# National and Cultural Identity in Iraq in the Face of the Formation of the New Order in the Middle East. Philosophical Reflection and the Political Reality

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## Abstract

After Arab Spring many hopes were dashed. However historical change must be happening now in the area of social awareness. The rise of extremism limits awareness and also endangers the Arab identity. The Arab revolution has to be more than the overthrowing of dictators. Bennabi created the concept of Post- Almohad Man and its "Colonsability" – a tendency to be colonized which allows the aggressor to be transformed into the colonizer. Is Bennabi's theory applicable to Iraq? Should killing a Post-Almohad Man be the aim, as Bennabi postulated, and only this will allow society to develop? Although Bennabi rather had in mind liberation from auto-stereotype and reconstruction of identity, many still interpret his words literally.

**Keywords:** Iraq, colonisability, national identity, self-awareness, civil war, national reconciliation

Conflicts in the MENA region are frequently seen as ethnic and religious not only by external observers, but also by societies for whom ethnic, tribal or religious loyalties, are often the strongest mobilizing factors. This is in spite of the fact that these affiliations can be, and often are treated instrumentally and used for political purposes, and thus have a devastating impact on security and social order. In fact, multi-level identity of MENA residents does not constitute *per se* the causes of conflicts. Actually, often the source of tension, is inequality, whether in access to power, resources or the possibilities of self-realization. These forms of exclusion results in the marginalization of certain religious and ethnic groups often through insufficient political representation. Breaking this vicious cycle is extremely difficult because at least for some Muslims: "The Shia-Sunni conflict is a struggle for the soul of Islam" (Nasr 20). This conflict between philosophical, theological concepts and alternative versions of shared history seems so archaic, and yet it is so vital since it is reminiscent of historical tribal and ethnic animosities which are fundaments of many regional identities.[1]

The dynamics of the events in Middle East can be perceived through a prism of delayed recovery from the colonial system, and its consequences, such as the need for revision of the borders and spheres of influence. In this postcolonial perspective, subsequent wars, the Arab Spring, the creation and success of ISIS etc. are interrelated steps of creating the post-colonial order in the region. After the Arab Spring, there has been no pan-regional change in terms of the nature of political systems or social structure. However, historical change may and must be happening now in the area of social awareness. The rise of extremism limits awareness and imagination. The Arab revolution has to be much larger than the overthrowing of dictators. It must lead to the elimination of a deficit, not only in economic terms, but the deficit of education and aspiration, which allows civil societies to flourish as well.

Iraq is often described as the most illogical experiment of the British Empire. Even occupation zones and areas of responsibility, as a result of the war in 2003, corresponded to the ethnic divisions, and many regarded the division of the country into three parts as a reality. What is the impact on the formation of the Iraqi identity in the absence of the principle of congruence, congruence of the nationality, legitimized by a specific culture, and state territory, as well as ethnoregional aspirations? The phenomenon of borderland culture and cultural conversion (Iraq is a borderline area of Arab culture, and adjoins Persian and Turkish ethnoses) and, above all, the geostrategic position of Iraq (the Iran–Iraq border region is defined in geopolitics as a shatter-belt – the area especially conflictual, of strategic importance for stability in the region. Furthermore, the former regional power has become an arena for proxy wars between states, as well as armed groups.), all have a major influence on the formation of the Iraqi identity.

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[1]  See more about meaning and dimensions of Shia-Sunni conflict in Nasr.

Historic Mesopotamia is the home of numerous ethnic and religious groups, including: Bahia, Jews, Yezidi, Kurds, Turkmen, Kyrgyz, Assyrians and of course the Arabs. For decades during conflicts and changes in regimes that ruled Iraq, various groups experienced changes in status. The demise of Saddam Hussein's regime led to the revival of dormant ethnic animosities in a similar manner as was the case in Yugoslavia after Tito's death.[2] Iraq was de facto in a state of civil war. Cultural, ethnic and religious differences, were used to justify violence and discriminatory policies of the state towards particular groups. Affiliations based on confessional and ethnic divisions have replaced the idea of national identity in Iraq, for years holding back the process of national reconciliation. In Iraq primordial tribal ties, ethnic and religious divisions overlap, which in many cases makes it difficult to clearly determine the dominant identity and depending on the situation, a person may shift by selecting the one that would guarantee the best economic or social position (IILHR). In the public discourse in Iraq, has any ethnic, religious or cultural identity been politicized, which, from a social perception, increased the importance and scale of existing divisions. The terms "ethnic" and "ethnicity" for the most part are used to describe the activities of political groups, membership in which is based on real or imagined historical ties, which supposedly have a continuous and significant impact on the political and socio-economic position of their representatives (IILHR). The Iraqi media and politicians consciously use these terms to describe reality. Former prime minister Nuri al-Maliki has repeatedly described the violence as being caused by ethnic hatred, although not saddled on the responsibility of a particular group. For the recipients of this message responsibility was obvious led to a further deepening of the atmosphere of distrust and tension. Despite the fact that most of the Iraqi political parties are largely multiethnic,[3] for Iraqis ethnicity continues to be one of the motives of support for a specific group. Although after the first parliamentary elections in the post-Saddam Hussein era, the main parties, including Maliki's party changed their names in order to not be associated with a specific religious denomination, they nevertheless continue to operate in this way in the social imagination. Although the Iraqi constitution emphasizes the multi-ethnicity and freedom of religion, the legislation still needs to be consistent with Sharia law, which is particularly evident in family law, guardianship and inheritance. The law prohibits discrimination based on language, age, disability or gender, but lacks specific provisions dedicated to the protection of ethnic groups (IILHR).[4]

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[2] Some scholars are predicting the development of a "balkanization process" in Iraq.

[3] For example Ayad Allawi a Shia'a, chairman of Al-Irakijia who enjoys the support of Sunni, is not concerned when referring to the terminology of modern secularists.

[4] The Institute of International Law and Human Rights published a report on Iraqi minorities, it emphasizes that the representatives of the different ethnic groups as well as women and sexual minorities, are vulnerable to discrimination, both de facto and de jure. http://www.iilhr. org/iraq.html.

The smallest groups such as Assyrians, Yezidis, Mandeans are still vulnerable to direct attacks.[5] One must remember that modern animosities often originating from a historical background was politically motivated, not ethnically (Dziekan, *Historia Iraku*, 157–158).

Iraq is often described as the most illogical experiment of the British Empire. Even the occupation zones, or areas of responsibility, as a result of the war in 2003, corresponded with the ethnic divisions, so many predicted that the division of the country into three parts was a probability (Dziekan, *Irak, Religia i Polityka*, 30). The fundamental challenge facing Iraqi society is redefinition, or rather self-realization of a shared identity. Iraqi nationalism, a common identity essential to the functioning of a civil society, had been constituted, like throughout the Middle East, in response to foreign rule, (in this case Turkish and British). A sense of unity is therefore largely superficial and for an individual, clan, ethnic, religious affiliation continues to have the greatest significance. The emergence of a new oppressor, a culturally alien enemy – the Americans, have forced Iraqis to try to overcome local divisions. However, the only secularideas, to which Iraqi society could refer to, such as the ideology of Arab socialism, has been devalued over previous decades. In the political arena only groups with their rhetoric of ethnic and religious identity, that support existing animosities remain. The fall of the secular regime, devolution of all state institutions, the dismantling of the army, the economic collapse and a humanitarian crisis has resulted, naturally, in the revival of religious and fundamentalist sentiments in society. Civil society *in statu nascendi* has lost all of its modern capabilities and people have instinctively turned to traditional tribal and religious structures, because they are the only forum where they can articulate their needs and aspirations. As a consequence, modern political parties have been replaced by religious ones which face the challenge of incorporating modern concepts of civil society into the Islamic worldview. The ideologues are trying to prove the absence of conflict between religion and civil society.

The Americans have faced a fundamental challenge – they wanted to bring democracy to Iraq, and they perceived civil society as its main catalyst. However, the Iraqi political tradition has made a tool of domination and propaganda out of civil society institutions, which the Americans were aiming to make an active political player. Out of those institutions the main problem was the overwhelming lack of public confidence in the concept of civil society as a whole.

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[5]  In 2007, attacks on the Yezidi community in north of the country killed more than 400 people. Ethnic animosities were used politically long before the occurrence of the Islamic State. A striking example of this is the situation of the Iraqi Assyrian population. In 1933, in northern Iraq, there was a massacre of the Assyrians, in which Kurdish troops actively participated. The slaughter was carried out by the Iraqi army without the decision of the government. The action was justified in press releases because of suspicions of an English-French-Assyrian conspiracy against the Iraqi authorities (Dziekan, *Historia Iraku*, 157–158; Deutsch).

There is a one fundamental difference between British colonialism and the American presence, which is often perceived as neo-colonialism – for the British civil society was the source for the modernization of the state (Saeed 4). According to the Americans, Iraqis would benefit from the weakening of the state (Saeed). Americans consciously brought to ruin any regime institutions, and, to some extent, allowed for the plundering of national heritage, hoping that *"starting from scratch"* would be the beginning of the development of a civil society in Western terms.

The fall of the Al Ba'ath regime created an urgent need to rebuild all the structures of the state and the political system. International actors, particularly international organizations have drawn attention to the need of creating a functioning civil society as a precondition for long-term stability. During the 35-year rule of Al-Bass (1968–2003), all forms of mass civil activity were controlled and treated as a propaganda tool by the regime, and any independent initiatives were eliminated. However, in the 1990s, along with changes in the internal structure of Arab authoritarianism, several noticeable papers were published. For example, "Civil Society in Iraq and its role in the creation of democracy" (1992), "Civil Society in the Arab World" (1994) (Saeed 2), "Civil Society in the Middle East" (1995), "Civil society in post-war Iraq" (2006) (Saeed 5). The only pre-2003 mention of the civil society in Iraq appears in a book by Tawfeeq al Moraine: "Civil society and the political state in the Arab World" (1997) (Saeed 2–5). According to the author the most important manifestation of the activity of civil society in Iraq was the functioning of the political parties. The ultimate goal of social activity should be to build the unity of the nation. According to Mudaini: "Civil society in Iraq begins with the end of tribal and ethnic conflicts" (Saeed 4). Because of the strength of the tribal identity's role in Iraq, it is virtually impossible that a civil society in the manner corresponding to the times of the British colonialism, in which social activity was accepted and even encouraged as long as it was in the metropolis' interests can be created. Social masses perceived that activity was usually at the behest of the anglophile elites' whim.

The reign of the Hashemite monarchy (1921–1958) led to the creation of the modern middle class, and when many organizations and associations such as the Women's Revival Club (1923), Iraqi Red Crescent Society (IRCS) (1932), Al-Bayt Schooling Association (1950), Women's Rights League (1952), Muslim Sisters Association, Muslim Boys Association were funded (NCCI 8).[6] Members of the royal family, the colonial authorities and the wider establishment often fulfilled the role of patron for these types of institutions.

In the Republican period (1958–1968), during the reign of General Abd al-Karim Kasim, known as Az-Za'im – the leader, activity in the public sphere was an element

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[6]  Read more about Iraqi civil society structures in an NCCI – NGO Coordination committee for Iraq report from 2011.

of political confrontation between the parties of socialist, communist and Muslim provenance. Keep in mind that in fact it was also a time of military rule (Dziekan, *Historia Iraku*, 172).

During the rule of Al-Bass (1968–2003) civil society structures played the role of an ideological base, helping to educate new activists. The system was based primarily on mandatory membership in trade unions, youth, students and women's organizations. Arab Socialists often invoked the idea of civil society in terms used by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, where civil society was the area of social mobilization against dictatorship. In fact, however, broad social activity was subjected to constant surveillance and had only one role, to be a tool of propaganda for the regime.

Famous Iraqi historian Abd-aziz ad Duri (Dziekan, *Złote Stolice Arabów*, 105–120) has presented an accurate analysis of the stage at which there is a sense of national identity and civic national movement of Iraqi society – "It is evident that, in many cases, national thought has not risen to the level at which there is a national movement and in many cases have a general character, which is sometimes romantic" (Dziekan, *Złote Stolice Arabów*, 115). This is the core and the root cause of all the challenges facing civil society in Iraq.

Ad Duri postulated a revival of Arab awareness, *wa'i Arabii*, which constitutes an expression of the spirit of community (Dziekan, *Złote Stolice Arabów*, 117), enabling its emancipation. *Wa'i Arabii* is realized through the ideology of Arab nationalism – al-qawmijja al-Arabiyya. Arab nationalism is therefore the final manifestation of the Arab consciousness. Arab nationalism has many of the characteristics of imagined nationalism, to paraphrase the theory of B. Anderson (Dziekan, *Złote Stolice Arabów*). What connects the Iraqis are now mostly romantic feelings: the memory of past glory, a post-war sense of humiliation and a constant renewal of national martyrdom. This is the core and the primary cause of all the challenges facing civil society in Iraq *in statu nascendi*. Other researchers, with whom Ad-Duri argued believed that the ideas and goals of Arab nationalism are already nearly fulfilled, so there is a need, therefore, to reevaluate the current outlook. They have seen causes of past failures in external factors (Dziekan, *Złote Stolice Arabów*, 14), while Ad Duri urged Arab intelligentsia to conduct introspection and self-criticism, which until today is regarded as avant-garde among large segments of Arab intellectuals. He claimed: "There are people who would like us to abandon history, and head towards the future. That's what has passed, therefore it is no more important, the more that we are burdened with it, the more difficult it is for us to follow the present. While others would prefer us to live in the past, clung to her heritage (…). We all feel that Arab nationalism is going through a very serious crisis, resulting from the delay of thought in relation to activities and various turbulences in action. (…) This explains the absolute need for the renewal of a philosophical basis for Arab nationalism. This will not be a purely theoretical exercise. The first step here should be to examine the historical roots of pan-Arabism. Such an analysis will identify factors that

combine trends of nationalist movement with the history of the *ummah* and will show to what extent they arise from the development of the community and its progress." (Dziekan, *Złote Stolice Arabów*, 114–116).

Ad- Duri, a pan-Arabic thinker, however, gave the Arabs, and perhaps himself, hope for a speedy revival: "I believe that Arab nationalism has already exceeded its pre-World War II romantic stage. We began to realize, after the experience of the mid-twentieth century, that the construction does not start with the roof, but the foundations and that this type of experience requires a new look at the past and reflection on plans for the future" (Dziekan, *Złote Stolice Arabów*, 116).

The idea of secularism is known in the Arab world, but it hasn't been widely accepted in its original form, European thought can provide a methodological frame, but its "secularist core will always be rejected. Everything will be Islamized which often means far-reaching re-evaluation" (Dziekan, *Złote Stolice Arabów*, 61). Even the Arab modernists such as Al Azm and Abu Zayd often found themselves with their views in a vacuum, so to know reality through religious truth is still more important than the experimental sciences. Arab secularists are often seen by their countrymen, with different ideological orientations, as uncritical followers of Western ideas and a tool in the hands of authoritarian regimes. Among ordinary Iraqis these associations were supported by the memories of the old, supposedly secular, regime.

Sadik al Azm sees the ideological causes of the crisis and a return to fundamentalism *after al-hzimia* of 1967 [The defeat] (Dziekan, *Złote Stolice Arabów*, 116; Dziekan, *Historia Iraku*, 309–310) in traditional Arab education, where the most important thing is honor. According to him the structure of the Arab personality: *al-szahsija al-fahlawijja* (Dziekan, *Złote Stolice Arabów*, 50) is a major obstacle to social and political progress in the Arab world. "The personality of pahlawi is characterized by the constant search for the fastest and easiest way to achieve a goal. Pahlawi does not care to execute a task correctly, their only concern is that no one can accuse them of wrong doing. It's about appearances – everything has to look nice and make a good impression, regardless of the actual value of the activities and achievements" (Dziekan, *Złote Stolice Arabów*, 50). A quick resignation from activities that require considerable, systematic efforts also have a pahlavis feature. To further, their personality they trivialize the other and enhance the sense of inferiority, reveling in negative self-exaltation (Dziekan, *Złote Stolice Arabów*, 50–51). According to Al Azm "A contemporary Arabic young man is usually revolutionary in political matters, but in the depths of his heart remains conservative on social, religious, cultural, moral, and economic issues" (Dziekan, *Złote Stolice Arabów*). Also the vast majority of Iraqi society, after its "al-hazimia" – the defeat of 2003, seems to be mired in a pahlawi mentality.

Another Arab thinker, criticized by al-Azm is Adonis, who sees the attachment to tradition as a strength of Arab culture not a weakness. To this idea he devoted one of his most important works, a study of approaches to the Arabic tradition and

modernity, "Constants and Variables": "Society based on the revelation in its essence is a community of tradition. It is not only the traditional with reference to the past, in the sense that it stores and nurtures the revelation, but also in relation to the future, in the sense that it is a society living in anticipation of the Resurrection. A society that finds its foundation and reference point in the revelation, is associated with what is permanent and eternal, in the 'Face of God,' and not with what is variable and transient. The change means imperfection. So it lives outside the historical movement, suspended between the past, which is a revelation, and the future, which is the resurrection. Creation, revision, renewal, only move away from the foundation. It is important to constantly looking at religion or revelation, as if they were revealed today, and keep them in the original form until the end of the world. (…) In this context, the change becomes negative – it becomes a deviation from what is good" (Dziekan, *Złote Stolice Arabów*, 75) the reflection of Adonis is full of concern for the future of Arab thought. For a thinker the disregard for the truth by the Arab society, and above all by the intellectuals is the source of crisis; "The constant is what constitutes the identity of Arabs" (Dziekan, *Złote Stolice Arabów*, 85).

One of the most prominent contemporary Arab philosophers, however, who remains relatively unknown to the wider public is Malek Bennabi (Dziekan, *Złote Stolice Arabów*, 189–211) who also saw the causes of "the crisis of thought" in internal factors. He created the concept of Post-Almohad Man (Dziekan, *Złote Stolice Arabów*) and a society which has a tendency to be colonized – the theory reflecting the moral condition and the stage of development of civilization in contemporary Arab societies. The foundation of society is its culture, which the researcher compared to blood (Dziekan, *Złote Stolice Arabów*). Ignorance of one's own culture leads to a loss of identity and the collapse of civilization. The catalyst for the development of each civilization, including the Muslim one, is religion (Dziekan, *Złote Stolice Arabów*, 198–200). However, Bennabi, who was educated in the West, did not deny the need for the achievements of other civilizations, and advocated passing it through a filter of Muslim culture, what would allow "for the adaptation of only some of its appearances – 'the body', but does not allow for the penetrating of the 'spirit of culture'". Historical perspective is extremely important in this context: "achievements of Western civilization are not 'timeless' and 'ahistorical' They are a product of long development in certain socio-political conditions" (Dziekan, *Złote Stolice Arabów*, 209). In the modern socio- political discourse that takes place between Islam and the West, both sides seem to forget this. Civilization is not given once and for all, society must be able to first recognize and then cherish its value (Dziekan, *Złote Stolice Arabów*, 199). According to Bennabi, the crisis in Islamic civilization began with the emergence of Shia, people who have chosen reason over spirituality, causing the spirit to now be in crisis and guided only by instinct.

The collapse of Almohad marked the start of *inhitat* [the decline] in the political aspect, and in a spiritual sense with the death of Ibn Khaldun (Dziekan, *Złote*

*Stolice Arabów*, 203). "A new type of man was no longer under control of the spirit (Arab. *run*), or reason (Arab. *akl*), but only guided by instinct (Arab. *ghariza*). On the first and second stages of development, man only listens to the dictates of the spirit and reason – they are somewhat hidden and therefore undetectable. In the third stage, the spirit becomes impotent, while the natural impulses are fully released and become the ruling force of society. This is the last cycle of civilization" (Dziekan, *Złote Stolice Arabów*, 201).

According Bennabi (in the 50s), the society of the Maghreb was mentally still in the year 1269. "There has been no evolution – neither social nor cultural, nor mental. Bennabis' theory not only refers to the Maghreb, but to the whole world of Islam, he wrote about how the big cities, like al-Qayrawanwere reduced to small villages, while Baghdad, and Samarkand also falling into decline. The fall of the Almohad caused chaos in the Maghreb, exacerbating the chaos already being felt from the fall of Baghdad in the east of the Arab world" (Dziekan, *Złote Stolice Arabów*, 203). According to Bennab, post-Almohad man brought germs, which became the cause of all social and political problems of the Arab world since the fourteenth century. This is why it is so difficult now to find forces for the revival (Arab. *an nahda*). "Muslims revere the post- Almohad man through their social heritage, the ingrained habits and customs" (Dziekan, *Złote Stolice Arabów*, 203). This applies to everyone from the simple farmers, pseudo-elites, to the elites. "Obtaining a diploma from a university does not diminish colonosability" (Dziekan, *Złote Stolice Arabów*, 203), and therefore, in fact, even educated society groups are not liberated from legacy of post Almohad man. According to Bennabi, so long as society does not find enough strength to eliminate this negative burden that has overwhelmed it for several centuries, and as long as people will not be able to reconstruct the identity based on true Muslim principles in conjunction with the achievements of modern science, all efforts to balance one's life will have no meaning.

"Man in a Muslim society is not able to progress, to move away from old patterns, is not able to accept new stages of development, create new thoughts, or things. This conservatism is not due to his own will, but is the result of deficiency. The Arab world now needs to put more emphases on morality, sociology and psychology than on the experimental sciences, (which Bennabi describes as "material"), as these, as long as man does not know himself, can inflict a lot of damage. A person must recognize in themselves a "post-almohad man" and have it all the time in mind, striving to solve all the problems besetting the Muslim world. (…) This new type of man is characterized by a helplessness and lack of self-confidence, self-depreciating value, it all adds up to porn to be colonized. (…) Post-Almohad man is only waiting for the colonizer, who will be able to instruct him to play any role (…)" (Dziekan, *Złote Stolice Arabów*, 204–205).

What are the implication of Bennabis theory for Iraq? "Colonisability is not limited in the strictest sense to the colonial experience, but rather it is the state of

a collective consciousness of social impotence. This term is now also used in relation to the countries of the Global South, which were never colonies" (Dziekan, *Złote Stolice Arabów*, 208). The situation of the occupied countries is much different. Colonisability means: emptiness, vacuity, moral decay, fragmentation and dirt. Such features of a society allows for the aggressor's transformation over time into the colonizer. In turn, the lack of "a tendency to be colonized," means the attacker becomes the occupier, which is associated with the existence of external factors such as invasion and an internal resistance force as well as discord towards foreign domination. Thus, for the completion of the tragedy of colonialism there needs to be an external factor (force striving to colonize) and an internal factor. So, according to Bennabi, the colonization of Algeria by France, which began in 1830, was a kind of "destination" – an event that had to occur, because they were satisfied all conditions were favorable (Dziekan, *Złote Stolice Arabów*, 205). The causes of the crisis of Arab national thought lies therefore in the internal factors, reflecting the moral condition and the stage of development of contemporary Arab societies. Is Bennabi's theory applicable to Iraq? USA and the UK under international law were occupying powers, but in the public consciousness did they become colonizers? Has colonisability survived in the mentality of Iraqis since the time of the British Mandate, or perhaps earlier? Among Iraqis there is certainly a strong resistance and opposition to foreign domination, however, over the years, in the absence of significant changes in the internal situation, the sense of resignation, powerlessness and inner emptiness has increased. Should "killing a Post-Almohad Man" (Dziekan, *Złote Stolice Arabów*, 205) be the aim of Arab societies as Bennabi postulated, and only this will allow these societies to develop? Although Bennabi had in mind liberation from auto-stereotype and reconstruction of identity, many still interpret his words literally.

Franz Fanon wrote about the phenomenon of "colonized intelligence." Fanon, perhaps to a greater extent than Bennabi, was aware that he himself is a "product" of the colonial system, however, through his personal drama, unlike the others, he was "sentenced to conciseness." For Fanon, during the Algerian War, the armed struggle was the only way to awaken national consciousness, liberation, especially its spiritual aspect has had its price of blood, – "The aim of the colonized man, involved in a fight, is the removal of foreign domination, liberation (…). Independence is not a word connected with exorcism, but the condition without which there can be no really free people. Holders of all natural resources allow for the reconstruction of society" (Fanon 180).

The West and the Orient remain hostage to mutual stereotypes and auto stereotypes spanning colonial times. According to Edward Said's radicalization in the Muslim Middle East is largely an attempt to find "own self and not-self", in the condition of subordination to Western cultural supremacy in the world, and the effect of propaganda (the so-called "collision of civilizations," endless, irreversible) (Said 1). Among Muslims, the view that only Islam can provide universal peace

and democracy in the true meaning of the sovereignty of states and societies free from foreign influence is common especially among fundamentalists.

For the West, since Napoleonic times, the Orient has been a quasi-mythological formation, which can be possessed, and one should aim to dominate and manage it. There is a dichotomy between the world of "our" civilization and culture, and the world of "others." Iraq was the victim of just such a perception of reality. According to the colonial paradigm, those others could not yet present achievements equal or superior to our own. Therefore, in neo-colonial categories the devastation of Iraqi cultural heritage and devolution of institutions was not seen in the eyes of the perpetrators as an act of cultural vandalism, but an exigence which allows for the construction of a new and better Iraq. Iraq's interim government has been accused not only by the Iraqis, but also by American politicians and scientists, of not preventing the escalation of looting, as well as being unsupportive and lacking inspiration (*No end in sight*). There were only five people speaking Arabic in the interim authorities. Any advice and appeals of numerous experts from the field of national heritage protection were ignored. Those facts only fuel mutual distrust and regrets. According to Said we are dealing with a massive and "aggressive stigmatization of Arabs because of their backwardness, lack of democracy and disregard for women." At the same time these values are being simplified and treated in a one-dimensional manner (Said 2). According to its adversaries, the West with their actions in the Middle East, are betraying all the values that they are aiming to promote. Despite this, the belief that Western democracy is the only desire of the Arab world is still common. Humanity is stuck in the rhetoric of "the collision of civilizations." Categorical and generalized categories such as "West" and "Islam," has led to the creation of an artificial collective identity for a number of significantly different individuals who are thus deprived of their true identity and potential (Said 7). The Middle East is often seen as a pariah of the globalized, democratic world. Therefore, Said called for a profound respect "for the energy and ability of all people of the region who are fighting for what they are and what they would like to become" (7). Even if this fight would result in the ultimate sacrifice. According to Said, Humanism is the only means of resistance against the inhuman practices and injustices.

Like the West, the world of the Orient fell into the trap of the negative effects of globalization, such as social exclusion and the disintegration of traditional structures, which has resulted in the necessity of redefining identity. The importance of cultural heritage for a sense of identity and national unity is not to be underestimated in the face of the overwhelming homogenization of global culture. There is an urgent need for a kind of cultural emancipation. The search for individual and collective identity should be an act of liberation. This process should be conducted voluntarily with respect for the pluralism of cultures and ethnic groups of the region. The culture is an expression of national identity. This collective responsibility is undeniably the foundation of prosperity and freedom. The deficiency of

responsibility is fuelling a culture of fear and anger. The lack of coherence between the social, political and economic systems, as well as the insufficient communication between the ruled and the rulers were what damaged the foundations of authoritarian regimes during the Arab Spring; a simultaneously and multidimensional social deprivation has strengthened the ties of local societies to religion and tradition, often in extreme forms.

Iraqis are still looking for the appropriate forms of expression for their aspirations. "Believers do not rise to pray during the night in order to find themselves and forget the world; they do so to find themselves, to fill the daylight hours with meaning, and to reform the world" (Said 7). Arab and Muslim societies require a "cultural Arab Spring." This kind of awakening is only possible in a society that is responsible, free from illusions, self-critical, introspective, but not deprived of optimism and imagination. Often this means going through the painful process of national reconciliation, which leads to the liberation from intellectual and cultural colonialism but can frequently be stigmatizing. "The rebirth of Arab existence is possible only if one breathes new life into the forgotten patterns, symbols and cultural landscapes. However, the Arab world is now undergoing another crisis, which limits awareness and imagination, and endangers the Arab identity" (Ramadan 3). The Arab revolution has to make acts much larger than just the overthrowing of dictators, it must get rid of "shackles forged in the smithy of the human soul" (Said 4). Iraqis often claim that with the improvement of the security situation in Iraq, the Arab Spring will come to Mesopotamia. The question is, whether "the revolution will not devour their own children." According to Franz Fanon any postcolonial revolution, including the struggle for identity, is carried out by the means of armed struggle, but at the same time "any act of aggression is an act of suicide" (Fanon 180), also for the Iraqi people.

Paraphrasing the words of Abd Al Aziz Ad Duri, we can say that, still, despite the grassroots efforts of the population, the Iraqi national movement, and with it civil society, are at the romantic stage. Iraqis seem to be overwhelmingly aware of the negative phenomena in their country – such as nepotism, corruption, poverty – but they seem to ignore their implications for future generations and tolerate their existence. Continuously living in life-threatening situations, through the past three wars, has led to indifference to violence and emotional and mental problems that affects entire generations. Deprived of the opportunity to meet their basic needs, Iraqis have significantly reduced their expectations of politicians. Increasingly, you can feel the longing for the former regime, Iraqis sometimes even publicly state that Iraq needs a dictator.

Pervasive violence effectively limits the aspirations of the Iraqi people. Although national awareness may have been transformed, there is a need for outstanding individuals or so called "positive deviants," ready to initiate these changes. The society in Iraq after *al-hazima of 2003* needs its own *an nahda*.

The main barrier for the development of civil society in Iraq is a lack of political maturity among the establishment. Iraqi society needs to go through the process

of national reconciliation, but it is impossible as long as the priorities of people are not priorities of elites The Iraqi government seems to duplicate the patterns of the past, treating the ideas of civil society and democracy and playing of the cards of sectarianism. Conversion requires the political landscape of Iraq to have efficient institutions, not based on religious and ethnic divisions. Above all, citizens need to feel at least a modicum of economic security. Social change must be linked to political reform. The biggest obstacle to the development of civil society in Iraq is the sense of responsibility to the family or tribe and not to the community, a lack of awareness of the common destiny and finally, most importantly, a lack of civic courage. As long as the Iraqis do not overcome the difficulties of daily life, it is impossible to re-awaken aspiration, and with it the transformation of mentality, and the social and political manners necessary for the effective development of civil society structures.

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