acts of violence that cannot be disregarded, nor the reality of the internalisation of communal categories for an important part of the population in Iraq. But, as I showed earlier, discourses of sectarianisation or Essentialisation by many of my informants are most of the time incomplete or rudimentary. In addition, victims of violence do not make their victimisers representative of communities, but most of the time the exceptions. The Essentialisation or ethnicisation of other communities remain rare, and when it happens, as in a case of a few of my informants, this is not or barely rationalised. Yet, as one may understand, for many of the people that left Iraq, but also for many of the ones who stayed or returned, they do not believe in the possibility of turning back to the plurality and mixing of the Iraqi life before. For many of these people, but not for all, there is even not the possibility of maintaining basic social relations with members of others communities in Iraq or outside Iraq. It is as if the physical walls separating communities and built-in Baghdad neighbourhoods or other areas of Iraq, during these days of extreme violence are mirrored with mental or cognitive walls and with the equivalent symbolic effects. Thus, a question remains. How to account for these cognitive walls and Essentialisation discourses, when the actors are not able to rationalise it?

Ultimately, it is the darkest, the most horrendous part of the story of these years that can shed some light on this process of sectarianisation and Essentialisation, and which is otherwise particularly difficult to understand and rationalise. Hicks et al. published a very interesting study concerning violent civilian deaths in Iraq (2011). Using the conservative figures provided by the Iraq Body Count database, they investigated perpetrators and methods of civilian killings in Iraq during the 2003-2008 period. They categorise three different kinds of perpetrators, Coalition Forces, Anti-Coalition forces—identified as such by their target—and Unknown perpetrators. Then, by definition, the last group, the Unknown perpetrators, embodies criminal, political and sectarian actors, that may have been members or not of insurgent groups, militia, gangs, and the security apparatus of the new Iraqi State. If the majority of the victims were killed by the Coalition Forces during the years 2003-2004, then afterwards Unknown perpetrators are responsible for an overwhelming majority of all the civilian deaths. In fact, the authors state that:

“Execution by Unknown perpetrators was the most prevalent form of violent death affecting Iraqi civilians in 2003–2008.” (ibid:11)

In Baghdad, Hicks et al estimate that over 43% of all the civilians killed during 2003-2008 had been executed by Unknown perpetrators, while 30% of these victims were bearing marks of torture and mutilation. In addition, a majority of these executions were the final stage of a succession of violence that began with the kidnappings of people from their houses or cars, on their way to work or to buy food or on their way to visit relative (as was the case for one of our informants). Sometimes it involved robbery or the destruction of their properties; sometimes it involved the rape of their relatives.

First of all, an important part of this violence had a distinctive sectarian component. At checkpoints or in neighbourhoods, militia or Death Squads were looking for “Shi’a or Sunni”. In other cases, people were targeted because they were not Muslim, but Christian or Mandean, as in the case of my informants Wassem or Carlos. Of course, the violence may have been of dual purpose, with a political or a criminal aim as well, like in the case of Wassem's family where they may have been targeted because of their shop and their wealth. Nevertheless, it is the sectarian component that is salient and which remains as an explicative frame for the victims, and as one can guess, for the executors.

Secondly, and more importantly, I consider that these particular forms of violence, the mass executions and tortures, the desecration of bodies, as well
as some suicide and car bombings\textsuperscript{398} events constitute a form of ritualised violence. And this ritualised violence has been an important factor for the crystallisation of a cognitive frame of crisis separating and entrenching Iraqi communities one against the other.

This cognitive frame of crisis is grounded in the immediate experience of the post-2003 atrocities and the internalisation of the Myth-Symbol Complexes defined by Haddad. Consequently, I do not think that it is by chance that the narrative of Hassan that I provided in the previous chapter, which ethnicises or essentialises both Sunni and Shi‘i, falls within the description of a ritual of violence and the slaughtering of hostages during funerals. In addition, many of our interviews are linked one way or another by the mention or description of such ritualised violence. In fact, the kidnappings, executions, torture and beheadings, are either directly present in the interviews of my informants or remain as a persistent contextual shadow. But considering that it may concern only my informants or Iraqi refugees—meaning the people who may have been the most exposed to the violence— is a mistake. Of course, all people were not affected the same way by the system of violence. And I could see during all my fieldwork a difference between the people that were directly affected by the sectarian violence and its ritualised components, the ones that have been affected by political or criminal violence and the ones that could escape it completely. However, the trauma of the sectarian violence does not remain limited to the actual victims; it moves like a wave affecting the society at large, maybe more diffuse the further from the violence, but effective nonetheless.

One has to consider that violence during the Iraq civil war has been highly publicised and without a doubt it was the first conflict of this kind to have been accessible online.\textsuperscript{399} There has been incredible media coverage of the sectarian violence, outside and inside Iraq, not only by the regular foreign and Iraqi media but also by the nascent social networks and internet forums in Iraq.\textsuperscript{400} Hence, testimonies of victims, pictures and videos of crimes taken by bystanders, victims or perpetrators\textsuperscript{401} and articles from international and Iraqi press about massacres, tortures and mass executions during 2005-2007 are countless and ubiquitous on the internet, on Iraqi forums, in newspapers, in

\textsuperscript{398} Hicks et al. found that the third deadliest method of killings was by suicide and car bombings, responsible for around 14% of the deaths. (2011:5).

\textsuperscript{399} Only to be exceeded by the Syrian conflict in terms of use of new technology and media platforms.

\textsuperscript{400} See for instance the account gave by the journalist Robert Fisk, in the Independent: “The dangerous face of ordinary life has been captured by Iraqis on their mobile phones—reaching the places Western photographers can no longer go. Robert Fisk reports”. (Fisk, 2008).

\textsuperscript{401} As much as I know, the Iraq conflict may have been the first where cell phones, digital camera were used to record and publish en masse, online attacks, bombings and executions, as a means of propaganda by sectarian and political actors.

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documentaries and reports from various NGO and international agencies.\textsuperscript{402} So much so, that one may feel overwhelmed by it and have difficulties in making sense of it. Therefore, I will try to limit to a few examples that I find meaningful for our purpose, in addition to the testimonies of the informants that I already produced. As I demonstrated in the chapter 3.3, militia and armed groups were enforcing the sectarian homogenisation of neighbourhoods in Baghdad and elsewhere using violence. They were killing people, forcing others out of their houses, kidnapping some for ransom, and so on. Obviously, it worked; people could not defend themselves against such violence. But in many cases, victims were beheaded, tortured or attacked with acid, and dead bodies were mutilated or burned. Thus, during the 2005-2007 sectarian war, the morgue of Baghdad was internationally infamous for the lines of dozens of victims’ families queuing in order to try to identify missing relatives. They were spending hours, looking for dead bodies that had been horribly desecrated. Among many other articles published at that period, Journalist Robert Fisk wrote a chilling article about the Baghdad morgue in August 2005. Here it says:

“The Baghdad morgue is a fearful place of heat and stench and mourning, the cries of relatives echoing down the narrow, foetid laneway behind the pale-yellow brick medical centre where the authorities keep their computerised records. So many corpses are being brought to the mortuary that human remains are stacked on top of each other.... July was the bloodiest month in Baghdad's modern history - in all, 1,100 bodies were brought to the city's mortuary; executed for the most part, eviscerated, stabbed, bludgeoned, tortured to death. The figure is secret. We are not supposed to know that the Iraqi capital's death toll last month was only 700 short of the total American fatalities in Iraq since April of 2003. Of the dead, 963 were men - many with their hands bound, their eyes taped and bullets in their heads - and 137 women.”(Fisk, 2005)

This will have been one of the first of an endless series of articles and reports about the Baghdad morgue, the desolate receptacle of the bloody furor that was roaming the city and surrounding places.\textsuperscript{403} The Tigris river also became the subject of many articles as it became a graveyard for many victims of the violence:

“BAGHDAD, 8 May 2007 (IRIN) - The River Tigris has long been a symbol of prosperity in Iraq but since the US-led invasion in 2003, this amazing watercourse has turned into a graveyard of bodies....Since January 2006 at least 800 bodies have been dragged from those iron nets, and this figure does not include those collected from the central section of the river. ‘Most of the bodies are

\textsuperscript{402} See for instance Human Rights Watch, “A Face and a Name, Civilian Victims of Insurgent Groups in Iraq”, October 2005 Volume 17, No. 9(E)

\textsuperscript{403} See for instance, the series of articles made by journalists Knickmeyer and Sebti for the Washington Post in February-March 2006.
unidentified and buried without family claims,’ said Col Abdel-Waheed Azzam, a senior officer in the investigation department of the Ministry of Interior. According to Azzam, 90 percent of the bodies found in the river show signs of serious torture. ‘Because of the state of the bodies, it is not useful to try to have an autopsy done, and if the bodies are not claimed within 24 hours they are automatically buried,’ he said.”

“BAGHDAD, Oct. 7, 2006. Iraq's Tigris River Yields Hundreds of Corpses. ‘Every day, we find bodies in the river, ... most of the corpses are young people who have been shot and then hacked to pieces’, according to the head of the Swaira police force, who asked that his name not be printed. The Tigris River is not the only place where bodies are found. Others include a sewage treatment plant in the southern Baghdad suburb of al Rustomia, and the Al Maleh canal that irrigates farming country to the west of Baghdad. It's a predominantly Sunni area where many Shiite pilgrims have been killed over the past two years in towns like Latifiya, Yousofia and Mahmodia.” (Alwan & Jihad, 2006)

The majority of the victims were abducted and then slaughtered individually or with a small group of relatives. And sometimes the abduction and the subsequent killings were massive and involved dozens if not hundreds of people at the same time, in a kind of tit-for-tat violence on civilians between Shi’ia and Sunni militia and death squads, as for example in June 2006:

“...mass abduction at Baghdad factory. Gunmen have abducted at least 80 Iraqi factory workers from a fleet of buses just north of Baghdad, officials say. The abduction took place at a state-owned factory complex at Taji where dozens of insurgents commandeered buses taking employees home after work. In Wednesday's mass abduction, the workers were taken from two factories - the Nasr and Hattin facilities - at the Taji industrial complex, where about 4,000 people worked. The area is predominantly Sunni Arab, but most of the workers at the two factories were thought to be Shiias, the Associated Press news agency reported.” (BBC, 2006)

I could give many more examples; there are plenty. I could also recall the stories of our informants; Ahmed, who was tortured before escaping a ritualised slaughter at a funeral, then an execution attempt. Carlos and his family were beaten, while his sister received an acid attack. I could continue at length, but suffice it to say that cruelties were significant during the period of the sectarian war and the explosion of violence between 2005-2007. In fact, Hicks et al state that:

“Our findings on the geographic distribution and nature of violent death across Iraq's governorates show that deaths from executions, and executions with torture, progressively and disproportionately increased as deaths from other forms of violence increased.” (2011:11)

If the cleansing of areas, with the killings of armed enemies and sometimes civilians as “collateral damage”, by militia or armed groups can be rationalised
as tactical moves and territorial gains, it is difficult to make sense of the mass tortures and mutilations, the slaughtering and beheading. Why torture a man for hours and play with his fear and suffering when the decision to kill him was made long ago? Why try to rape the daughters of a family or throw acid on their faces when members of the militia already succeeded in their objective to push these people out of their home? What was the purpose of such horrendous acts? How to understand and rationalise the use of cruelty and the desecration of bodies by militia and death squads? Of course, there is a great temptation to refer these questions to the common reality and the horrors of war. War is a dirty thing and maybe civil war is even dirtier because it involves civilians and not professional, disciplined soldiers and chains of commands. Unfortunately, in Iraq these kinds of violence against men at arms or civilians has been practised by soldiers or members of the security apparatus of the new State, within a military or civilian chain of commands. Another way to see it may be to look at them in a context of a particular ‘backward’ or violent mindset that would explain the deployment of this particular violence and cruelties.

In fact, this kind of violence, the massive practice of cruelties, are not particular to the Balkans or Africa. One may find them everywhere in different periods all over the world. Hence, one will find massive practices of cruelties in Columbia during the period of La Violencia. They were also present in Pol Pot-era Cambodia, but also during the French colonial conquest of Algeria, where, for example, photographs with beheaded indigenous tribesmen were a fashion trend amongst French soldiers. And of course, they had been studied at length by many scholars working on Nazi Germany, Goethe's homeland. The truth is that no ‘civilization’, no particular culture or nation is more prone to, nor immune against, this kind of acts of ritualised violence. They are neither an irrational explosion emerging from the furor of war, nor a product of a backward culture or mentality. Therefore, one should try to understand their meaning and what they can tell us about a conflict. Consequently, I prefer to follow Frederic Bailliette’s reflections about cruelty in the context of violence:

“Cruelty always has a functionality, an intentionality. Even the most barbarian, sadistic, irrational or delusional act is bearing a meaning and exists within a framework of tolerated or encouraged violence by the military executive staffs or the warlords.” (Baillette, 2006:47)

404 At that time, perpetrators invented their own ritual, the Columbian necktie. The corbata colombiana is a method of murder wherein the victim's throat is slashed horizontally, with a knife or other sharp object, and his or her tongue is pulled out through the open wound.
Unfortunately, unlike studies of other conflicts involving similar kinds of violence, we are missing direct accounts or testimonies by the executors themselves like in Ex-Yugoslavia, in Rwanda\textsuperscript{407}, Indonesia\textsuperscript{408} or in Lebanon\textsuperscript{409}. As difficult and dreadful as it is, such work of gathering evidence and testimonies would be essential if one is to try to make a systematic study of the violence in Iraq at that period. However, we have enough material, victims’ testimonies, articles and secondary sources involving executors and members of militia and other armed groups, at least to be able to sketch here the general elements for a comprehension of the ritualised violence as it happened in Iraq.

One element of this ritualised violence is the dehumanisation of the victims. Accordingly, one reads that the unfortunates would be “hacked to pieces”, “bludgeoned”, “mutilated”, so much that most of them would be unrecognisable, unidentifiable by the victim’s family members, so much that they would become just shapeless carrion, losing any kind of human appearance or resemblance. In addition, the fact that a huge number of the dead would be thrown into rivers, ditches or even landfill, says a lot about the intention of the perpetrators. Even beyond that, the fact that in doing so the perpetrators are breaking a cultural and religious taboo, preventing the victim from having a swift burial (in Islam it is required that the dead should be buried in a few hours or days following death), they are making a statement. It is not human beings that are thrown in landfills or ditches but leftovers, garbage, pieces of meats. This dehumanisation of victims has to be understood at the same time as an expediency and a programme. Or maybe an expediency that became a programme.

An expediency, because mass killing is not a usual or easy business. Societies do not harbour a multitude of serial killers at the ready to enjoy baths of blood and guts of men, women and children alike during civil wars. In many of these conflicts where mass killings and cruelties happened, in Ex-Yugoslavia or Lebanon and Iraq as well, the people who enlisted and ended up killing civilians by the dozens were not sociopaths but somehow became them. So, as demonstrated by numerous studies and testimonies, the killers were subjected to heavy psychological pressure that needed to be alleviated a way or another. It is not by chance that many testimonies emphasise the use of alcohol, drugs and other psychotropic substances.\textsuperscript{410} In Iraq it was marijuana, amphetamines and all kinds of tranquilizers, trafficked in increasing quantities

\textsuperscript{408} See for example the two documentaries made by Joshua Oppenheimer \textit{The Art of Killing} (2012) and \textit{The look of Silence} (2014).
\textsuperscript{409} See for instance, Massaker (2005), documentary made around the interviews of some of the perpetrators of the Sabra and Shatilla massacre in Lebanon in 1982, by Lohmann Slim, Monika Bergmann, hermann Theissen, Nina Menke.
since 2003 (Looney, 2005). Thus, many of our informants were describing militiamen on drugs, “always high”. But another way to go on with such ‘work’ is also to dehumanise victims. Then executors are not killing humans but things, animals, “sheep” as in the case of our informant Ahmed. In an article about the bestialisation and dehumanisation of enemies, La Esmeralda explains this necessity for mass killers to dehumanise victims:

“Specifically, dehumanization can go through the act of defacing an enemy with rifle butts and / or ideological hype. For how to kill daily, at close range dozens of men, women, children panicked, elderly anxious man, if not destroying previously corporal points of reference which humanize. Swell the face of the person questioned, put his face to a pulp and his body into rags allows liquidation without further formality or to throw away that which no longer has a human form.” (La Esméralda, 2006:236. Translation is mine.)

But it is also a programme, and Nahoum Grappe, in “l'usage politique de la cruauté”, allows us to understand that beyond alleviating the psychological charge of mass killings for the executioner, cruelty is a programme and formidable political tool. She states that:

“The use of cruelty help brings at least partially propaganda categories, grossly false, in historical reality.” (1996:318. Translation is mine.)

She explains, in the Yugoslav context, how constructed political hate, lying on an ultra-nationalist project (in the Iraqi context, it would be an ultra-sectarian project, but for what is our concern here, it is the same) was false and could not find its object. Contrary to what it claims, the community that it designates as an enemy and a block, is always heterogeneous, always contradictory. The nationalist/racist/sectarian claim cannot hold confronted with the reality of social life. That's exactly what I show with the testimonies of my informants. The intricateness of Iraqi social life, the reality of inter-sectarian and ethnic relationships and bonds. The mixed schools, neighbourhoods, tribes, places of work and families, all of this is the real proof that the sectarian and ethnic claim is a fraud. Haddad’s Myth-Symbol Complexes are first and foremost myths, before the violence moulds them into social realities. Therefore, hate must prove itself constantly and the use of cruelty, as much as it triggers the possibility of revenge, also retroactively proves all the discourses and the propaganda about the threats that constitute the enemy, the other sects. But there is more, Nahoum Grappe shows us that:

“In choosing how to kill, a whole style, a whole non verbal language about his internal utopia is stated by the executor. All the work of the genocide maker is
based on the inscription into the reality of his vision of the other, dirty, repulsive, debased, bestial covered with its excrement; only cruelty and his program can do this work on the body of the other.”411

And here comes to mind the “dirty Shi‘a”, the “dirty Sunni”, the “dirty Christian” that can only become dirty by literally losing its human face. These desecrated corpses, incomprehensible arrangements of flesh and blood that have been manipulated by the executors, are symbolically representing the final transformation of the other community into something that is stranger to the country, to the nation and finally stranger to humanity itself. The animalisation of victims, “the sheep”, “the dogs” and so on, in the words of perpetrators, is an other illustration of this. This is the programme of cruelty developed by some of the militia, the death squads and the armed groups that operated in Iraq at that time. It was a programme and a visiting card as well, a signature left to impact the Iraqi psyche. As noted by Nir Rosen, it was “common knowledge” to know that: “...if a victim had been beheaded then he has been killed by Sunni militia, if he had marks of torture and especially drills [sic.] one (‘Black&Decker’), then it was Shi‘a militia.”

3.5.2 Ritualisation of violence

Finally, I would like to add another angle of view, which may be complementary or even go beyond the reflections I have already built on this topic. Here, I would follow Catherine Coquio’s considerations concerning ritualised forms of violence and genocide violence. Observing the presence and the repetition of ritualised forms in modern genocide violence (for example, “…the utilization of symbolic elements of rituals borrowed from ‘normal’ life and deviated or inverted; especially the funeral rituals and the rituals of animal slaughtering.” (2005:207)) she regrets the lack of articulation between religious and political anthropology when studying such phenomenon. Reflecting on different theories on violence, she rightfully points to the blind spots in Girard’s theory. These are the denial of Politics and “l’impensé genocidaire” (ignoring to think of genocide) in what is otherwise a coherent theory on the religion issue, with sacrificial violence and rituals as the primordial regulator of violence. In particular, in Girard theory’s, it is the sacrificial violence and its rituals that are preventing a generalised violence that otherwise is always on the verge of engulfing any society.

411 Nahoum-Grappe, Veronique... idem 356
However, from her serious discussion of Girard’s works, Coquio introduces the notion of ritual of de-regulation, that is when “...within the full scale genocide violence, the killings borrow ritual forms that do not regulate anything, except in a strictly murderous negativity” (2005:208 translation is mine). Therefore, they are the negative of the sacrificial, sacred violence described by Girard. Instead of neutralising violence and reuniting the community around the expiation of the sacrificial victim (symbolic or real), they have the inverse effect. Rituals of de-regulation escalate the cycle of violence and increase the separation within the community. She then makes three hypotheses that should be considered as constituent components of these Rituals of de-regulation and are fundamental to understand and make sense of the ritualised practices of violence and cruelty:

“That is to ensure in the murderous act itself, not only a rigorous state organization, but also forms of community cohesion among victims and among perpetrators, hence radically separated by the terms of the collective murder, bent on destroying the human connection and any kind of possibility of shared space.

That is, by making victims “atone” for an imaginary crime, and to produce a sense where the integral and senseless violence cannot acknowledge or support itself as such: the executioners would, therefore, do at the time of the crime, ‘the equivalent’ of what the victims do when testifying after it; thus mass crime would need sense as the necessary engine of a senseless violence;

That is, to play with the reminiscence of sacrificial rite, which became cultural memory in a community invited to think about itself on a martyrological and mythical model and in the full modern era. The ritual of deregulation would not be an archaic rite but strictly a modern one, or, one might say - knowing that this category is itself mythical - “postmodern” in its memorial and playful/theatrical character. Here we could use the theory of Benveniste, who interpreted the structure of game as a result of a mimetic decomposition of the rite, disconnected from the religious system on which it was based. Existing in the order of discourse as well as in the order of the gesture, the game is what remains of the rite when it is deprived of the act or deprived of the myth.” (Coquio, 2005:196. Translation is mine.)

In Iraq, the desecration of bodies, the mass killings, the tortures, the murder of religious leaders considered as sacred symbols of communities, the beheadings, the slaughtering at funerals, should all be considered as kinds of de-regulation rituals. As a whole I consider that they form what I call the ritualised violence which has been at play during the post-2003 period. To understand the mechanisms at play, I will take one example of such acts and analyse it in regard to Coquio’s hypotheses. In the previous chapter, two of my informants mentioned the slaughtering of kidnapped victims who were members of the Sunni community, by a powerful Shi'a militia during funerals in Sadr City, a
neighbourhood of Baghdad. This kind of slaughter is also mentioned in different accounts concerning the violence in Baghdad at this period. As explained by one of my informants, the slaughtering was done at funerals where the Shi‘i deceased had been allegedly killed by people or armed groups belonging to the Sunni community. Kidnapped victims, members of the Sunni community, would then be offered by the Shi‘a militia to be slaughtered by the relatives of the deceased in revenge for the deaths of their relatives. As I understood, on many occasions either the Shi‘a relatives would accept to kill the kidnapped victims and if not the militia would kill them anyway. As my informant explains, refusing to kill or letting the kidnapped be killed would amount to making a stand against the powerful Shi‘a militia. A stand that only a few, either a member of a powerful tribe or family, were ready to make.

One can already see two of the dimensions described by Coquio. The militia was enforcing its domination and control of a part of the population in Sadr City by pushing them or forcing them to kill or condone the killings of Sunni during funerals. Whether they wanted it or not, by condoning the killings, these people were now part of a collective murder against the other sect. And this would contribute to destroy previous links or bonds between communities. There is here the violent erection of symbolic boundaries or walls between communities. The militia were, of course, using the pretext of vengeance and retributions, ‘the eye for an eye’ to give sense to this kind of violence. But as Coquio pointed out in her demonstration, and as such in our cases, the victims of the slaughtering, people randomly kidnapped on the road, were imaginary culprits, only really guilty of being Sunni. The last dimension, which Coquio describes as the “...play with the reminiscence of the sacrificial rite.”, is there too. Hence, in different parts of Iraq and especially in rural areas, it is customary to sacrifice (adahi) one or more animals, like a sheep or a camel, during the funerals of tribal leaders or powerful people, and distribute the food to the needy and people coming from afar to pay their respects to the dead. It is considered a good deed for the soul of the deceased and may elevate his status in the eyes of God. Some of my informants explained to me that during the funerals of some heads of powerful tribes, dozens of sheep or camels were slaughtered. Here one can see the mimetic reproduction and the gross distortion of the sacrificial rite used as a cultural and martyrrological tool of legitimisation.

These three dimensions—the production of a morbid form of sovereignty and the movement of Boundary Making; the production or the extension of a discourse of fear and guilt; and the use or the play with the religious and the sacred as a cultural tool of mobilisation and legitimisation—would be at play all along in the Iraqi conflict. In fact, one could summarise the post-2003 period as a conflict for the redefinition of the state and the sovereign. A conflict structured around Boundary Making and competition between communities. This has been done by manipulating history to produce collective guilt and
collective sense of fear, and finally using or manipulating religion and traditions as a tool of mobilisation and legitimisation. The Iraqi elites who played these different cards—the Myth-Symbol Complexes defined by Haddad—in order to access the new political system and grab a portion of power in the new fragmented state, were numerous if not the majority. However, if the new failed state and the new political system projected politically and economically these myths-symbols, the physical sectarianisation of space and the ritualised violence would succeed to give them a social shape, a substance. It would finalise the manufacture of a new cognitive frame of crisis, a social trauma separating and mentally walling the different communities of Iraq.

In this frame, it could be interesting to look at the ritualised violence that has been practiced by the different sides in Iraq in the light of Françoise Héritier’s considerations about rituals of passage and sacrificial violence in different pre-modern societies. In her introduction to the first book on violence, Héritier points out that work on bodies is essential in rituals of passage among different communities. She indicates that in such rituals, the law and the knowledge of the community is marked on the body of individuals. As I noted earlier with Nahoun Grappe, a similar kind of work on the bodies of victims was at play in modern genocide types of violence and finally in Iraq. Therefore, one might very well wonder to which degree the violence and the cruelty marked on bodies has become law. In a sense, the sectarian coordinates (sectarian representations and identifications) of the violence are ascribed with blood and flesh to everybody, perpetrators and victims alike. Lastly, following her discussion about rituals, Héritier states that ritualised violence, may serve to resolve internal contradictions of some communities:

“The existence of regulated collective violence ... that have been mutually inflicted by...matched opponents that for no personal reason are forced to strike, but who do so with each other to resolve the 'inherent contradiction within a dualistic society between the identity of each of the halves and the unity of the whole group'. “(1996:32)

On the contrary, in Iraq, ritualised violence functioned as a de-regulation ritual and its effects were the dramatisation and the essentialisation of sectarian representations and identifications. And this while veiling and encapsulating other contradictions like class or geographical contradictions of the Iraqi society or generational polarisation, finally resulted in building symbolic trenches between communities. Despite experiencing the severe oppression of the Saddam dictatorship and years of embargo, social life for Iraqis was constructed around a cognitive frame of multi-confessional cooperation and mixing. However, for many of my informants, the post-2003 period introduced an

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412 Again, it is not so much the question of pre-modern or postmodern that is the salient question here but the use and the mechanism of rituals and cruelty within community that is of interest.
intense cognitive dissonance, making it impossible to reconcile the factual reality of their social life as it was before, with what Iraq had become - a country divided into homogeneous neighbourhoods and entrenched communities fearful of ‘the other’. “I don't know” or “I don't understand” remain their best answers. Only the violence and its ritualised components can then explain or give sense to something that remains otherwise senseless.

In the case of some of my informants, the question of violence and separation were not limited to the remembrance of the immediate past, of what they had to endure and escape from Iraq, but was still existing as a looming shadow on the present. As I was in Damascus between 2007 and 2009– years before the civil war in Syria– Iraqi refugees, at least many of them, were convinced, with some reasons, that the militia and the armed groups that were roaming free in Iraq, were also present in Syria. They were convinced that Jeish el Madhi, Al Qaeda or the Islamic Army in Iraq had men in the country and were monitoring the Iraqi community. In many interviews that I made at that time, Iraqi refugees, regardless of their sect, were willing to leave not only Iraq, but the Middle East in general. In the words of my informant, “the further the better and if it is as far as Japan, it is fine with me!”

Obviously, the reasons for leaving Middle East and going abroad were diverse. For instance, they were also related to the hope of getting opportunities– job, education, a ‘better life’– that were not available in Syria or Jordan. But often this was blended with the fear that the violence in Iraq they had been able to escape would catch up with them in Syria. For many of them, Syria was simply too close from the violence of Iraq to be safe.413 In a similar manner, some Iraqi refugees would choose to remain in particular places in Syria or Jordan where only members of their sect, Shi’a, Sunni or Christians would have settled. Hence they will have no contacts, or maintain them at minimum, with Iraqis from other sects. Here again the fear of violence remains central in their explanations. Hence, in the interview of Omar, that I produced in the precedent chapter the possibility of violence or on the opposite, its absence, depends of the presence of the other communities. Hence, he “…will go to a place without hate, without revenge. It will be a Sunni place.” Another Iraqi, George, a Christian refugee that I interviewed in Sednayah in May 2009 would say something similar:

“Tsh: Do you think that you will stay here in Sadnaya?
George: No, I hope that we will leave abroad.
Tsh: Why do you want to go abroad?
George: Look, here there is no future for us and even less for our children. There is no job here. No job for Syrians, so for the Iraqis it is worst.
Tsh: But if you could find a job here, would you stay?

413 In a certain sense, such refugees were more than correct, but quasi prophetic.
George: No. I don't think so. I want my child to be in a place where they will be safe and have a good future. You know, I don't think there is a future for a Christian in the region.”

Which is interesting is that these people would acknowledge that most of the Iraqis from the other sects, Shi‘i for Omar, Muslims for George, were not the responsible of the violence, that they were mostly victims like them. Yet, the presence of Iraqis from the other sects remained dangerous and were avoided. In fact, even if they were not always verbalising it, the people like Omar or George, feared not individuals or families, Shi‘i or Muslims. They feared the militia or the armed groups that they though would certainly come with the Shi‘i or the Muslim families—whether these families would like it or not. In a sense, for Omar, George and some other of my informants, Violence looked like a disease, a transmissible disease, that could strike one area after another and even more important that would be transmitted from a community to another. A disease that would be carried by the other communities, even against their will.

Of course, for some others Iraqis who may not had previous experience of an inter-mixing social life, or maybe who had completely erased it through the experience of the civil war, it would be even worse. Through the violence they would have construct their own ‘essentialised’ subjects, the ‘other’, the Shi‘i, the Sunni, the Christian. Therefore, one should not be surprised to find that, representations and mythical symbols that would have been deemed absurd, extremist or considered as an irrelevant myth a decade or two ago may now have become a ‘fact’, a historical ‘reality’.

In his study, Haddad provides rich empirical materials and numerous examples of the crystallisation of such myths on popular levels (2010). In these mythical reconstructions, the Sunni community would be openly or implicitly equated with Wahhabism and Ba‘athism, with Al Qaeda and Sectarian terrorism, with Saddam regime crimes such as the crushing of the 1991 intifada. But more important, the present, as desolate as it is, would find its explanation in the remembrance of the long history of suffering. In the recollection of the Shi‘a martyrology, with the assassination of Shi‘i imams under the different caliphates, right up to the killing of Hussein ibn Ali in Karbala in 680 AD. 414 The construction of such mythical and monolithic narratives of the Shi‘a and their ‘historical’ oppression by Sunni in Iraq provided and reinforced a sense of victimhood unique to the Shi‘a community, contributing to mobilising and entrenching it. On the opposite side, these discourses encompassing mythical symbols were mirrored by anti-Shi‘a sectarian discourses describing the supposedly “eternal” treacherous psyche of the Iraqi Shi‘a community toward

414 In his thesis Haddad, provides plenty of examples of such aggressive sectarianism rhetoric. In particular, see chapter 8 about the civil war. See also the one example of such reconstruction in chapter 2.5.4 of this thesis.
Iraq. And this would be illustrated by direct references to the famous myth of the treason of Ibn Al Aqami, the then minister of the last Abbasid caliph, who supposedly opened the gates of Baghdad to the Mongol Hulagu Khan in the 13th century. And sometimes references would go back even further, connecting the actual Iraqi Shi’a community with the Buwahyid Persian dynasty. Haddad, who situates such examples in the discourses of some political Sunni elites in the post-2003 period, notes that:

“... in a different context, say the 1960’s, vilifying Iraqi Shi’as by referring to the Buwayhids would have seemed absurd and would certainly have been restricted to fringe and extremist elements.” (Haddad, 2011: 266)

Interestingly enough, it seems to me that an important part, if not the majority, of the songs, the poems, the discourses that Haddad provides and uses as the core material of his analysis about the Myth-Symbol Complexes, are all blended with vivid descriptions or evocation of the post-2003 violence. Hence, violence contributed to the crystallisation of sectarian discourses and myths into an essential fracture, notably between Shi’i and Sunni, as if they were eternal enemies fighting for the land, the resources and the religion.

415 See for instance the pages p 206-209; 210-211; 221-225; 228-229 in Haddad, 2010.
Conclusion

1.1 Determining a trajectory

In this thesis, I sought to answer a simple and yet difficult question. How can we comprehend the episode of massive and ethno-sectarian violence, in particular between the period 2005-2007, that plagued the country since the invasion of Iraq by the US-led Multinational Forces? Contrary to conventional analysis of the occupation, I do not think that the long or short history of ethno-sectarian relations and divisions within Iraqi society and the state before 2003 alone, allows us to understand and even less explain what happened there. In my view, such an approach is misleading and entails the risk of taking the effects for the causes. On the contrary, I show that at the social level, it is the violence of the post-2003 period, as a phenomenon, that profoundly transformed ethno-sectarian relations in Iraq. Even more importantly, I show that in order to be intelligible, and seen not only as an ill-fated course, the violence needs to be situated within the socioeconomic and political context that framed the whole post-2003 occupation period. Therefore, this thesis retraces and dissects a complex chain of events and reactions, a trajectory, that led to violence and civil wars, when at its apex in 2005-2007. I call this set of processes and chain reactions, a System of Violence and without this analytical framework, it is difficult to explain let alone understand what happened in Iraq during the occupation. As illustrated by the analytical map proposed in the next page, this trajectory could be represented by three movements:

1) The Kinetic Neoliberalisation of Iraq
2) The Culturalisation of Politics
3) A System of Violence
Hence, this trajectory began with the Kinetic Neoliberalisation of Iraq, that is the violent imposition of a market-driven society and state by the US authorities. This produced a set of unintended consequences—notably a dystopian economy and a “failed” fragmented state. Meanwhile, the reconfiguration of the political space and the state was undertaken under the principle of the 
\textit{muhassasah}, the ethno-sectarian quota sharing system. The Culturalisation of Politics, as a mode of governance, compounded a dysfunctional, illegitimate political system and a drive toward ethno-sectarian Boundary Making. In turn, the neoliberal dystopia and the Culturalisation of politics contributed to the development of a System of Violence that would more and more revolve around Ethno-sectarian coordinates until it reached its peak during the Ethno-sectarian civil war between 2005-2007. From 2008 until 2011, the System of Violence would recede and open space for a return to Politics and the contestation of the 
\textit{muhassasah} system in both elections of 2009 and 2010 and in the streets in 2011. However, the new empowered elites, with the support of their foreign allies—US and Iran, would succeed to maintain and profit from the ‘confessional game’. This will open a new phase of violence and sectarian confrontations starting from 2012. Of course, such an ordered breakdown remains an artificial representation of reality. Hence, in real life, these different movements, although appearing one after the other, were not temporally separated but overlapping.
This thesis focuses on the change in political and economic structures imposed by the US occupation, and within this framework on the crucial role played by Iraqi Political Entrepreneurs, and with them, the ‘army’ of community leaders (religious authorities, local elites, intellectuals) and the diverse Specialists in Violence that were at the core of the conflicts. And at the bottom, the effect of such a progression on Iraqi society. Of course, the whole process of sectarianisation could rest on internal trends that were already present within Iraqi society. For instance, in terms of an ideological superstructure and Common Sense, the failure of Arab nationalist ideology, coupled with the revival of religious practices and faiths in Iraq, as in all of the Middle East, provided an underlying ideological background propelling religious movements into political life. Soon, some of these religious political movements, but not all, became critical vehicles of the sectarianisation of Iraqi life. In a different vein, with the disintegration of the old state structures and the failure to rebuild a new functional state, the rise of corruption permitted patrimonial and neo-patrimonial relations, and clientelist ties between local notables and clients to form. In turn, these patrimonial networks needed a moral and ideological legitimisation provided by sectarian discourses and practices (Herring and Rangwala, 2006:156). Yet, it is the US occupation authorities and Iraqi Political Entrepreneurs who organised and legitimised the sectarianisation of Iraqi political and social life and, in fine, the Political Entrepreneurs were empowered through this process.

In this way, I hope to have contributed to shedding some light on different phenomena that, in my view, remained insufficiently addressed. Hence, in his very well crafted thesis, Haddad demonstrates how the shift from “banal sectarianism” to “assertive” and even “aggressive” sectarianism in the post-Saddam period has been operationalised through the reformulation or the reconstruction of sectarian narratives, and memories of cleavages—Myth-Symbol Complex—the emergence of which he could trace since the 1991 Intifada and the decade of embargo within the Shi'a community, and directly after 2003 within the Sunni community (2011). Yet, the author notes that:

“How easily and readily the shift is made depends on a variety of factors amongst which, class, geography, external influences and socioeconomic and political conditions are key. The state, both in its policies and in how it is perceived from below, is likewise a crucial factor influencing sectarian relations.”
(Haddad, 2011:277)

In a sense, this has been the unifying thread of my thesis. Namely, trying to understand how the US nation-building experience in Iraq, that is, the attempt to found a new socio-economic and political order, with a new state and a constitution, has framed the political and socio-economic conditions for the
rise of identity politics, and the violent confrontation between the diverse communities of Iraq.

I will now briefly recap the principal mechanisms that contributed to the unfolding of the Iraqi crisis: the destruction and reconfiguration of the political and economic system, the movement to a Culturalisation of Politics and Boundary Making, and finally the rise of a System of Violence and a process of essentialisation.

A) Destruction/Reconfiguration of political and economic systems

Although a stiff debate among specialists and academics, the question of the Bush administration’s lack of plans for the post-invasion period is, in my view, misleading. In fact, a multitude of plans for regime change in Iraq existed within the different US departments, bi-partisans think tanks and within the US Army. Taken altogether, these plans involving Iraqis whether they were exiled or otherwise, were drawing a map of the complex and conflicting interests and realities of US policies, and of Iraq as a country. However, the Bush administration was not really interested with facts and complex realities, nor they were interested in following a precise post-invasion plan. They had something much more powerful that could transform or erase facts, and create a new reality.

The US Administration and powerful circles around it had a vision of the future Iraq that they intended to create. It was framed by neoconservative circles, but maybe best articulated by President Bush himself in his Bush doctrine (Bush, 2002). It was the fusion of the neoconservative vision, of a US ‘national greatness’ projected abroad, and the neoliberal constructivist project of a globalised market order. In this frame, Iraq was the blank screen on which they violently projected this neo-imperial vision. Despite all the denials that would come years later, the debates about the future of Iraq held within the US circles of power, in the administration or the Congress, during the first months of 2003, show how much American politicians were eager to drive Iraq towards the “modern world”. In their view, the embodiment of modernity was the market-driven society and it looked like an idealised version of the US. Iraq was meant to be at the same time a successful neoliberal model and the launchpad of a new regional order under American guidance. Obviously, such experimentation embodied more prosaic interests. Hence, the prospect of a lucrative reconstruction business, the reintroduction of Iraqi oil into the world market, the possible exploitation of its huge hydrocarbon reserves, or in other words, the comprehensive neoliberal transformation of Iraq into a “playing field” for
US multinationals and companies was extremely attractive to a vast array of American public and private actors. Consequently, this “imperial benevolent” endeavour demanded the complete remaking of Iraq as a state and as a nation.

In this context, the first step of the American adventure in Iraq began with the destruction of the old Iraqi State. In less than two months, Iraq received three fatal blows, the structural damage from the invasion, the weeks of looting, and the first two orders of the US-led coalition, which eviscerated what remained of the old state and its skilled personnel and “institutional memory” (Dodge, 2009). It follows that, if the decades of the Saddam dictatorship and the embargo had wrecked Iraqi society, the American invasion and occupation of Iraq had the effect of destroying the Iraqi State. However, the American occupation authority, and its Administrator, the Pro-Consul Bremer, had arrived in Iraq with a “democratic package,” which included the promise of a swift and durable economic reconstruction, the neoliberal transformation of the country, and a so-called democratic process. In reality, within the package, the neoliberal transformation of the country was the core element that was accentuating and linking the other two.

Here I want to emphasise again, the centrality of the neoliberal element during the period of the American occupation of Iraq. In particular, the first three years were not simply the fantasy of Bremer, or the brainchild of the Department of State. It was the reality or the product of the neoliberal “Common Sense” (Doge, 2010) among the US Administration, the Congress, the US Army, but also within the corporate media and shared by important sectors of the American population. And this Common Sense was the product of decades of structural change within US State structures. Besides, such an ideological framework was not only dominant in the US. In fact, a common vision of neoliberal policies has evolved since the 1980s, and promoted the superstructure for market globalisation, which is widely shared and promoted by powerful sectors of the international community and its institutions. Hence, the US neoliberal programme in Iraq did not differ in substance from other plans of transition applied by international institutions elsewhere. If anything, the real difference with the regular IMF or World Bank programmes, was that the Bush administration was left without any restraints to imposing the most brutal and boldest project of neoliberal transformation on a country of all time.

However, the confluence of three elements: the brutality of the American neoliberal re-regulations; a constitutional model imposing the federalisation and the radical decentralisation of state structures; and the total failure of an outsourced and privatised reconstruction programme contributed to very negative outcomes. First, it aggravated the economic crisis during at least the first three years of the occupation, leading to a drastic contraction of resources available at the level of the state, and in general within the Iraqi population. Second, it produced a corrupted, privatised and impotent state, an “integral and subordinate part” of the international globalised market under “US-led governance” (Herring & Rangwala, 2006:258). Therefore, the main principle
of governmentality would be driven by neoliberal rationality. Third, it removed any kind of legitimacy to the occupation and the constitutional and political process engaged by the US authorities in Iraq. In this context, ‘new’ or rebranded political actors and elites emerge, being in competition to retain or gain political and economic positions within or against the new political and economic systems. However, the competition for access to contracted resources, which are also unequally allocated is extended to the whole population, contributing to social polarisation and fragmentation. Clearly, the social brutalisation and social insecurity that existed under the Saddam dictatorship, particularly during the embargo period, continued uninterrupted during the US occupation period.

As I said, the new political system in construction did not benefit from foundational Legitimacy and it was not able to produce Politics either. It was not able to produce Politics in the sense that it was incapable of negotiating and managing conflicts and producing integrative institutional structures. In particular, the enforcement of neoliberal rationality corresponded to an equal reduction in the possibilities for the political field to regulate market forces and buffer global integration. The problem is that one core function of the political field is the resolution of the struggle or the conflict about the sharing and allocation of resources. Typically, victorious politics represents specific political and social constituencies, and determines how to share and allocates resources. However, in this case the conflict could not be resolved by the confrontation between politics and political constituencies. In a sense, this refers to Brown's definition of the “depoliticisation” and “de-democratisation” (Brown, 2006:703) induced by neoliberal rationality. Precisely, within neoliberal rationality the only role left to the political field, and at its centre - the state, is to protect and reinforce the neoliberal rationality and to adapt state structures and society to market forces (Brown, 2005; Bobbitt, 2001). Herein lies the central crisis, intertwining economic and political factors, that would frame the whole conflict.

B) Culturalisation of Politics and Boundary Making

In a certain way, the phenomena of Culturalisation of Politics and the process of Boundary Making that unfolded since the beginning of the occupation period, in particular during the constitutional process from 2003-2005, was the result of two convergent movements that depended on different factors, but on which the imposition of a neoliberal order weighed heavily.

On one side, the Bush administration had to rebuild some state institutions and a political space which were needed to enforce a neoliberal order in Iraq, and to try to grant some legitimacy to an occupation of the country. The Iraqi
transitional institutions they created to keep control of the whole democratisation process, starting from the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC), introduced an ethno-sectarianisation of state institutions and the political space. It was the result of three main facets. First, it was the result of a neo-imperial vision of Iraq as a blank screen, devoid of historical substance and only understood through the prism of the ethno-sectarian divisions of the country. Second, the necessity to acclimate more or less amenable Iraqi allies, mainly the official exiled opposition, and the Kurdish parties. And finally, the need to build a political space and institutions devoid of the possibility of politics, i.e. devoid of the possibility of contesting the domination of the globalised market under American guidance, while maintaining the illusion of a democratic process. More precisely, the ethno-sectarian composition of the first political institution created by the US authority, the IGC, was the only argument of legitimacy invoked to defend its existence. The creation of the IGC was portrayed as the first step towards a democratic transition because it was supposed to represent, almost statistically, the ethnic and religious diversity of Iraq. In reality it was dividing the country symbolically into three factions, Arab Shi'a, Arab Sunni and Kurds.

On the other side, the newly empowered Iraqi elites, who had weak grassroots support, were handpicked by the occupation authorities firstly because they were legitimising the occupation but also because they were in favour or at least ready to accept the US-led neoliberal vision of the future Iraq. In particular, they were ready to accept federalism and the liberalisation of the economy, including the privatisation of a good part of the state structures and the oil economy. In any case, Iraqis who had accepted to join the new political process and new Iraqi institutions, the IGC and later on the Iraqi Transitional Government (ITG), or the first Iraqi government after the December 2005 elections, accepted to participate in Iraqi institutions that could not enact real power or sovereignty. In reality, they were caught between the US State, its army, the dozens of “advisors” in Iraqi ministries and the debt discipline of the international financial institutions. They could not, or did not want to, oppose the brutal integration into the global market and neoliberal rationality. This means that they were incapable of responding politically to the economic depression, the decentralisation and the fragmentation of the new state institutions, to the social brutalisation and the rising polarisation of the society. They were trapped in the depoliticisation process induced by neoliberal rationality.

However, this situation was happening at a particular time. Indeed, the state-building and constitutional process launched by the US occupation implied a redefinition of political boundaries. In a sense, the whole process was renewing the fundamental question of the definition of the political community and the resources granted to those who belong to it, i.e. the political question of rights. In this way, the constitutional process was rendering the political and economic crisis even more acute.
In this context, the newly empowered Iraqi elites seized the question of ethno-sectarian power sharing while deflecting the political question of right. Communities, and not individuals anymore, based on ethnic and sectarian backgrounds in Iraq (Arab Sunni, Arab Shi'a, Kurds), became the real holders of political membership. With the Culturalisation of Politics redefining the political space in term of cultural membership (sectarian or ethnic), new political elites were able to reorganise cultural blocks within a fragmented and disfranchised society. And they were transforming the competition from everyone having access to a shrunken pool of resources provided by the Iraqi State, into a competition between the communities. They were able to tap into and mobilise these cultural constituencies into a race for the ownership of the country. In a sense, they were diverting the general anxiety and the rising polarisation of the population toward a much more manageable fear of ‘the other’.

Moreover, these Political Entrepreneurs and community leaders, who were in competition for the power and resources within the new state institutions, were also in competition for the control, mobilisation and representation of their own ethnic and sectarian communities. Competition between both the communities and within the communities, required intense Boundary Making in order to mould and separate sectarian and ethnic communities into ‘cultural’ constituencies for the race towards power and resources. This was done by enforcing or reinforcing their alleged identity markers, in particular by reactivating and manipulating cleavages with memories and guilt. For instance, the memories of the 1991 Intifada in the south of the country and the Anfal campaign of 1986 in Iraqi Kurdistan, which were in fact crimes of the Saddam regime, were transformed into political tools in order to legitimise the exclusion of the Sunni community from the political space and the new state. The real stakes of this double competition are the resources that victorious parties could retrieve from the partisan cannibalisation and sectarianisation of the new state. In this frame, I described how the De-Ba'athification process has been a central mechanism implementing the ethno-sectarianisation of both the political space and state institutions. It was constraining the political debate and preventing political opponents, mainly Sunni, from participating in the electoral races and, at the same time, enforcing the (partisan) privatisation and sectarianisation of state and public offices, through the purge and reinstatement function.

Finally, the new political order based on neoliberal rationality and Culturalisation of Politics emerges as a dysfunctional system. A political space, or more aptly called a “game”, limited to the struggles, alliances and negotiations between the diverse ethno-sectarian elites in competition for the resources and rent provided by the cannibalisation of the state. In any case, the ‘confessional game’ is incapable to solve the essential issues staked stacked upon each other since the beginning of the American occupation.
C) System of Violence and process of essentialisation

In Iraq, it took only two years to go from the US-led invasion of the country, the destruction of the Saddam regime and the old State in 2003, to the sectarian civil war in 2005-2007. The disintegration of the state structures, their replacement by a dysfunctional or “absent State” (Davis, 2006) and Culturalisation of Politics were happening within a context of rising generalised violence and within a frame of two years. In a sense, everything was happening more or less at the same time, and therefore it seems more difficult to analytically separate each of these fundamental elements, state destruction, Culturalisation of Politics and System of Violence. The fact is that political elites were not able to address the economic and social crises induced by the neoliberal restructuring policies. And more important, the US administration and the newly empowered Iraqi elites failed to establish a legitimate political and economic centre able to realise politics and negotiate plurality. Instead, they focused on the massive use of coercion in the attempt to impose the new order. In this contested and illegitimate frame, what emerge is the rapid increase of cycle of violence and counter violence by a growing number of actors—state and non-state—supporting the new order or contesting it. In a sense, where Politics become impotent, Violence establishes the facts on the ground.

As the object of the second part of my thesis, Violence is considered as a specific field with its own dynamics, properties and actors. It permitted me to understand how the generalised violence during the post-2003 period has been structured around collective, organised networks of violence, the militia, the armed groups and state security apparatus, all linked with Political Entrepreneurs against the Iraqi society. Here, contrary to what has been portrayed by media and other analysts, the first characteristic of the violence of the post-2003 period is not the engagement, “en masse”, of Iraqi society with violence but the subordination of unorganised violence—‘the crowd’, unorganised people—toward the organised networks of violence.

The second characteristic of the period, in particular during the peak of the conflict between 2005-2007, is that, more precisely, violence forms a system. A system of generalised and multiform violence, at the same time transnational and very localised and with a tendency towards the autonomisation of the violence. The violence is generalised not because everybody partakes in it, but because everybody is affected by it in one way or another. In this system, a new kind of actor gets the upper-hand. They form networks of violence, within the state or outside, combining Specialists in Violence and Political Entrepreneurs, who encourage and directly benefit from the generalisation of violence. In reality, what is at stake here is the control of fragmented territories for material and symbolic resources by networks of violence.

Within these territories or “Spaces of Coercion” (Ali Ali, 2012), a debilitated form of sovereignty is enacted by the networks who control the areas,
enforcing deregulated Violence and providing limited and temporary protection. As such, this type of conflict falls into Kaldor’s category of “new wars”, that is: “the new type of warfare is a “predatory social condition” (1999:107), as non-state actors and State military factions were directly plundering assets of people living in gained territories and neighbourhoods. In this sense, violence was multiform and of “dual purpose”, at the same time politically-oriented and criminal (Green and Ward, 2009). Within these spaces, networks of violence will impose a system of extortion, and in exchange provide limited forms of protection against their own violence or the violence of the other networks and some access to resources. In a sense, the “rent of suffering” analysed by Harling and characteristic of the last years of the Saddam regime, would persist but this time as fragmented replications in every and each of the coercive landscapes under the control of networks of violence. The Iraqi population encapsulated perfectly the situation with a sentence that one would hear again and again during the whole period:

“Before we had one Saddam, now with have thousands of little Saddam[s].”

In a certain way, as the System of Violence extends, the existing political space as dysfunctional as it was, is stifled and replaced by a regime of Fragmented Tyranny. That is, a “regime of warlords, bandits and political predators”, with low democracy and low capacity (Tilly, 2003), with the devolution of degraded governmental capacities to the local, and at the same time a “globalisation” or internationalisation of power and economic structures. As I demonstrated in this thesis, the general violence and more precisely the Spaces of Coercion are imposed on the population by the different networks of violence. In other words, the population is caught between the different actors, state and non-state, of the conflict. Yet, if Iraqi society did not engage massively in violence it did not prevent it either. Certainly, the terrible legacy of the Saddam regime and the embargo period, but also the violent shocks of the American neoliberalisation during the first years of the occupation, all contributed to the continuous “brutalization” (Bozarslan, 2008) and fragmentation of the population in Iraq. In reality, the Iraqi society is already on its knees when the country sinks into generalised violence after 2003. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise if the Iraqi society could not mobilise enough social resources to break the rising cycles of violence, nor to prevent the rise and domination of the different networks of violence. And even more, since the System of Violence works on what remains of the society as a centrifuge machine. It is upsetting social relations, breaking bounds and links between people and transforming the spatial and demographic configuration of entire areas, neighbourhoods and cities during the conflicts. Therefore, the impossibility to move and access spaces of socialisation, the breaking apart of pre-
existing social circles, families or neighbourhoods, tends to transform individuals into isolated cells, and impede greatly the capacity to confront the violence and the brutal changes within the social life.

Furthermore, the effect of the System of Violence in Iraq on social realities does not stop there. As I said, violence in these conflicts are multiform and ‘dual’ or multipurpose. One aim of the violence, as recalled by Kaldor is the “political mobilization of basis of identity” (1999:110). In other words, within the System of Violence, Culturalisation of Politics is translated into Culturalisation of Violence. Here the ethno-sectarian coordinate, which has become the main coordinate driving the new Iraqi political institutions created by the US occupying forces, would also become a structuring coordinate of violence. Precisely, in Iraq, aggressive sectarianism and the Myth-Symbol Complexes, become the apparatus of the mobilisation and legitimisation of the violence by the militia, the armed groups and other networks of violence. Hence, the creation of ‘spaces of coercion’ and the plundering of these areas by victorious networks of violence were preceded, accompanied or followed with mass crimes and terror aimed towards groups and individuals, targeted because of their membership, real or supposed, of the ‘enemy’ community. In this frame, ethno-sectarian violence is producing its own physical and symbolic effects on Iraqi society.

Where the generalised violence tends to isolate people from each other, sectarian violence is enforcing the homogenisation of sectarian and ethnic blocks in place of the pluralistic society and heterogeneous demography of the landscape. Moreover, and beyond the physical sectarianisation or ethnicisation of space, the ritualised component of the violence and the practices of cruelties attached to it would contribute to create a traumatic cognitive frame within the society at large. Ritualised violence produces the dramatisation and the essentialisation of sectarian representations and identifications, while veiling and encapsulating other contradictions. In this sense, the Myth-Symbol Complex and the aggressive sectarianism that Haddad analyses, concerning Iraqi society and its different communities that tend to transform Iraqi communities, especially Sunni and Shi'a, into eternal enemies fighting for the ownership the nation, the resources and the religion, are first and foremost myths. They do not hold in front of the intricateness of a social life, the inter-sectarian and ethnic relationships and bounds, that characterised the Iraqi society as it was before the violence. One may agree with Haddad about the emergence of assertive or aggressive sectarian narrative and related Myth-Symbol Complexes after 1991, but it is the System of Violence after 2003 that is moulding a fiction, a myth, into social realities. Hence, if the new political system and failed state created by the US occupation projected politically and economically the division of Iraq into antagonist communities, the physical sectarianisation or ethnicisation of space and the ritualised violence would succeed to give them a social shape, a substance. It would finalise the manufacture of a
traumatic cognitive frame, essentialising and mentally walling off the different communities of Iraq. In fact, the Culturalisation of Violence is reproducing and extending the “exclusive bargaining deal” (Dodge, 2013), that is the exclusion of Sunni elites from the political and economic system, into the social realm. Here again, I think it is worth repeating Gregory’s note: “It [the violence] has been a significant means of manufacturing identity in Baghdad as elsewhere” (2008:14).

1.2. Generalisation?

As this study should have made clear, I consider that beyond the question of violence, the neoliberal rationality and policies imposed by the US in Iraq have been the crucial drivers of the unfolding of the Iraqi crisis. Notably, because it aggravated the economic conditions of the country—at least until the boom of oil prices in 2006-2007—and derailed the reconstruction process. And above all, they were the major factors preventing the reconstruction of a legitimate and functional political space, leaning on the Culturalisation of Politics. But beyond the question of Iraq, could we consider neoliberal globalisation as a driver of conflicts elsewhere, and in particular communal (racial, ethnic or religious) conflicts? The globalisation phenomenon, understood and seen as an inexorable transformation of mode of governance, the expansion of the market in all spheres of life, and implemented through a common set of economic and policy re-regulation reforms (Brown 2005, 2015; Harvey, 2005; Robinson, 2006), seems to be a consensus amongst a wide range of academics. However, there is a large variation in the scope and temporality of its implementation all over the globe, and also how it has been partially adapted with previous forms of governance. Therefore, such a phenomenon is not homogeneous, but on the contrary gives rise to different formulae, ideological frames and aspects. As a result, it also gave rise to different kinds of resistance, mobilising different social and political forces against it. As noted by Gamble, instead of a unique wave travelling the world since the 1970s, we are confronting a kind of “Hydra-headed” occurrence (Gamble, 2006:34). That being said, there is a large corpus of studies that show how the implementation of neoliberal policies and structural reforms provoked social disruptions, political and economic instabilities and violence in a vast range of countries (Glivanos, 2006; Robinson, 2006; Soederberg et al, 2005; Gutierrez and Schönwälder, 2010).

Of course, neoliberal reforms did not provoke intense crises in all countries, and even when it provoked important economic and political crises as in Asia or Latin America, all crises did not turn into massive communal conflicts or civil wars. Interestingly enough, in the conclusion of a comparative study of
six countries on economic liberalisation and political violence, Schönwälder brings two important insights. First, neoliberalism may have contributed to improve state modernisation and political plurality here and there, but “more often than not, it accentuates governance deficits and sharpens political contestation.”, second, it can alter “war making” and incentive to political violence in different ways. By provoking the collapse of regimes and/or fueling Kaldor’s “new war” type (Schönwälder, 2010:335). It can also lead to the development of repressive and authoritarian regimes, and finally, it:

“... may signal a transformation from political to criminal forms of violence, especially in circumstances where insurgent groups have been defeated by the state. It also heralds the emergence of new opportunities for illicit economic activities, particularly around drug trafficking. Most troubling perhaps are the instances where armed or criminal groups were able to infiltrate the state apparatus itself, not only capturing resources but acquiring some form of legitimacy for their actions. In the end, this could obviate the need for open violence directed at the state, but at the price of creating a climate of generalized repression directed at citizens”. (ibid:336-337)

In my view, there are similar patterns that can be traced in different cases. As I already said earlier, in the course of my thesis I have been strongly influenced by different works written concerning the Yugoslavia crisis. But I think that other conflicts such as the Rwandan genocide or the Sudanese multiple conflicts since 1989 could qualify for a comparative study that puts at the centre the questions of neoliberalism, and Culturalisation of Politics and Violence. At least in these 4 cases, Iraq between 2003 and 2007, the Yugoslavia wars from 1990 to 1995, the 1994 Rwanda genocide and Sudan since 1989, imposition of a neoliberal mode of governance and structural reforms had preceded and often extended during these conflicts. Of course, that is not to say that neoliberal policies were solely responsible for such conflicts and the forms they took. But could one try to understand if, as in the case of Iraq, neoliberalism could have been one crucial driver of these conflicts, on one side accelerating economic and social crises, on the other preventing the establishment of a viable political field, contributing to the Culturalisation of Politics and the framing of these conflict in ethnic or religious terms?
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