The Use and Abuse of History:
the images of the enemy in the Iraqi historiography

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ABSTRACT

This research attempts to explore the dynamic relationships between writing the ancient history of Iraq and political discourse, focusing on academic publications in Iraq between 2003 and 2014. These publications created images of the enemy through transhistorical narratives, providing "evidence from the past" to justify aggression against certain communities and neighbouring countries. The study uses Stein's definition of enemy images and Ofer Zur's model of creating enemy images to examine the role of Iraqi historiography in shaping political discourse.

The research argues that the peaceful coexistence between Iraqi communities depends not only on political actors but also on the response of the academic community to power. By addressing distorted historical images of "Others," Iraqi historians can play a role in promoting peaceful coexistence between communities. The study highlights the importance of challenging politically motivated enemification of certain communities, which lack evidence from history.

The research reveals a strong connection between the representations of the Persian, Jews, and Christians by the Baʿthist regime and those found in Iraqi academic publications after the regime's collapse. The study highlights the need for Iraqi historians to re-examine their relationship with power and to avoid disseminating politically motivated narratives that distort historical facts.

Thus, this research emphasizes the importance of examining the role of historical narratives in shaping political discourse and promoting peaceful coexistence between communities. Iraqi historians have a crucial role to play in challenging distorted historical images of "Others" and promoting a more accurate and inclusive understanding of history.

KEY WORDS: Use and Abuse of History, Enemy images, Iraqi historiography, historiography and extremism, Iranian images.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed" (UNESCO 1966). 'Enemy images' are a propagandistic tool, usually citing historical events, used to create an often fabricated perception of the "Other" – either creating divisions within a population or with an external population. During most wars, the apparatus of 'enemy images' is used as a crucial weapon in mobilizing the nation's population against the "threat" posed by the out-group who is portrayed as the "enemy". However, once the war is over, these images, the discourse, the prejudice, and the hatred – all stemming from this war propaganda and disseminated to the general population remain for decades, or even centuries to come within societal tropes, narratives, and discourse. To create a more harmonious future between nations and ethnic groups, this issue should be identified and tackled. As such, identifying an approach for removing these archaic tropes and catalysts of division becomes crucial. This paper looks specifically into three interrelated themes in the Iraqi historiography of post Saddam: a) the perception of Iranian as a historical enemy, b) the Persian and Jewish conspiracies against the Iraqis, and c) the representation of the Iraqi Christians as an "internal enemy", who were equated with out groups enemy as a threat to internal unity.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

April 2003 marked a turning point in the history of modern Iraq. The toppling of Saddam Hussein's statue by U.S. marines in Firdaus Square in the centre of Baghdad on the 9th of April symbolized the end of one of the most dictatorial regimes in the twentieth century and raised the hope for the founding of a viable democracy in modern Iraq. However, the results of the December 2005 free election revealed the existence of deep-rooted ethno-sectarian identities within Iraq of Arabs and Kurds, and Shia and Sunni (Osman 2012: 217). Consequently, this ethno-sectarian mood shaped the government. The bombing in February 2006 of the al-Askari shrine, one of the holiest sites for Shiite Muslims, in Samarra turned the dream of a smooth and dramatic transfer into a democratic system in Iraq where all the communities coexist in peace and harmony into a nightmare.

Theoretically, Iraq after the U.S. occupation has remained united. However, the reality is different. Iraq has been divided into three major zones: Arab Shiite, Arab Sunni, and Kurds. The Shiite Arabs, who make up around 60% of the Iraqi population, dominate the stronghold stretch from Baghdad to the Iranian border in the east, and to the southern and west border with Saudi Arabia. This area includes the most important Shiite holy cities of Najaf and Karbala. The Sunni Arabs, who comprise almost 14% of the population and historically ruled Iraq and subjugated the majority Shiite population, dominate the heartland stretches west of Baghdad to the western border with Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Syria. This region encompasses three major provinces of the country namely Mosul, Tikrit and Anbar. The Kurds, with almost 19% of the population of Iraq, dominate the northeast (Danecki, J. and Górak-Sosnowska, K., 2019: 12; Katzman, K., 2009: 2).

This division has longstanding historical roots. During the era of the Ottoman Empire, these three communities inhabited three different administrative divisions called wilāya in the region that became modern Iraq after World War I. Although they were in the minority, dominance of power rested in the hands of the Sunnis who ruled Iraq and subjected the majority Shias to systematic discrimination (Mary 2012, 6-8; Metz 1988, 95). Due to various ideological and historical factors, the subsequent Iraqi governments failed to create an Iraqi identity that could go beyond political domination to create the sense of belonging to one country (Kirmanc 2013). Each of these communities fostered different identities and aspirations. As a result, writings about the pre-Islam relationship between the Arab and Iranian empires represented these ties differently.

3. METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on politicised historiography published within the academic framework of historical studies in the Sunni majority zone from the fall of Baʿthist regime in 2003 to the fall of the city of Mosul to Daʿesh on June 2014. It is crucial to indicate here that the terms "politicised historiography" and "Iraqi politicised historiography" used in this paper refer to publications that were published in the Iraqi Sunni majority zone which covers: Nīnawā, Salāh ad-Dīn, Anbar and Diyālā. The reason for this selection is to trace the response, continuity and disruption of the Baʿthist discourse by mostly Sunni scholars of this region. While this community had received comparatively more support than in the rest of Iraq, bearing in mind that the Sunni dominated Iraqi power since the Ottoman era, they almost lost such privilege after the occupation of Iraq in 2003, in which according to the democratic system the centre of power transferred to the majority of Shiite community. It is also worth to mention that the term "post Saddam" and "Post Baʿthist" have been used interchangeably for the same meaning.

Due to the trans-cultural nature of this article and the complications of rendering the exact meaning of some Arabic terms and phrases in English, this paper uses anglicised terms according to the transliteral scheme used by the International Journal of Middle East Studies.

4. ENEMY IMAGES

According to Stein (1996) "Enemy images are a set of beliefs or hypotheses about a particular individual or group and become stereotypes when held by an entire group". The construction of enemy images is dependent on a division between "Us" the in-group and "Them" the out-group and between "good vs. bad". Such a belief is deeply rooted in many societies both unconsciously and in some cases consciously. Vuorinen rightly points out that, paradoxically, "the inventing of an enemy begins with the invention of the self" (2012: 1). Subsequently, as the self becomes more 'human' the enemy becomes less so" (Kelly 1991: 16). During wartime, the act of portraying the enemy as a threat intensifies. Therefore, the relationship between "good-bad" turns into the "good-evil" or even "ideal-evil" relationship. Within such a context, the "Us" always becomes representative of the "good", while the "Other" becomes representative of the "evil", who, as a result, is completely separated from any merit of the "good" and "Us". Then, the out-group is viewed as a significant danger to the values and survival of the in-group. This perception might have little or nothing to do with reality. Nonetheless, this perception can be a potent tool used by the in-group or leaders to address external or

internal threats. Once the society has adopted these enemy images, it becomes easier for leaders to mobilize the society against the who been depicted as an enemy, whoever they may be.

There have been many types and ways of representing enemy images throughout history. Zur (1991) proposed seven different forms of depicting enemies that have been prevalent throughout history, with the "threatening enemy in defensive wars" being the most commonly portrayed enemy during the second half of the 19th and 20th centuries. The goal of depicting such a wartime enemy is to safeguard "Our" nation or homeland against the aggressive expansionism of the "Other," who is seen as a danger to the in-group "our borders, our people, our ideology, our economy or our future" (Zur, 1991).

Throughout history, societies have had a tendency to create an unrealistic and exaggerated image of groups who have been depicted as an enemy. The concept of an oppositional cultural dichotomy between Us and Them is not only an ancient idea that dates back to the classical time, but it can also be considered a widespread phenomenon across different societies (Mac Sweeney 2013:1). In contrast to Greek model of enemy images that focus on an external actor becoming an enemy, such as Persians, the internal enemy is externalized once it has become an adversary. Thus, a discourse of exclusion occurs, which externalizes groups or actors identified as an enemy (Płucienniczak etl. 2017: 17).

Dehumanization and demonization are the two primary methods used to depict the enemy. Dehumanization seeks to portray the targeted group as subhuman or inferior to humans or even as an animal. A recent example is when Mr. Putin, in response to his opponent Ms. Marina Ovsyannikova's opposition to his invasion of Ukraine on March 14th, dehumanized his opponents on live TV by urging "true patriots to simply spit them [traitors] out like a fly that accidentally flew into their mouth," (the Guardian March 17, 2022) thus portraying them as insignificant and unworthy of respect. Earlier, in his book *Mein Kampf*, Hitler, for instance, dehumanized the Jew and called them parasites "irritating but eliminable"; (see Capozza and Volpato, 2004; Rash, 2005: 106; Bar-Tel 1990: 65). These representations are more effective when the out-group is distinct in terms of ethnicity, nationality, language, religion, or sect. (Vuorinen 2012: 1). On the other hand, demonization aims to portray the group being targeted as evil, demonic, monstrous, or associated with evil (Normand, L., 2016: 2). The difficulty with constructing enemy representations is that once they are established in a society and the opposing group is stereotyped, they are difficult to change even after the underlying reasons for the enmity have disappeared.

5. RECONCILIATION OF ENEMY IMAGES

Within the Iraqi Iranian context, the deconstruction of enemy images would not only be the foundation stone in building a bridge between the Iraqi people with its neighbours, but, cautiously, it could be argued that it is also much more urgently needed for the internal reconciliation of the Iraqi people. As discussed above, once enemy images have been implanted and have taken root in a society, they become very difficult to uproot. When the causes of hostilities come to an end the need for revising the enemy images created by previous regimes arises. It is an arduous task, but perhaps not impossible.

Gayer et al. identified three steps for cognitive societal unfreezing: Firstly, a re-evaluation of the invented beliefs during the conflict; Secondly, readiness to new information and idea with different concepts; and thirdly, the acknowledgement of new ideas arising from different evidence (2009: 954). These steps are crucial to dismantle the constructed belief of the enemy, the Iranian and non-Iranians in the case of Iraq, and will ultimately help to create a more constructive image of the whoever would be called the "Other".

It is worth mentioning here that reconstructing the culture of peace is necessary in a post-war period and has been given considerable attention by the United Nations. The Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace (A/53/243B) pointed out the significance of this issue, and acknowledged that the United Nations alone cannot achieve this goal. Transformation from the culture of war to the culture of peace needs enormous scholastic and political effort. With this in mind, the General Assembly's Programme of Action called for civil society participation to broaden the scope of activities for establishing a culture of peace and to be a part of a global movement for a culture of peace (UN General Assembly 1999).

6. BAʿTHIST DISCOURSE OF THE IRANIAN AS AN HISTORICAL ENEMY OF IRAQI PEOPLE

During the war against Iran the Baʿthist regime spared no effort to depict the Iranian as an historical enemy. According to Harold Lasswell, "For mobilization of national hatred the enemy must be represented as a menacing, murderous aggressor, a satanic violator of the moral and conventional standards, an obstacle to the cherished aims and ideals to the nation as a whole and of each constituent part" (Cited in Merskin, 2004: 162).

The Iranian, after the beginning of the war, was soon demonized within Baʿthist historical writing. Rash (2005) suggests that animal metaphors are employed in oppositional discourse to degrade humans by portraying them as animal-like. For instance, donkeys

are depicted as obstinate, indolent, and unintelligent, while sheep are viewed as docile and unintelligent, foxes as cunning, bees as industrious, and so on. The Baʿthist used a wide variety of mostly conventional animal images for the purposes of dehumanizing their enemy. They preferred to use lower-order animals as insulting names. For the Iranian and the Jew, the favoured comparisons were those for which human beings feel particular revulsion, such as flies which are irritating but eliminable at the same time. Khayr Allaĥ Ṭilfāḥ, Saddam's uncle and father-in-law, attempted to dehumanises the Iranians through the use of animal metaphors to convince Iraqi readers, and wider Arabs as well, that the Iranians, by their nature, have no human traits. To this end, he even went as far as criticizing God for creating them.

Ṭilfāḥ published an undated pamphlet, apparently published during the Iraq-Iran war, entitled "Thalatha kan ʿala Allah an la yakhluqahum: al-Furs, al-Yahud wal-dhubab" (Three whom God should not have created: Persians, Jews, and Flies). The act of dehumanizing Iranians was employed to depict them as having characteristics that are less than human and are inherent, making it impossible for them to change. This created a perception that the Arab people should view Iranians as their primary and long-standing adversary.

According to Ṭilfāḥ, thus, "Persians are animals God created in the shape of humans. However, the only human advantages they have is that they walk on two legs like a hen [...] Their morals are bad, their traits are vicious, and their beliefs are immoral. This is evident from their belief in Zoroaster and Mazdak as goddess [...] this is similar to the recent claim by Khomeini in Tehran to be a God, and he has portrayed himself as the Spirit of God [...] my Arab brothers, the Persian [are] your first enemy (Ṭilfāḥ N.D.: 5).

Inventing the Self begins with inventing the Other. Vuorinen argued that the exclusion of the other is a way to the inclusion of some into a limited-membership community such as a national, political or an ethnic group (2012: 1). Thus, the image of the enemy is a natural product if not the most crucial step in the process of self-identification. History is in the centre of this process. Iraqi scholars, after the fall of Baʿthist regime, did not attempt to illustrate the generic nature of the enemy but rather attempted to invent, in a similar manner as Baʿthist discourse, an enemy through the historical narrative. The Iraqi publications portray the Iranian as a natural enemy of the Iraqi and the Arab. This narrative of the Iranian as a historic and natural enemy is structured in such a way as to suggest that hostility and conflict characterized the relationship between the Mesopotamian and the Iranian at every historical juncture and rejects any possibility of peaceful relations in the future.

7. POST BAʿTHIST REPRESENTATION OF THE IRANIAN AS AN IRAQI HISTORICAL ENEMY

Kurt and Kati Spillmann (1991) point out that the images of the enemy are moulded by perceptions based solely on negative assessments, which demolishes any possible future bridge with the Iranians. By 2006 various publications had appeared in Iraq that expressing anti-Iranian sentiment. These publications, similar to Baʿthist discourse, concentrated on particular figures and events. The campaign against the Arabs by Shahpur II (309-379), the Sasanian king of kings, becomes fertile grounds for identifying national innate traits of both Arab and Persians. For instance, al Mahal (2012) proposed that Shahpur II committed a massacre against the Arabs in which many were killed without any mercy. Mahal indicates that such enmity has resulted from Shapur's malice against the Arabs (2012: 146-47). Similarly, al-Shaheen claims that the negative response of Yazdegerd III (624-651), the last Sasanian king of kings of Iran, to the prophet's letter revealed his innate arrogance and malice towards the Arabs (2009: 226-7). In the same way, al-Jubūrī frequently portrays the Persian as an enemy of the Arabs (2011: 71-3). In the same context, he portrays Khosrow II (-628) as malicious Persian king who attempted to insult the Arabs (2011: 71-73).

The dispute between Khosrow II, considered to be the last great Sasanian king of Iran, and Nuʿmān bin al-Mundhir, the last Lakhmid king of al-Ḥīra, has repeatedly been used throughout history as a transhistorical theme to evoke the enemy images of the Iranian by Iraqi scholars (Maghdid 2018: 148). In this dispute Nuʿmān is portrayed as an ideal Arab ruler whose quest for Arab unity was the sole reason behind his assassination. In contrast, Khosrow II, who killed Nuʿmān, has embodied the Persian's innate malice towards the Arabs. For instance, Jassim argues that the deterioration of the relationships between the Sasanians and the Arabs resulted from Nuʿmān's aspiration for liberty and independence (2007: 44). Additionally, she refutes other views which suggest that the cause of this hostility was the result of a personal enmity between Khosrow II and Nuʿmān, or from Nuʿmān's refusal to marry his daughter to Khosrow II (2007: 44). Likewise, ʿAbdul-Rahman (2012: 113) indicates that Khosrow II deliberately killed Nuʿmān when the latter sought to unify the Arab tribes. In a similar manner al-Jubūrī (2011: 72) agrees with the view that the killing of Nuʿmān by Khosrow II resulted from the former's aspiration for Arab unity and the desire to eliminate the Sasanian occupation. Hence, he rejects all other views of the cause of Nuʿmān's assassination (2011: 72). Likewise, both al-Ṭāʾī (2011: 162) and al-Jubūrī (2012: 255) argue that the dispute between Nuʿmān and Khosrow II was the result of the former's attempt to strengthen his

relationships with Arabs to unify them. Sasanian military forces in Ḥīra are portrayed as part of the Sasanian hegemony over the Arabs who deplored their subjugation (Jassim 2007, p.44). It is worth mentioning here, that the political motivation for publishing such papers has reflected in very basic historical mistakes, as seen in the example of al-Jubūrī (2012: 251) who argues that 'the Sasanian who took over the Achaemenid empire', despite the fact that the Achaemenid empire had collapsed due to Alexander the Great's invasion in 330 B.C.E., and the Sasanian empire was established when Ardashir I took over the Parthian empire in 224 C.E.

Thus, Iraqi, historians portray the Sasanians as a primary threat to indigenous Arabs and an obstacle to Arab unity. These solely negative depictions demonstrate the continuity of the Baʿthist discourse of the Iranian as a historical enemy of Iraqi people.

8. BAʿTHIST DISCOURSE OF THE IRANIAN AND JEWISH CONSPIRACY AGAINST IRAQI

In the 1980s, Iraqi historians invented a theory about a historical conspiracy between Iranians and Jews against the Iraqi people. According to this theory, the Jews in Babylonia, who were held captive by Nebuchadnezzar in the sixth century BCE, opened the city's gates and allowed the Achaemenid king Cyrus to capture it. This concept of a Jewish-Iranian conspiracy against Iraq had first appeared in the mid-twentieth century, but it wasn't materialized in a political context until the Israeli attack on Iraq's nuclear reactor in 1983 (Baram 1991: 110-1).

Iraqi officials categorized Iranians, Israelis, and "Zionists" as a group of saboteurs and conspirators who had collaborated throughout history to undermine Iraq and Arab interests. Saddam Hussein and other officials in Iraq gave speeches in which they made such claims. For example, during the war, Saddam made a speech in which he asserted that:

"The Zionists [and] their allies [Western imperialists] bear a grudge towards our nation and at the same time are attempting to stop the advancement and development of the Arab people. After other plots against the Baʿthist revolution were unsuccessful, these powers have found that the Iranian regime which came to power in Tehran is the best tool to eliminate the chance of the Arab nation's cultural advancement" (Ḥusayn: cited from ʿUdwān 1988: 17).

Similar claims were put forth by the Iraqi Minister of Defence during the Iraq-Iran war, who stated that, "From the very beginning [of the war with Iran], we never had any illusion about the Iranian regime's associations with Zionism" (Cited in Workman 1994: 152).

9. POST BAʿTHIST ON THE IRANIAN AND JEWISH CONSPIRACY AGAINST IRAQI

The narrative created by the Baʿthist regime, which presented Persians and Jews as historical adversaries working together against the Iraqi people, continues to be propagated in Iraqi publications even after Saddam's regime. For example, Marwin Awiny, who wrote for the Historical & Cultural Studies journal at the University of Tikrit, tried to portray Persians and Jews as a "natural enemies" or "historic opponents" not only of the Iraqi people but also the Arab people. While Awiny often referred to Iranians as Persians to emphasise ethnic differences with Arabs rather than political boundaries, he expressed his doubt about the Jewish people as a nation (Umma) (2009: 194).

In the opening of his article, Awiny argued that the comprehensive theory of national security requires specifying military doctrines and past war experiences: The first important element is the ability to identify and define the sources of danger of the 'historical enemy' or 'natural opponent'… These two characteristics can be applied individually to all nations that bordered the Arabs in history; Mongols, Turks and Greeks. However, these characteristics combined apply to two nations more than the others... from whom the Arab historically experiences a never-ending aggression to seize any opportunity for revenge. [These nations] exercised cycles and uninterrupted opportunities for revenge. Those are the Persian and the Jews (2009: 193-4).

The above quote demonstrates how post-Baʿthist regime publications sought to define the innate nature of an authentic Iraqi identity by defining the oppositional, essentialist, and innate nature of inimical Iranian and Jewish identities. Awiny's narrative of Iranian identity seeks to construct the hostility and aggression of the Iranian enemy against the Iraqi as a primordial quality that cannot and will not change, thus denying the possibility of peaceful coexistence.

The Baʿthist historical narrative that sought to inculcate the concept of Persian and Jewish historical enmity to Iraq was a result of the fundamental role played by Iraq within the Arab world. Awiny (2009) argues that an eternal conflict has existed in the Middle East between the Arabs on one hand, and the Persians and Jews on the other. Iraq has played a pivotal role in this conflict because, according to Awiny, the Iraqi steppe was always open to the enemy powers coming from the east to control the Arab civilization, as it had also been an entry point for the Islamic conquests to the east of the Arab homeland. Thus, winning the battle of Iraq meant winning the strategic prize that all powers dreamed of (2009: 194). Based on this, Awiny concluded that, whoever dominates Iraq will dominate the Mashriq al-ʿArabī, and whoever dominates al-Mashriq al-ʿArabī

will dominate the Middle East. Consequently, whoever dominates the Middle East will dominate the world. History repeats itself at the turn of the twenty-first century when the eternal alliance between the Persians and the Jews, under the cover of the U.S. Empire, was rebuilt again (Awiny 2009: 194-5).

Despite such naïve assumptions it demonstrates how significantly the Baʿthist ideological discourse continued to influence the Iraqi scholars' perceptions and their writings about Iraq's history even after the fall of the regime in 2003. In addition, it demonstrates how history is employed as an important tool for the Iraqi intellectuals to support their ideologies through the use of transhistorical examples.

Through the use of transhistorical examples Iraqi scholars have been able to tie the contemporary Iraqi situation to the conspiracy theory links between the USA, Israel and Iran. Awiny, for instance, concluded that the 1980's war with Iran stemmed from the need to prevent Iraq from evolving into a political and economic giant in the region (2009). Similarly, the occupation of Iraq by the United States of America is presented as part of an agreement by the three powers to support the Israeli objective of dividing the Arab states, which the author calls "mashrue altaftit altaayifii waleunsurii", the sectarian and racial fragmentation project (2009). It should be noted here that the words taftit, fragmentation, or tamziq, rupture, have been frequently used to describe the Iranian primary policy against the Iraqi or Arab people.

10. BAʿTHIST DISCOURSE OF THE CHRISTIAN IRAQI/ARAB IDENTITY

After the occupation of Iraq by the United States of America and its allies, a sentiment of hatred grew towards minority groups, above all the Christians who were thought to be allies of the "Western occupiers" as they, supposedly, share the same religion. Thus, Iraqi publications during this period break with the long running Baʿthist discourse that attempted to emphasise the Pan-Arab identity, sometimes Iraqi national identity, of the Iraqi people without consideration of sectarian or religious differences in opposition to the Persian Iranian. Within the Baʿthist discourse the pre–Islamic Christian inhabitants of Iraq were always presented as Arab Christians who fought beside their brothers the Muslim Arabs against the non-Arab enemies, Iranians or Romans. For instance, in a speech by Saddam in late 1980 he stressed that:

The Iraqis fought the Persians with their Arabism before they became Muslims. Many of them were Christians, who knew when the Persians were defeated by the Muslims, they would be asked to convert to Islam, but this did not allow anything to deter them

from demonstrating their Arabism against the Persians (Cited from al-Baṣrī 1980: 63-4).

11. POST BAʿTHIST DISCOURSE OF THE CHRISTIAN AS AN INTERNAL ENEMY

The rise of Salafī groups, who adopted the philosophy of al-tawḥīd (absolute monotheism), had a significant impact on the Iraqi historical narrative after the fall of the Baʿthist regime. Al-tawḥīd claims that no God is worthy of worship except Allah, and in practice, it seeks to establish rule by Islamic sharia, rejecting any man-made political system. The Salafī were among the most active groups within the insurgency after the collapse of the Baʿthist regime (Hashim 2009: 29-34). Salafi ideology evolved into Salafi-jihadi or Jihadi-Salafism by 2007 when its leader, Abu ʿUmar al-Baghdadi, appealed to all Sunnis and the young men of Jihadi-Salafism (al-Salafiyya al-Jihadiyya) worldwide. Later, his deputy described the fighters of the Islamic State as part of "the current of Jihadi-Salafism" (citied from, Bunzel, 2015, p. 7). Salafī-jihadi then allowed and legitimized the use of violence for political purposes, especially against particular Iraqi communities such as Christians. The leader of Daʿsh, Abo-Umer al-Baghdadi, in his principles of the "Islamic state" stated that "The people of the Book [Christians and Jews], and Sabians have no protections in the Islamic State today; they are considered as [our opposition] in war" (al-Baghdadi, March 13, 2007). This vision soon reflected in Iraqi historiography, which portrayed these Iraqi religious groups as a corrosive threat to Islam far greater than any external threat (Abdo 2015: 12).

The Salafī-Jihadi's intolerance was aimed at spreading hatred against non-Muslim communities in Iraq, such as Christians, by using an alleged historical precedent of Christians' hostility towards the Muslim conquest. Huseen's article, for instance, aimed to examine the true allegiance of the Arab Christians in Mesopotamia during the Islamic conquest and to repudiate the distorted references to historical sources. According to Huseen, these sources actually confirmed that the Arab Christians stood against the Islamic conquests (2009: 292). The main implication of Huseen's perspective is his focus on religious affiliation rather than ethnicity. He examined several battles during the Arab Islamic conquest in Mesopotamia, where the Christians were portrayed as allies to the Sasanian Empire. For instance, within the battle of Alīs (633), Huseen argues that the Arab Christians from various tribes gathered to avenge their defeat at the Battle of Waljā. They were joined by the Persians, but the Arab Christians were more enthusiastic to fight the Muslims than the Persians. This prompted the Persians to promote them in the ranks of the battle and assign leadership of some sections of the

army to them. This infuriated Khalīd Ibn al-Walīd and drove him to challenge those Arab Christian leaders directly and to draw his own sword and kill some of them with his own hand in the battle. The battle ended with a Muslim victory and the killing of large numbers of Persians and Arab Christians. This battle was a great opportunity to teach the Christian Arabs a lesson they would never forget (2009: 298).

With this argument Huseen prioritises the religion rather than ethnicity as a criteria of identity and to draw a new line between US and "Them". according to this argument the Iraqi Christians were not stripped from their Arab identity, instead they have been portraited as the "fifth column" or even "traitors", consequently they become on the side of the Other. He concludes, after similar discussions, that even though the Christians were Arabs while the Sasanians were Persians, the Christian Arabs resisted the Muslims and sided with the Sasanians despite not even sharing their Zoroastrian religion. For Huseen, the lesson to be drawn from the battle of ʿayn al-Tamr was that Muslims did not distinguish between Arab Muslims and those of other ethnicities, but they inflicted the severest penalties on Arab Christians who fought against the Muslims. They showed no leniency towards these Christians despite them being Arabs. The Muslims *insulted* and *looted*, emphasis added, them as much as they did with the Persians. There was no distinction drawn between the Arab polytheist and Persian polytheist (2009: 303).

What can be noticed here is that, even though the Christian consider themselves as to be monotheist, they are deemed by these propagandistic publications as polytheist. Consequently, it provided theoretical grounds or justification from historical events to treat the Iraqi Christians community as an enemy and then legitimized insulting and looting them. Unfortunately, this is exactly what happened to one of the oldest communities in Iraq after Daʿesh took over Nineveh in 2014.

In a similar manner the Iraqi post Saddam's historiography aimed to draw lessons from the Arab Islamic conquest of the Sasanian and Byzantine empires of how to deal with non-Muslim communities in Iraq. Hasan, who published in Mosul, states that the he aims to present an independent study on this period that showcases the power of the faith and vigour of the era of early Islamic conquest. This era, according to Hasan, is replete with lessons and experiences that are worth re-reading for the Arab Muslim people to regain their self-confidence and rise again from their stumble (Hasan 2005: 65). He places similar emphasis on the need to re-examine the Islamic conquest of Tikrit in 633. He argues that it was a crucial moment in Arab-Islamic military history where strategies, sacrifices, speed of decision-making, skilled planning and discipline revealed depth

of faith, sincerity and determination. He poses that it deserves to be examined and a light to be shed on the detail from which rich lessons can be drawn (2010: 251). Similarly, al-Fahdawi argues that a right is meaningless if it does not have power. Thus, if Islam does not have the forearm raised, carrying the sword of defence, its watch would be ended. Those forearms are to eradicate false gods and lords and throw them into the desert of Mecca (2006: 86).

It is worth examining what lessons are to be drawn from this trend to re-visit Arab Muslims conquest. After a long narrative of the battles of Khalīd Ibn Walīd, the Arab Muslim commander in the service of the Islamic prophet Mohammed and the caliphs Abu Bakr and Umar, in Iraq, Hasan (2005) concludes that a number of lessons are noteworthy for the modern Arab nation; first is the courage and the speed of decision-making successfully deployed in the toughest conditions; second, is the adoption of the element of surprise to pounce on the enemy and to deprive them of the opportunity to catch their breath and re-organize their defeated forces by perpetuating the momentum of the attack. Swift action is to be maintained, and no allowances are to be made for any preoccupation with minor matters. The enemy must be relentlessly pursued to achieve the greatest possible gains when it is defeated; third, Khalīd also honed motivation, boosted morale and fostered a spirit of enthusiasm associated with faith to sacrifice for the sake of the Islamic faith (Hasan 2005: 77). In addition, Hasan tacitly draws a lesson from the defeat of one of the Arab tribal leaders, who allied with Sasanians, by the Muslim conquerors by demonstrating the contempt of the Persians for its Arab allies. He holds that this contempt is true of all foreign occupiers towards their local allies, and he stresses that this is a "lesson to those who consider" (2010: 255). Finally, through the unity of Muslims, the sincerity of intentions, the nobility of aim and with deep faith a manifest victory was achieved (Hasan 2010: 255). Likewise, Abd and Fadhil (2014), who published their work in April 2014, three months before the Daʿesh takeover of Mosul, state that the Arabic Islamic conquest is considered to be among the most important historic events especially because the emergence of the Islamic army was coupled with Jihad, for the sake of God, as it was Jihad that expanded the reach of Islam, and its aims were to uphold the name of God on earth and to establish truth and justice among humanity, and make governance to God alone, and no one would rule except by the sharia [Islamic law] (Abd and Fadhil, 2014: 1).

It appears that the impetus behind this trend to draw lessons from the Islamic conquest narrative is to legitimize contemporary strategies adopted by different insurgency groups after the fall of the Baʿthist regime in Iraq, especially by the Islamist Salafī groups. It reflects a

strong relationship between the rise of political ideologies and Iraqi historiography.

Thus, we see a shift in Iraqi publications after the fall of the Baʿthist regime. Whereas, before, enemy images were created around an external threat, now they are created against communities of the internal population who are presented as collaborating with the out-group. These enemy images are used as a tool for propagating and justifying violence against citizen groups inside Iraq who share their religion and / or sectarian affiliation with the external enemy. This is a dangerous trend which, if continued unabated, could load more burden on the already fragile Iraqi identity.

12. CONCLUSION

Using and abusing historical narratives from the pre and early Islamic period was at the heart of the Baʿthist strategy to create a discourse that exploited the allure of pan Arabism by focusing on ethnicity and depicting the Iranians as the historical enemy of Iraqi people. Portraying the Iranian as an enemy image and dehumanising them in several ways was one of the main features of Baʿthist discourse. After the fall of the Baʿthist regime, Iraqi historiography within the Sunni Zone continued with this Baʿthist discourse in some instances but broke with it in others. Iraqi publications continued to depict the ancient and modern Iranian as a natural enemy who, throughout history, has shown a clear and consistent enmity toward the Iraqi people. On the other hand, the post Baʿthist works published in the Sunni zone broke with the Baʿthist discourse by further including religion affiliation as the basis for creating enemy images aimed at communities within the Iraqi population. These publications show that there was an effort by scholars to depict the religious minorities of Iraq as allies of Iraqi enemies with whom they shared the same religion. This discourse has been used as a tool to promote intolerance by extremist groups in Iraq and to justify their actions against fellow citizens with whom they share a common history and identity

As a final conclusion it is evident that further unbiased and disinterested academic review of historic discourse, separated from political ideologies that highlights Iraqi identity based on equal citizenship for everyone is needed for a harmonious modern Iraq. It could be argued further that this refutation of the Baʿthist creating enemy images discourse requires a collective effort by both the scholarly and political community. Without such efforts, the Baʿthist discourse will continue, for at least the foreseeable future, and coexistence in peace and harmony in Iraq will remain an elusive dream.

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