

The Sounds of Silence: Iraq's Missing Voices from the Sanctions Period

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A thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the

Requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN INTERNATIONAL STUDIES: MIDDLE EAST

University of Washington

2019

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

Jackson School of International Studies

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**Abstract**

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Using personal interviews and works of art, I bring into focus the suffering of Iraq's people who lived through the sanctions period (1990-2003) under the regime of Saddam Hussein. I examine the effects of the sanction's regime on their everyday lives regarding family, the economy, medical care, education, and culture. My research centers on the presentation of events from the Iraqi point of view, adding a new perspective to existing articles and books written by non-Iraqis who were not affected by sanctions personally. By providing historical background as a foundation, I demonstrate the ways in which Iraq and its people fell into a downward spiral after Saddam Hussein took control in 1979. Through primary research, I examine corrupt acts committed by the United States and Iraq that began during the presidency of Ronald Reagan and continued throughout the sanctions period. I argue that, in view of this oral history research, the conditions in Iraq during this period were far more devastating than previously acknowledged. Finally, I illustrate how the United States government and the media exacerbated the struggles of the Iraqi people by willfully neglecting them.



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## Preface

The events preceding and following the first Gulf War were always on the periphery of my life as I grew up. As years passed the daily happenings between the United States and Saddam Hussein became as commonplace as the Cheerios commercials on my television set. Years later when it came time to select a subject for my master's thesis I never thought it would be Iraq. However, when my advisor suggested the topic United Nations sanctions and Iraq I was intrigued. I liked the idea of writing on a subject that had yet to be sufficiently covered and I'd enjoyed the thought of presenting it from the perspective of the citizens of Iraq even more. Throughout my educational journey into the world of Middle Eastern history I had discovered the United States is quite prone to skewing historical facts in their favor. This was not the U.S. I was brought up to believe in; therefore, discussing the government's true involvement in the disintegration of Iraq became my priority.

My thesis concentrates on the personal narratives of Iraqi citizens regarding sanctions placed on Iraq by the United Nations in response to the regime of Saddam Hussein during three major incursions: his invasion of Kuwait, the first Gulf War, and the 2003 invasion by a U.S.-led coalition. It also provides context explaining the formation of the Middle East and Iraq-U.S. relations. Finally, the piece delves into Iraq's infrastructure and heritage and the ways their destruction has affected the people of Iraq. In my two years researching and writing this piece I met many wonderful Iraqi expatriates who probably wondered why this American woman was so interested in telling their stories. The insights that I have gained from everyone who contributed to this piece, whether by interview, artwork, and advising has brought the real Iraq

into focus for me for the first time. Choosing to look at history from the perspective of the “opponent” has shown me the beauty of the country and its people that has been extinguished through years of war.

Finally, I’d like to thank everyone who volunteered their time and privacy to share their memories with me: Yahya and Marwa, Reem, Nada and Ahmed, and Zaid -all the way from Baghdad! Everything you shared will continue to educate others which I feel is a great gift. Whether we met in person, through phone calls and email, or via WhatsApp at odd hours, I could never have written anything without all of you! A very gracious thank you also goes out to each artist who allowed me to include their pieces in my work: Mahmoud Obaidi, Jamal Penjweny, Dia Al-Azzawi, and Nicole Schulman. All your work added an entirely different level to the sentiment regarding the suffering of Iraq’s people that I could never expressed through words. The biggest thank you of all goes to Dr. Arbella bet-Shlimon for not only suggesting this topic to me but guiding me along the way. I knew from the beginning you would challenge me to get my best work, but how you did it while keeping it stress free is pure magic. Thank you to Dr. Paula Holmes-Eber for being my first committee member and whose anthropology course came in extremely handy for this project. Lastly, to my husband Jay who had to read, listen to, and discuss topics that he knew extraordinarily little about against his will, I appreciate the help and yes there will be a test.



# PART ONE

## Introduction

I often equate analyzing conflicts in Middle East with reading a book from the Game of Thrones series by George R.R. Martin. The plot is always complex, thought-provoking, and his characters lack a clear delineation between good and evil. Characteristically, Martin's subjects exude both attributes leaving it to the reader, not the author, to judge them accordingly. Martin's novels contain countless pivotal moments rendering them nearly impossible to break down into a few central themes. Instead he weaves his plotlines together layering them as he goes to build a strong foundation. Skipping a chapter or even a few pages alters the reader's perception of the story affecting the overall context. However, unlike a novel, conflicts in the real world have consequences which impact real people. Whenever voices are left unheard, the historical narrative of a conflict is left with a gap making it problematic to decipher fact from fiction.

Although Iraq's history started thousands of years ago, the purpose of my thesis is not to repackage historical events and present them from my perspective. Instead it is intended to focus on the people of Iraq by sharing their personal accounts and memories to help shrink the gap in their nation's narrative regarding life under U.N. sanctions. Each of my interlocutors displayed a different level of openness regarding their experiences and all chose to use their own names. The only person who opted for a pseudonym was Zaid. Unlike the others, Zaid still resides in Baghdad and while he is an artist in his spare time, his day job is of a diplomatic nature. Despite the number of years that have passed since these events, Iraq can still be dangerous and it's usually best not to draw too much attention to oneself.

Along the way I discovered that despite each interlocutor having different experiences, that many of them shared similarities. For example, each person has a moment as they are recounting a memory when I could feel time stopped for them. It was never anything that was pointed out to me as their defining moment when they realized whatever was to come next would never be as it was before. I'm not even sure if they were aware of it as it was happening, but nevertheless it's there.

As I listened to or read each of my interlocutor's accounts regarding numerous aspects of daily life in Iraq, emotion always abounded. Sometimes it was theirs, sometimes it was mine, and occasionally was both of us at the same time. The best and worst part of this experience was never knowing what to expect. For example, in my interview with Reem one minute she was recalling a memory that invoked a feeling of sadness and in the same breath she would switch over to a crazy story about making Pepsi with dates!

Some memories made me angry at the situation being discussed while others made me feel ashamed for having such a good life and never fully appreciating it. Then there were the accounts that just made me uncomfortable because I wasn't sure how to feel. Typically, this happened when I interviewed Yahya. Since relocating to the United States, he has been interviewed about his experiences in Iraq several times by different media outlets. Therefore, he wasn't as inclined to be as emotional even during the worst moments of his accounts. Often I felt as though he was observing me to see my responses, but that is pure speculation on my part.

Along with my interviews, is the history of Iraq and details concerning the country's conflicts with Iran and the United States to provide the necessary contextual foundation of the events surrounding the U.N. sanctions period. I have also included works of art created by Iraqi artists which offer an alternate method to examine the plight of the Iraqi people. Like the

interviews, each section is intended to do more than tell a story. I have attempted to present each portion in such a way that it invokes feelings from the reader. Whether it be laughter, anger, sadness, or surprise, I feel to utterly understand their experiences one must do more than simply read about it. It's also my hope that the reader will be able to recognize portions of themselves with one of my subjects or be able to associate a subject with a friend or family member. I believe if a person can relate a far-off situation with that of their own life maybe the next conflict, like Yemen, will be handled better.

I have chosen to arrange my research into three parts: The Invasion of Kuwait, the First Gulf War, and Sanctions and Social Change. This is my attempt to simply an extremely complicated topic while attempting to focus on the humanity. I also wanted to challenge the traditional narrative constructed by the United States government's culpability in Iraq's struggles. It is important to take into consideration most works previously written on this topic are from the outside looking in. Simply put, they are by authors and scholars outside of Iraq who have based their research primarily on western documentation. While these sources do offer an important piece of the puzzle they do not reflect the feelings of the Iraqi people or a deeper understanding of how devastating the situation inside Iraq was.

As I began conducting my oral history research I inadvertently yet skillfully employed the snowball method as my technique of discovering and contacting my interlocutors.<sup>1</sup> I knew that I would locate people for my histories however, gender, age, place of birth, social status, and religious sect was the variable that could take my research in multiple directions. I did not start with the intention of acquiring a certain number of interlocutors. The Iraqi sanctions period is a

<sup>1</sup> The snowball method refers to starting with something small like a handful of snow then continuously adding increased snow until the desired size is acquired. In my research contacting one interlocuter led to making another contact and so on in a chain. Goodman, Leo A. "Snowball Sampling." *The Annals of Mathematical Statistics* 32, no. 1 (1961): 148-70. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2237615>.

delicate topic for those who experienced it. I felt it was best to start my research on the internet or by gathering names from people I already knew. I wanted a direct yet light method of approach to make people feel at ease. If I sent an email to someone I did not know then they could choose to respond or not without feeling awkward. Interlocutors I attempted to contact through friends, had the added benefit of knowing their friends trusted me. Although, some attempts resulted with a 'no' or no response at all, such as the few mosques and Kurdish organizations I emailed, the rest were successful.

When I began collecting my oral histories they came to me in one of three forms: via personal interview, like Yahya and Reem A., via emails in English and Arabic like Nada S. and Ahmed A., or in the form of WhatsApp messages and calls like Zaid. Except for Reem A. who consented and interviewed in the same day because she was unplanned, all consent was gathered beforehand via email or WhatsApp message. The same holds true for each artist I've used in my thesis. Contact and consent was acquired via email or WhatsApp after researching their artwork. The only artist I was unable to reach personally was Dia Azzawi, whom was graciously contacted by Mahmoud Obaidi on my behalf to obtain his permission to include his work.<sup>2</sup>

Continuing forward with my snowball approach, I never attempted to control my interlocutors. I had a set of basic questions inquiring about their age during the sanctions and what their life was like, but otherwise anything shared was entirely at their discretion. I never inquired about the interlocutor's ethnicities or religious sect. I'd like to say it was in the name of good research, but in all honesty I didn't care. My definition of the 'voices of Iraq' includes everyone born and raised during the sanctions period. The one exception was my attempt to contact the Kurdish community. I wanted to gain as many perspectives as possible and this was

<sup>2</sup> All methods of consent, interviews, and interlocutor identification comply with the standards of the Oral History Association. <https://www.oralhistory.org/>

one group I was concerned I may overlook. However, it's impossible to represent every group. Therefore, supporters of Saddam Hussein, Iraq's upper class, and the country's rural population are just a few of the groups not present in my research.

The interlocuters and the artists share similar origins but vary by age and current locations. Except for Zaid, who preferred the use of a pseudonym, and Yahya Algharib, who has used his full name in published interviews, each interlocuter will only be referred to by their first name. Yahya, age 52, lived in the city of Basra in southern Iraq until he and his brother relocated to the Seattle area in 1994. Yahya's wife Marwa S., age 33, left Baghdad and relocated to the Seattle area with her family when she was seven years old. Reem A., age 36, remained in Baghdad until after her college years before relocating to the Seattle area. Nada S., age 46, and her husband Ahmed A., age 48, just recently relocated to San Antonio, Texas. Zaid, age 46, is also from Baghdad, but unlike the others he never relocated outside the country. Among the artists Jamal Penjweny, age 38, is the youngest and the only Kurdish-Iraqi artist. Currently he resides in Iraq. His predecessors opted to leave Baghdad. Dia Azzawi, age 80, relocated to London in 1976 and Mahmoud Obaidi, age 53, relocated to Canada in 1991. The lone American and female artist is Nicole Schulman, mid 40's approx., was born in the Bronx in New York City and currently resides in Brooklyn.

Finally, a brief explanation regarding the title of my thesis. For slightly more than two years I have been developing my thesis. Throughout all that time I could never find a title I felt adequately described my work while invoking the emotional aspects I wanted it to. Finally, the day before my thesis defense, one of my advisors asked for a "finalized" copy of my work. Luckily I woke up with song lyrics repeating in my head and in five minutes I had my title. I will

end my introduction by sharing the lyrics that inspired me: Simon & Garfunkel's "The Sound of Silence."

...People talking without speaking  
people hearing without listening  
people writing songs that voices never share  
no one dare  
disturb the sound of silence.  
"Fools" said I, "you do not know  
silence like a cancer grow  
hear my words that I might teach you"...<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> "The Sound of Silence" Paul Simon Official Site. Accessed March 17, 2019.  
<https://www.paulsimon.com/track/the-sound-of-silence-8/>.  
Originally published in 1964.

## Part Two

### Irreconcilable Differences: Memoirs and Moments from the Iraqi Citizens

#### Caught Between Saddam Hussein and the United States

On August 2, 1990 Iraq invaded Kuwait. Their occupation lasted seven months and brought condemnation from all the major world powers.<sup>4</sup> In their reaction to Saddam's drastic move, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 660 which initiated the sanctions period. It was also the first of twelve to be passed that year regarding Iraq.<sup>5</sup> Initially these resolutions intended to draw a line in the sand demonstrating to Iraq that their invasion wouldn't be tolerated. Yet, this resolution proved to be ineffective since Iraq made no attempt to withdraw from Kuwait. This prompted harsher economic sanctions starting with Resolution 661 and the passage of Resolution 678 allowing the United States to use "all necessary means" to force Iraq out of Kuwait.<sup>6</sup>

As the military chess match between the United States and Iraq began play itself out, the eyes of the world were focused on the fate of Kuwait. In the United States many people, including

<sup>4</sup> Mudiam, Prithvi Ram. *India and the Middle East*. London; New York: New York: British Academic Press: Distributed by St. Martin's Press, 1994; Tisdall, Simon. "Superpowers Unite on Iraq." *The Guardian (1959-2003)* (London (UK)), 1999.

<sup>5</sup> "U.N. Security Council Resolution 660." *The Times of India (1861-current)* (Mumbai, India), February 16, 1991. Resolution 660 contained four elements including: (1) Condemns the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, (2) Demands Iraq withdrawal all its forces immediately into the positions they were previously located on 1 August 1990, (3) Calls upon Iraq and Kuwait to begin immediate and intensive negotiations for the resolution of their differences, especially those set of the League of Arab States, and (4) Decides to meet again as necessary to ensure compliance with present resolutions.

<sup>6</sup>"U.N. Security Council Resolution 661, August 6, 1990." *American - Arab Affairs*, no. 33 (1990): 144; "UN Security Council Resolution 678 Authorizing the Use of Force in the Gulf 29 November 1990." *Arab Studies Quarterly* 13, no. 1/2 (1991): 175.

myself, had never even heard of Kuwait until now. Yet the U.S. showed almost as much concern for this tiny kingdom as it did for the U.S. troops preparing to retake it. Meanwhile, no one was looking at Iraq. At least not at its citizens, the majority of who were about to become caught in the middle of a conflict they didn't expect or want. The answer of how each nation came to this point has never been up for debate. Yet, when it comes to pinpointing an event responsible for triggering Iraq's problems opinions vary. While I and all my interlocuters pinpointed the same event, the conclusion of the Iran-Iraq War, as the foundation of Iraq's downfall, some scholars, like Dina Khoury, insist Iraq's fall originated with the Iran-Iraq War.<sup>7</sup> I believe that both perspectives have merit and reflect the vantage point from which they stem.

This part reconstructs Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, the First Gulf War, and the sanctions period (August 6, 1990-May 22, 2003) through a mixture of historical context and personal accounts . The men and women I spoke with disclosed various aspects of the suffering and the challenges that most Iraqis experienced during these events. Furthermore, their recollections extended beyond the commonly reported accounts of Saddam Hussein's regime, Iraq's severely damaged national infrastructure, poverty, or oil. Their stories provide insight into the daily lives of the individuals who found ways to endure despite shifting economic, political, social, and cultural challenges. Those who were children during the invasion are unable to recall what life was like in Iraq before it became a war zone. Even those who could remember only did so by repeating stories told to them by their parents and grandparents. Suddenly women who were educated to enter the workplace and men who spent years cultivating the proper social status to marry, woke up one day to a vastly different Iraq. Now women were encouraged to remain home and secure marriages like their mothers while men became defined by their ability to provide an income.

<sup>7</sup> Khoury, Dina Rizk. *Iraq in Wartime : Soldiering, Martyrdom, and Remembrance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Although not all my interlocutors experienced the same degree of hardship, this period affected everyone not granting any age, gender, or social class immunity from its devastating impacts.

## **The Invasion of Kuwait**

**“Politics is when you say you are going to do one thing while intending to do another. Then you do neither what you said nor what you intended.” -Saddam Hussein<sup>8</sup>**

During the 1980's the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf considered Iraq a buffer against the newly formed Islamic Republic of Iran.<sup>9</sup> Border disputes regarding the Khuzestan Province and the east bank of the Shatt al-Arab had been a common occurrence between the two countries for years.<sup>10</sup> However, mounting tensions in the region incited Saddam Hussein to invade Iran initiating the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988). It was the aftermath of this event that started the domino effect that eventually lead up to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. So, what historical events carried Iraq to this point?

After World War II, Middle Eastern countries began shifting in one of three directions: towards the United States in the west, towards the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R)

<sup>8</sup> Patrick Cockburn, "Saddam Hussein: Deluded and Defiant a Dictator Awaits His Nemesis," *Independent*, March 6, 2003, , accessed October 20, 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/politics/saddam-hussein-deluded-and-defiant-a-dictator-awaits-his-nemesis-121766.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Takeyh, Ray. "The Iran-Iraq War: A Reassessment." *Middle East Journal* 64, no. 3 (2010): pg. 373. <http://www.jstor.org.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/stable/40783105>.

<sup>10</sup> Simons, G. L. *Iraq: From Sumer to Post-Saddam*. 3rd ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

in the east, or toward the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)<sup>11</sup>. As the Cold War began to settle in, alliances became particularly important. Many countries like Egypt and Iran ended up on multiple sides due to agendas imposed by the superpowers and the leader of their country. Tensions in the Middle East began to reach their boiling point by the late 1970's. However, it was the Iranian Revolution (1979) that pushed foreign relations with the Middle East beyond the precipice and created openings for a dictator like Saddam Hussein to rise.

Iraq's war with Iran influenced the creation of the Gulf Cooperation Council or GCC. Created in 1981, it consisted of six Arab monarchies: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.<sup>12</sup> Predisposed by the changing political environment in the region, a delicate relationship was formed among these countries to facilitate decisions that concerned them all. It was also intended to protect them from falling victim to the agendas of Iraq or Iran since they were literally caught in the middle. By 1988 the Iran-Iraq war ended in a ceasefire with both sides claiming the victory. However, it was Iraq and not Iran that found itself in a precarious position.

When Saddam Hussein decided to invade Iran, he needed to borrow money from outside countries to support his war resulting in an odious debt he could not repay.<sup>13</sup> Countries, such as France, The United States, Britain, Russia, China, Japan, Italy, and Saudi Arabia, elected to

<sup>11</sup> Movement, Non-Aligned. "16th Summit of Heads of State or Government of the Non-Aligned Movement." *Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran* (2012): 26-31.

<sup>12</sup> The original member states of the GCC have not changed since its formation in 1981. Although discussion has occurred regarding entrance by other countries such as Jordan, Morocco, and Iraq, its membership currently has not changed. "GCC Discusses Economic Plan for Jordan, Morocco." *Kuwait Times*, 2011, Kuwait Times, Sept 12, 2011. [https://alliance-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/primo-explore/fulldisplay?docid=TN\\_bcrc266745119&context=PC&vid=UW&search\\_scope=all&tab=default\\_tab&lang=en\\_US](https://alliance-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/primo-explore/fulldisplay?docid=TN_bcrc266745119&context=PC&vid=UW&search_scope=all&tab=default_tab&lang=en_US)

<sup>13</sup> As defined by the Collins Dictionary an odious debt refers a debt contracted by a despotic regime, not for the needs or in the interests of the state, but rather to strengthen itself, to suppress a popular insurrection, etc., this debt is insufferable for the people of the entire state. This debt does not bind the nation; it is a debt of the regime ... and consequently it falls with the demise of the regime. <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/odious-debt>

completely forgive or reduce Iraq's debt affording them the opportunity to rebuild their economy.<sup>14</sup> Still, one significant ally expected their financial investment in Iraq to be repaid: Kuwait.

Saddam Hussein's rage quickly found an outlet in Kuwait. With his country in fiscal crisis it was now his responsibility to mend Iraq's sagging economy and what better way to accomplish this task than using their greatest export: oil. While Iraq was at war with Iran, their drilling operations in the Rumalia oil fields declined. Meanwhile, Kuwait's oil production surged. This outpouring prompted Kuwait to make a request of OPEC to increase the country's total oil production ceiling by 50% to 1.35 million bpd.<sup>15</sup> Furious over Kuwait's success, Saddam Hussein called an emergency meeting of the Arab League to complain. In this meeting he claimed that by depressing the world market with their excessive oil supply, Kuwait had cost his country's economy as much if not more than what Iraq owed them from the war.<sup>16</sup> It was estimated that between 1985 and 1989, Iraq lost US\$14 billion a year due to Kuwait's oil price strategy.<sup>17</sup> However, Middle East experts such as Marvin Zonis claimed Saddam Hussein's charges are merely a "smokescreen to disguise Iraq's more ambitious intentions."<sup>18</sup> Receiving no support from the international community that he had just finished protecting, Saddam Hussein decided to take matters into his own hands.

<sup>14</sup> Weiss, Martin A. A. "Iraq's Debt Relief: Procedure and Potential Implications for International Debt Relief." In *International Debt in Individual Countries*, 123-41. Nova Science Publishers, 2011.

<sup>15</sup> "OPEC pressures Kuwait to moderate quota demand", *New Strait Times*, 7 June 1989

<sup>16</sup> Hayes, Thomas c. "Confrontation in the Gulf; The Oilfield Lying Below the Iraq-Kuwait Dispute". *The New York Times*. (3 September 1990);

<sup>17</sup> Charette, Duane. "Iraq: Destitute and Crumbling or Middle East Power Bent on World Domination." *The Manitoban* (Winnipeg, CA), February 5, 2003, 20th ed., News Features sec. Accessed November 2017. <http://hdl.handle.net/10719/1467845>.

<sup>18</sup> Hayes, Thomas c. "Confrontation in the Gulf; The Oilfield Lying Below the Iraq-Kuwait Dispute". *The New York Times*. (3 September 1990). Marvin Zonis is an American political economist and emeritus professor at the University of Chicago who focuses on Middle Eastern politics and history.

When Saddam Hussein entered Kuwait, no one expected it, not even the people of Iraq. In 1990 Ahmed A. was 19-year-old cadet at the Baghdad Police Academy. He lived and trained on site except the one weekend a month he returned to his family's home in the city to visit his parents, 4 brothers, and 5 sisters. After receiving his account, written in Arabic, I sat down with my limited, but growing language ability, and started translating. Among the stories he shared with me was his description of how he and other Iraqis learned of the invasion:

The Iraqi citizen had no role in foreign and military policy during the rule of Saddam Hussein. One day we came to the news of the invasion of Kuwait, the entry of the Iraqi people, and the Iraqi army, but only Saddam's Republican Guard [knew in advance].<sup>19</sup>

While his surprise about the invasion is apparent by his wording, it's what is not being said that stands out more. Though Ahmed comes across as disappointed, he is not shocked, insinuating this behavior was typical of Saddam Hussein. One of the common threads I noticed throughout my interviews was the awareness that something just wasn't right about Saddam Hussein's behavior. In previous research, I have found that this is same observation many Cubans made about Fidel Castro.<sup>20</sup>

Also living in Baghdad at the time of the invasion was Nada S., a 17-year-old high school student. Nada was the product of a middle-class family and she lived with her parents and her younger brother and sister. The Iraq of Nada's birth was a result of Ba'ath regime which began a hard drive towards modernization in 1968. Their ideology was secular, nationalist, and Arab Socialist with a drive to develop by bringing about their own Arab renaissance. Various

<sup>19</sup> A, Ahmed. "Sanctions Thesis Interview" Interview by Heather A. Rodriguez. May 21, 2018; The Republican Guard were the elite troops of the Iraqi army and reported to Saddam Hussein directly. Each soldier was a volunteer who received better training, equipment, and compensation than the traditional army.

"US Marines and the Republican Guard" BBC News.  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/world/02/military\\_fact\\_files/v3\\_special\\_forces/html/](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/world/02/military_fact_files/v3_special_forces/html/)

<sup>20</sup> Rodriguez, Heather, "Castro, The Cold War and its Effects Upon the Cuban Family" (research paper, University of Texas at San Antonio, 2013).

countries such as Egypt, Turkey, Syria, India, and Yugoslavia, who had previously made their own nationalist movements, were examples for the Ba'ath Party who favored nationalist ideologies like the Non-Aligned Movement and Pan-Arabism. During the late 1950's charismatic leaders like Egypt's second president Gamal Abdel Nasser (1954-1970) gained popularity enticing a union with Syria. However, after a few years Syria felt its collaboration with Egypt was trading one imperialist ruler for another.<sup>21</sup> Syria's break with Egypt did not affect Iraq directly, yet it displayed the difficulty with the idea of Pan-Arabism could be. I feel this was one factor among many that helped divide the Ba'ath Party into two groups thereby encouraging Saddam Hussein to concentrate on Iraq even more.

During the 1970's women's education became a priority in Iraq. Statutes put in place by Ba'ath Party ensured universities were built, scholarships made available, and government systems were installed allowing women to have families in addition to attending school or work. Literacy campaigns began in the rural areas along with a raised awareness towards women's health and hygiene.<sup>22</sup> While these changes did alter the lives of some Iraqi women by allowing them to advance socially through educational and labor opportunities once only afforded to men, it could hardly be likened to the Feminist Movement happening in the United States.

At its core, Iraq was still a highly paternalistic country that had recently experienced an oil boom resulting in labor shortages. Therefore, to draw a wider base of support Saddam Hussein embraced the façade of egalitarianism for women.<sup>23</sup> The only real beneficiaries of these

<sup>21</sup> Ginat, Rami. *Syria and the Doctrine of Arab Neutralism: From Independence to Dependence*. Portland, Or.: Sussex Academic Press, 2005; Dawisha, A. I. *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003.

<sup>22</sup>Wing, Joel "Musings on Iraq: Iraqi Women Before And After The 2003 Invasion, Interview With Prof Nadjie Al-Ali Univ of London" Blogspot, December 23, 2013  
<http://musingsoniraq.blogspot.com/2013/12/iraqi-women-before-and-after-2003.html>

<sup>23</sup> Al-Ali, Nadjie Sadig. *Iraqi Women: Untold Stories from 1948 to the Present*. London; New York: Zed Books, 2007.

liberal social policies were upper class and the upper middle-class women who had already been privy to this lifestyle. To the newly formed middle-class, these changes mostly brought disputes regarding the traditional gender roles of men and women, and for the highest percentage, women located in the rural areas, these shifts in policy were hardly felt if at all.<sup>24</sup>

Yet, there was one area that effected all women equally; the toll of the war on the men in their lives. While I cannot confirm if the effects on husbands, fiancés, sons, and brothers involved were equal across classes, the overall impact was intensely felt. In her recollection, Nada expressed to me what it was like to go through one of these situations:

At that time, I had a hobby writing letters through post mail to people who published their address in magazines. I was exchanging letters with a guy from Kuwait and in the last letter we decided to meet in person. He was going to come all the way to Baghdad and meet me in person. We even exchanged photos. He was very handsome, and we talked once on the phone. We had so much in common! It was 15 days before the invasion [the] last time I heard from him. His name was S. S. and he came from the same tribe as I [did]. I was really looking forward to meeting him...and he was very happy that we were going to finally meet after one year of exchanging letters, but I never heard from him since then. When I heard about the invasion I was very angry and confused and wondering can we do that?<sup>25</sup>

I've often contemplated why this story? What I initially filed away as just another example of how Saddam Hussein ruined the lives of the Iraqi people soon took on a bigger connotation. Those who have lived through a traumatic event such as war all seem to share one common attribute: a line of demarcation. This line represents the exact moment their lives transformed into two parts: everything that came before the incident and everything that came after. This experience is often viewed by those it has touched in one of two ways. It's either a time to forget or dwell on depending if the impact on their life was good or bad. Although I cannot claim to know Nada's feelings regarding this subject, I suspect this was a defining

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> S., Nada. Sanctions Thesis Interview" Interview by Heather A. Rodriguez. May 21, 2018

moment causing her to reflect on what might have been. I believe the ability to grasp this concept is fundamental to understanding the plight of the Iraqi people.

In contrast to the invasion experiences in Baghdad were those that took place in southern Iraq. The region and society featured a complex religious history and the Basra's proximity to Iran was only the beginning of its troubles. The city of Basra is within 85 miles of international borders with Kuwait to the south and Iran to the east, and it is a port on the Shatt al-Arab waterway leading to the Persian Gulf. Shiites, predominately located in southern Iraq, form the country's religious majority comprising an estimated 60% out of a population of 40 million people.<sup>26</sup> Yet, despite their numbers Shiites have been minimalized throughout Iraq's history while enduring fabricated links to Iran. These and other repressive tactics by the ruling Sunni minority have led to a lack of representation in positions of power until 2003.<sup>27</sup>

Iraq's Shia population has been frequently mislabeled as separatists or *shu'ubis* by the Sunni community.<sup>28</sup> Whereas Sunnis who were Arab nationalists favored unification with all Arab nations, Shiites tended to view this unification as an attempt to keep them at a minority status.<sup>29</sup> Years of struggles with the Sunnis eventually led the Shiites to support groups like Iraq's

<sup>26</sup> Holden, Stacey E., "The Secular Roots of a Religious Divide in Contemporary Iraq'," *Origins: Current Events in Historical Perspective*, November 2015, accessed October 28, 2018, <http://origins.osu.edu/article/secular-roots-religious-divide-contemporary-iraq>; "Iraq Population (LIVE)." Iraq Population (2018) - Worldometers. July 1, 2018. Accessed October 28, 2018. <http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/iraq-population/>.

<sup>27</sup> Cockburn, A. "Iraq's Oppressed Majority (Shiite Muslims)." *Smithsonian* 34, no. 9 (2003): 98-105.

<sup>28</sup> The term *shu'ubis* refers to the *shu'ubiyya* movement that appeared within Islam in the eighth century and involved predominately Persians and Aramaeans who protested against the privileged positions of the Arabs within Islam. Throughout Iraq's history the term has been reincarnated several times in connection with the rise of Arab Nationalism. Its definition has changed over time depending on who the term is meant to depict and who says it. For example, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the term referred to Shi'ites, later it referred to members of the Communist Party or anyone against Pan-Arabism, and when spoken by Saddam Hussein the term referred to Shia Islamists or anyone connected to Persia or Iran since they were viewed as the destroyers of Arabic values.

Nakash, Yitzhak. *Reaching for Power : The Shi'a in the Modern Arab World*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006. Pg.85-90.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 85

Communist Party to make their voices heard. Although this decision still made them unpopular, the Shiites couldn't anticipate the impact of this decision or the backlash Saddam Hussein would unleash.

The mid 1950's into the 1960's was a political whirlwind in the Middle East. It was thought that Arab unity could be reached under the leadership of Egypt's president Gamal Abdel Nasser. Therefore, when Egypt and Syria decided to unite politically in 1958, forming the United Arab Republic (UAR), the Ba'ath Party offered total support. However, by 1961 it became clear that Nasser's political agenda was different than anticipated.

Nasser's call for the disbandment of all political parties, including the Ba'ath who had supported him, and the implementation of his Socialist policies produced a Syrian coup pulling them out of the UAR in 1961.<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile, Iraq's Ba'ath Party supported the toppling of their monarchy instead favoring the rule of nationalist Abd al-Karim Qasim (r. 1958-1963). His decision to align with Iraq's Communist Party could have been an opportunity for the Shiites to gain power, but by 1963 Qasim was killed and replaced. Also, Iraq's dream of Arab unity would never come to fruition after the failure of the United Arab Republic (UAR) in 1961.<sup>31</sup> Eventually stresses caused by backing leaders who worked against the Ba'ath Party and infighting between the party's founders and newest leaders caused the group to fracture in 1966. As a result, the Ba'ath Party splintered into two parties: one in Syria and one in Iraq.

With new ideals infiltrating traditional Ba'athist ideology in Iraq, Saddam Hussein slowly began taking control of the Ba'ath party finally declaring himself Iraq's president in 1979.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Aburish, Said K. *Nasser: The Last Arab*. London: Duckworth, 2005. pg. 162-163

<sup>31</sup>Palmer, Monte. "The United Arab Republic: An Assessment of Its Failure." *Middle East Journal* 20, no. 1 (1966): 50-67.

<sup>32</sup> Simons, G. L. *Iraq: From Sumer to Post-Saddam*. 3rd ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

Infamous by now for his domineering and suspicious nature, Saddam Hussein viewed Iraq's Shia population as a threat and treated them as such. Soon political parties such as the Dawah Party (f.1958) began inciting the Shia community to demand their own Islamic state within Iraq's borders.

Further aggravating to Saddam Hussein were the politics of Iran.<sup>33</sup> Tensions began to escalate when the Iranian Revolution of 1979 unfolded. When Ayatollah Khomeini returned from exile he installed a theocratic, *Velayat-e Faqih* style government (political ideology combining government with sharia law headed by an Islamic Jurist [*fiqah*] providing guardianship [*velayat*] over a nation.). Mohammad Reza Shah, who remained in power with the assistance of the United States and Britain, was replaced.<sup>34</sup> Khomeini desired a return to what he considered Islam's fundamental tenets thereby making himself the highest religious authority or the Supreme Leader.<sup>35</sup> Meanwhile, the Ba'ath party secular by nature, morphed into a new political ideology related to and pursued by Saddam Hussein thereby coining the term "Saddamism."<sup>36</sup> From this moment forward life for Iraq's Shia population went from unequal to a fight for survival.

Yahya and his wife Marwa stem from the Shia community in Iraq. I first met them in December 2017 during my winter break from school. Together they manage the Iraqi

<sup>33</sup> Cockburn, A. "Iraq's Oppressed Majority (Shiite Muslims)." *Smithsonian* 34, no. 9 (2003): 98-105.

<sup>34</sup> Iranian Government Constitution, English Text Archived 2013-08-19 at the Wayback Machine. | iranonline.com <https://web.archive.org/web/20130819052822/http://www.iranonline.com/iran/iran-info/Government/constitution.html>

<sup>35</sup> Khomeini, Ruhollah. Translated by: Algar, Hamid. *Islamic Government: Governance of the Jurist*. Manor Books, Mizan Press. Alhoda, UK. 2002

<sup>36</sup> Bengio, Ofra. *Saddam's Word: The Political Discourse in Iraq*. Oxford University Press, 2011. Pg.208 The term "Saddamism" was first used in the Iraqi daily *Babil* which defined it as: "Ba' thism—differed from all other earlier forms of discourse in the Arab world in the following two ways: its "mission" was not limited to a short period but would extend over "hundreds of years," and it represents the 'no' project [mashru' la]"—that is, saying "no" to the American epoch (zaman). The new era of "Saddamism," in turn, was different from the earlier period of being "dragged along" (tab'iyya) by foreign influences."

Community Center of Washington (IRCCW), which Yahya established in 1999. As an Iraqi community advocate he is able to ease the struggles of Iraqi immigrants in his community trying to resettle in the United States as he and his brother did in 1994.<sup>37</sup> In the course of our interview he recalled distinct parts of his life living as a Shia under Saddam Hussein's regime; however, some of the more intricate details of his involvements were not mentioned. I suspect this is a result of his having been interviewed by local media outlets several times throughout the years. Therefore, I incorporated these interviews into my research to present as much of his firsthand experiences as possible.

Yahya Algharib was born in Basra in 1967 to a Kurdish Iraqi mother and a southern Iraqi father with 4 brothers and 3 sisters.<sup>38</sup> In 1984, Yahya was close to finishing his college degree. When faced with the decision to fight in Saddam Hussein's army during the Iran-Iraq War, he refused and encouraged others to do the same. For this refusal he was arrested, beaten, placed in solitary confinement, and held for 3 months before he was let go.<sup>39</sup> For months afterward, he faced constant harassment by Saddam Hussein's regime. Still determined to save others from being sucked into the war, Yahya withstood the harassment until his family was informed that he would be "shot on sight" for his continued defiance. Encouraged by his father to seek out a safer environment, Yahya fled to Kuwait.<sup>40</sup> He stayed there with his brother posing as a "cousin" (for

<sup>37</sup> Johnson, Larry. "Under Saddam, it would not be possible". SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER FOREIGN DESK EDITOR Published 10:00 pm, Wednesday, June 4, 2003

<sup>38</sup> Johnson, Larry. "Under Saddam, it would not be possible". SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER FOREIGN DESK EDITOR Published 10:00 pm, Wednesday, June 4, 2003

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

safety it was simpler for Yahya to appear as distant cousin than as his brother's sibling) for almost two years. Yet, as he paid close attention to the happenings around him he understood very quickly that Kuwait was not a permanent solution to his troubles. In fact, soon it would become the more dangerous option between the two countries.

Unlike most Iraqis I interviewed, Yahya expected Saddam Hussein's invasion. This can be attributed to his hiding out in Kuwait, but I also think he was very keen in recognizing Saddam Hussein's agenda.

There was Iraqi militia there [within Kuwait's borders]. Kuwait was close with Iraq, especially southern Iraq. So whatever supplies go to Iraq will go through Kuwait. Also, weapons, they sent everything through Saudi Arabia from Dubai or anywhere so it's like part of a game. So, for sure we expected that. We expected something because it's hard to trust Saddam Hussein. He has no friend and just needs to be in power all the time. So, whenever any country around him tried to separate themselves [like Kuwait] ...it's not going to work.<sup>41</sup>

Yahya's attention to detail permitted him to leave Kuwait before Iraq's invasion, but to leave meant returning to Basra. Undoubtedly, he kept in touch with the situation back home, yet just because Saddam Hussein was currently concentrating on Kuwait didn't mean that Yahya could return home to a normal existence.

The problem in my city [Basra] we knew a lot of people and they knew us by name and face, so I couldn't use a different name. I had to use my real name. I didn't really go out a lot. I had to stay home, not showing myself.<sup>42</sup>

Whereas the invasion altered the original life paths of Ahmed and Nada, with some readjustments they were able to continue forward and build a life that somewhat resembled their previous goals. For Yahya, his life became a clean slate. He could never return to the future he had once envisioned for himself or even something similar. Before too long even a life in Iraq

<sup>41</sup> Algharib, Yahya. "Sanctions Thesis Interview" Interview by Heather A. Rodriguez. May 9, 2018

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

wouldn't be an option. At any rate, within 6 months the U.S. arrived in Iraq entangling themselves in a conflict the United States government claimed to care nothing about. Life as the people knew it would never be normal again.

## The First Gulf War

**I simply couldn't believe that in this day and age leaders could be so childish and/or plain stupid as to think that war could solve any issue. I underestimated the destructive instincts of man and his agenda of the forces allied against us. Not that we are angels, after all we did the first wrong.**

**-Nuha Al-Radi, *Baghdad Diaries: A Woman's Chronicle of War and Exile*<sup>43</sup>**

From the late 1990's to the mid 2000's a small crop of nonfiction books and novels about the Gulf Wars were beginning to surface in the literary community. Written by Iraqi exiles such as Nuha Al-Radi and Betoool Khedairi, books like *Baghdad Diaries: A Woman's Chronicle of War and Exile*, *Absent*, and *A Sky So Close* provided readers with a first-hand look into the realities of sanction life in Iraq during war time. Many tragic events struck the Iraqi people during this period some which have been highly publicized and others that were not. Yet, it wasn't the actions of Saddam Hussein, but instead the actions of the American government that caused the most surprise.

Prior to their invasion, the U.S. was maintaining its support of Iraq through a course of noninvolvement. In July 1990, U.S. Ambassador April Glaspie had her last official meeting with Saddam Hussein before the U.S. incursion. In this meeting she was recorded as saying: "we have no opinion on the Arab-Arab conflicts" and "President Bush is an intelligent man. He is not

<sup>43</sup> Radi, Nuha. *Baghdad Diaries: A Woman's Chronicle of War and Exile*. 1st Vintage Books ed. New York: Vintage Books, 2003.

going to declare an economic war against Iraq.” On July 31st, the Assistant Secretary of State, John Kelly, stated to congress that the US had no treaty obligations to defend Kuwait.<sup>44</sup> I venture to say many Americans viewed our noninvolvement towards Iraq exactly as our government wanted them to; as the U.S. choosing to stay out of a conflict [for once]. I’d also wager to say, that many Americans presumed their government had learned from the mistakes of its last major conflict; Vietnam. None of this was true of course. The problem was the United States was so thrilled not to be involved directly, that they never stopped to ask why. So why was the United States suddenly choosing to refrain and what implications would this have on the citizens of Iraq?

The onset of the Iranian Revolution flipped everything upside down. The U.S. was now anti-Iranian (excluding that little mess known as the Iran-Contra affair)<sup>45</sup> and the Reagan administration suddenly found procuring a stronger relationship with Iraq as beneficial to the United States financially. Therefore, despite being fully aware of Saddam Hussein’s penchant for immoral behavior, Reagan announced there was no justification for Iraq to be labeled as a terrorist supporter.<sup>46</sup>

This trade relationship combined with British exports to Iraq practically built Saddam Hussein’s arsenal not to mention bringing in billions of dollars to the U.S. By 1990 the U.S. government had no desire to take on Saddam Hussein and risk losing billions. However, when the dictator they had facilitated decided to invade Kuwait, the U.S. government only had one

<sup>44</sup> Simons, G. L. *Iraq: From Sumer to Post-Saddam*. 3rd ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. pg.349-351

<sup>45</sup> Blanton, T., Byrne, M., & Kornbluh, P. (2006). *The Iran-Contra Affair 20 Years On*. National Security Archive, George Washington University. Retrieved from <https://search.proquest.com/docview/60005617?accountid=14784>

<sup>46</sup> Tran, M. (1992, Jun 08). Bush 'knew saddam aided terrorists'. *The Guardian (1959-2003)* Retrieved from <https://search.proquest.com/docview/187355175?accountid=14784>

choice; to use the fail-safe tucked in their back pocket. The Carter Doctrine was a policy announced by Jimmy Carter during his 1980 State of the Union Address. The doctrine, a response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, designed to prevent Soviet expansion into the Persian Gulf, stated the U.S. would use military force to defend its national interests in the region, if deemed necessary.<sup>47</sup> While the U.S. had been playing fast and loose with Saddam Hussein, Iraqis suffered the most under his torture tactics and false promises. U.S. mistakes combined with Iraq's agenda was the giant green light Saddam Hussein needed to proceed with his plans to invade Kuwait.

Beginning on January 16<sup>th</sup>, the coalition forces embarked on an aerial bombing campaign known as Operation Desert Storm. Despite continuously bombing for 42 consecutive days and nights the U.S released fewer missiles on Iraq than previous incursions.<sup>48</sup> In his book, *Iraq: From Sumer to Post-Saddam* Geoff Simmons quotes the London *Observer* to describing the destruction perpetrated by these air strikes saying: "In Iraq the devastation continued, with the whole country 'bombed back to last century'."<sup>49</sup> Every ounce of infrastructure within the country was taken out. Power stations, telecommunications buildings, refineries, the sewage system, in addition to civilian deaths resulting from hospital bombings, malnutrition, and disease.<sup>50</sup> Life for the citizens of Iraq was now entering a new level of suffering; sheer misery.

<sup>47</sup> Staff, Newsdesk.org. "A Cold War Legacy of Persian Gulf Conflict: This Means War." Newsdesk.org. November 19, 2013. Accessed March 1, 2019.

[https://web.archive.org/web/20080819194536/http://www.artsandmedia.net/cgi-bin/dc/newsdesk/2003/03/18\\_centcom\\_1](https://web.archive.org/web/20080819194536/http://www.artsandmedia.net/cgi-bin/dc/newsdesk/2003/03/18_centcom_1)

<sup>48</sup>In comparison to other major military conflicts the United States participated in, WWII, Korea, and Vietnam, the entire Gulf War released less bombs by tonnage and occurred for the shortest length of time. Operation Desert Storm. Globalsecurity.com

[https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/desert\\_storm.htm](https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/desert_storm.htm)

<sup>49</sup> Quote by Elaine Sciolino from: Correspondent, O. (1992, Jul 10). "Saddamgate Edges Closer to Bush As Inquiry Claims Agricultural Loans Were Used For Military Purchases." *The Guardian (1959-2003)* Retrieved from <https://search.proquest.com/docview/187366998?accountid=14784>

<sup>50</sup> Simons, G. L. *Iraq: From Sumer to Post-Saddam*. 3rd ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. pg.375

To expand my understanding of this period I interviewed Reem K. Despite initially appearing nervous she was able to recount several childhood memories from this time. She was born into a middle-class family in Baghdad in 1983. She was 8 years old in 1991 when the U.S. invaded Iraq. When the invasion began, she told me how her parents took her and her two brothers out of the city at 5 am to stay with relatives in Najaf.:

I remember my parents were frightened. They didn't know what to do. They didn't know what was next. My parents felt it was safer for everyone to be in a different city that wasn't the center. While Najaf was more than two hours south of Baghdad it wasn't far enough to escape the air raids. I remember I used to go to school, I was in the 1<sup>st</sup> grade. I was afraid to go to school because you didn't know when the bomb is going to come. So, I didn't want to go to school but I had to.<sup>51</sup>

In Reem's story the one key point that stands out to me is her family's anxiety about the air raids and their inability to feel safe even outside the city. During the Gulf War evidence was presented proving some attacks were unjustified. One such strike occurred at the Amirriyah blockhouse which was a civilian air raid shelter. Despite U.S. reports that it was a military communication center, BBC reporter Jeremy Bowen was permitted to access the site and found no evidence of military use.<sup>52</sup> Another example did have an intended target, a bridge in the Al-Fallujah neighborhood; however, the British bomber missed, hitting a residential area instead. Despite being a mistake, the simple fact that British warplanes returned shortly thereafter to bomb civilians who were trying to assist the injured lends to the argument that the U.S. led coalition did not always make civilian safety a paramount concern.<sup>53</sup> George H. W. Bush's next move wouldn't cause suspicion that the U.S. had ill-intentions in Iraq; it proved it.

<sup>51</sup> K, Reem. "Sanctions Thesis Interview" Interview by Heather A. Rodriguez. May 9, 2018

<sup>52</sup> Bowen, Jeremy. *1991 Report of the Bombing*. BBC News. February 14, 1991.

<sup>53</sup> Jamail, Dahr. *Beyond the Green Zone: Dispatches from an Unembedded Journalist in Occupied Iraq*. Chicago, Ill.: Haymarket Books, 2007.

The month to follow became one of the most highly contested moments in the history of U.S.-Iraq relations. On February 15<sup>th</sup> via Voice of America radio, George H. W. Bush made a speech directed to the citizens of Iraq calling them to: "...force Saddam Hussein to step aside...and rejoin the family of peace-loving nations."<sup>54</sup> A similar occurrence happened 9 days later when Salah Omar al-Ali<sup>55</sup> also broadcast to the people of Iraq from the Saudi based radio station Voice of Free Iraq: "...you have no option in order to survive...put an end to the dictator and his criminal gang."<sup>56</sup> By February 28<sup>th</sup> Iraq agreed to a ceasefire ending Operation Desert Storm.<sup>57</sup> For the first time since the sanctions began, the citizens of Iraq had a reason for hope. The coalition forces had finally regained control from Saddam Hussein. Yet, this optimism that the United States intended to solve Iraq's "Saddam problem" proved to be short-lived. Soon enough they realized they were on their own.

On March 1<sup>st</sup> one of two separate uprisings began in Iraq. Encouraged by the speech of George H. W. Bush, Iraqis felt the it was time they stood up to Saddam Hussein. However, they never expected it was to be completely alone. In the south the uprising was referred to as Sha'aban Intifada. Meanwhile, in the north the National Uprising by the Kurds broke out March 5<sup>th</sup>. The end goal, or so the people of Iraq felt they were led to believe by the United States, was

<sup>54</sup> Unfinished war- CNN. Com- transcripts 2001-01-05

<sup>55</sup> Salah Omar al-Ali is an Iraqi and former member of the Ba'ath Party. From 1968-1970 he was appointed to the Iraqi Revolution Command Council though differences with other members led to his exile to Egypt. After Iraq's oil boom in 1973 several dissidents were invited back to Iraq. Upon his return, Salah Omar al-Ali was appointed as the Ambassador to Sweden from 1973-1976 and Ambassador to Spain from 1976-1978 finally to become an appointed representative to the United Nations. At the end of the Iran-Iraq War, Salah resigned his position once again due to conflicts with Saddam Hussein's government policies. Thereafter he was banned from returning to Iraq, prompting him to join the Iraqi Opposition Movement which favored removal of Saddam Hussein in addition to no foreign rule imposed by the United States. He returned to Iraq in 2003.

<sup>56</sup> Fisk, Robert. *The Great War for Civilisation : The Conquest of the Middle East*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005.

pg. 646

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*

the removal of Saddam Hussein and the installation of a new regime.<sup>58</sup> The Bush administration denied this. Because my interlocutors stemmed from Baghdad and Southern Iraq, I'm going to focus on the Southern uprising for this thesis.<sup>59</sup>

The southern uprising began in Basra, quickly spreading to other cities such as Najaf and Karbala. Yahya, who participated in the events, recalls the atrocities committed by Saddam Hussein's regime:

He [Saddam] killed a lot of people. Families, kids, he don't care. He destroyed houses. As an example, people who are against him they destroy the whole city. A lot of people, if they can run away, if not they [the regime] don't care. They just shovel [bulldoze] and destroy all houses. The U.S. government just watch it happen. They agree with it. People left to Iran and Syria when the uprising get really strong. They had a meeting next to the border of Kuwait in south Iraq and give the government [Saddam's regime] the green light to stop the uprising. Saddam can use his aircraft to bomb the people and...his military to fight in the city. They shoot and bomb wherever.<sup>60</sup>

This incursion resulted in a truce by early April between the local resistance groups and the Republican Guardsmen.<sup>61</sup> Saddam Hussein had gained the upper hand through a ruthless counter-offensive. Iraqis like Yahya started to see a key fact with a new clarity. The U.S. was not there to stand beside them or remove their dictator, rendering them utterly helpless.

<sup>58</sup> Goldstein, Eric. *Endless Torment: The 1991 Uprising in Iraq and Its Aftermath*. New York: Human Rights Watch, 1999. Chapter 3

<sup>59</sup> The most prominent uprisings took place in Northern Iraq or Iraqi Kurdistan and Southern Iraqi cities. The city of Baghdad is approximately 300 miles from Iraq's northern, southern, and western borders hence my decision to only focus on the southern uprisings.

<sup>60</sup> Algharib, Yahya. "Sanctions Thesis Interview" Interview by Heather A. Rodriguez. May 9, 2018

<sup>61</sup> Middle East Watch. *Endless Torment: The 1991 Uprising in Iraq and Its Aftermath*. New York: Middle East Watch, 1992.

America's decision to pull out of Iraq was catastrophic. The people of Iraq who rose up in protest Saddam Hussein inspired by the words of president Bush will never forgive or forget. U.N. Resolution 687 or the ceasefire meeting took place in Safwan just across the border from Kuwait.<sup>62</sup> President Bush had wanted to conduct business on the USS Missouri currently docked nearby in Saudi Arabia, but the war had made transportation for both sides difficult and dangerous. Besides, the two most important people would not be in attendance; George Bush and Saddam Hussein. Instead the details were to be carried out by Norman Schwarzkopf for the U.S. and General Sultan Hashim Ahmed for Iraq.<sup>63</sup> The choice to leave all the decision making to Schwarzkopf, proved to be an epic failure on the side of the U.S.

When the Iraqi military requested the use of their helicopters for transportation of their government officials, Schwarzkopf consented. In his book *U.S. Leadership in Wartime: Clashes,*

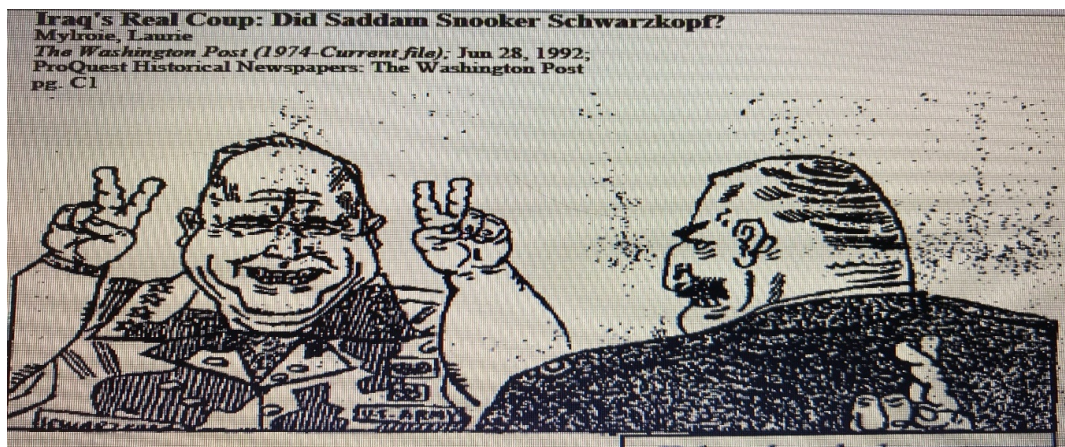


Figure 1. Political cartoon from The Washington Post depicting U.S. ignorance in dealing with Iraq during the ceasefire in 1991.

<sup>62</sup> The most important part of this resolution beyond the ceasefire can be found in paragraph 34. which mentions the U.N. council's ability to take further steps as required to implement this resolution or secure peace in the region. This text served as the U.S. justification for future bombings in 1996, 1998, and 2003. United States. Congress. House. Committee on International Relations. *The Monitoring of Weapons Development in Iraq, as Required by U.N. Security Council Resolution 687 (April 3, 1991) : Markup before the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, One Hundred Seventh Congress, First Session on H.J. Res. 75 and H. Con. Res. 273, December 12, 2001.* Washington: U.S. G.P.O. : For Sale by the Supt. of Docs., U.S. G.P.O. [Congressional Sales Office], 2002.

<sup>63</sup> Mylroie, Laurie. "Iraq's Real Coup." *The Washington Post (1974-Current File)* (Washington, D.C.), 1992.

*Controversy, and Compromise* Spencer Tucker argues Norman Schwarzkopf's decision to allow the Iraqi army access to their armed helicopters, is to blame for the disaster that came next. Saddam Hussein's military's open attack of the Shia and Kurdish populations.<sup>64</sup> Granting the use of these helicopters resulted in an undetermined number of Iraqi civilians being killed by brutal Iraqi military tactics. Helicopter gunships strafed neighborhoods and tanks to blasted schools, hospitals, and places of worship as thousands of U.S. troops were still on Iraqi soil. Sometimes American troops were even close enough to watch.<sup>65</sup> By now Iraqis were experiencing sanction life, facing the complete destruction of most of the nation's resources, and still living under a dictator.

When it came to discussion about the aftermath of the Gulf War my interlocuters always came to the same consensus on two issues. The first was that America's decision to leave Iraq with Saddam still in charge was devastating. The second regarded how U.N. sanctions, initiated to bring Saddam Hussein to heel, never actually hurt Saddam's regime and only hurt ordinary Iraqis. When I asked Yahya if he thought America had intended to remove Saddam, he responded:

We thought yes. We thought that the first time was real, but it's still like a game all political. I mean the percentage of Iraq is mostly Shia Muslim. Some people in Iraq they don't like it at all so the countries like Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and America because of examples like Iran and Lebanon. So, if Iraq appeared to be controlled by Shia they appear to be united with Iran, Lebanon, and Syria. All these are not favorite country. This is why in 2003 there is no trust with the U.S. government. They are not about the [Iraqi] people. It's more political<sup>66</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Tucker, Spencer. *U.S. Leadership in Wartime: Clashes, Controversy, and Compromise*. Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 2009.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Algharib, Yahya. "Sanctions Thesis Interview" Interview by Heather A. Rodriguez. May 9, 2018

Despite being heavily criticized for deserting the Iraqi people to languish in Saddam Hussein's backlash, president George H. W. Bush still maintained his stance about United States intentions in Iraq, saying: "...from the very beginning...it was not an objective to overthrow Saddam Hussein. I don't think the Shiites...or the Kurds...ever felt that the United States would come to their assistance."<sup>67</sup> In my opinion, the idea that Iraqi protestors would revolt against the regime without expecting assistance from the U.N. coalition is a ridiculous thought. Yet, in the age before the internet and smartphones, exposure to the realities of the situation in Iraq were limited to news reports, government offices, and the military.

In 1991 I was 14 years old. Even though we watched the news in our home every night, cable was still considered a luxury in my single parent household, I can honestly say I don't remember hearing any of this information. I cannot recall how old I was the very first time I heard the terms Sunni and Shia, but I know it was well into my twenties. In the 1990's United States, Operation Desert Storm was an event with immense cultural impact. I grew up in the Midwest in the state of Illinois and wearing t-shirts or pins proudly announcing what branch and unit a family member was serving in was extremely popular. Yellow ribbons adorned the tree trunks as far as the eye could see and America's patriotism was in full swing. *Tie a Yellow Ribbon Round the Ole Oak Tree* was even receiving air time on the radio stations again.<sup>68</sup> By 1991 roughly 55% of Americans were in favor of sending troops into Iraq to remove Saddam Hussein from power.<sup>69</sup> Considering U.S. claimed their involvement was only intended to halt Iraq's aggression in Kuwait, I find it extremely suspicious that twelve years before our actual invasion that the U.S. government was already thinking of replacing Saddam Hussein.

<sup>67</sup> U.S. Forces Won't Intervene in Iraq's Civil War." Fas.org. 2008-05-30

<sup>68</sup> Tony Orlando and Dawn, "Tie a Yellow Ribbon Round the Ole Oak Tree." *Tuneweaving*, Bell, 1973.

Initially, I found the idea that America chose to abandon the Iraqi citizens, despite the appalling effects of the sanctions, to be unthinkable. Yet as I continued my research the question of why the U.S. initially left Saddam Hussein in power kept resurfacing. Sometimes one of my interlocutors would ask this question during their interview. However, it was never a question they intended for me to answer, but that person thinking out loud. In the end whether the U.S. intended to or not they did destroy Iraq through its civilian population and what little the U.S. government may have gained along the way could never balance the scale.

## **Sanctions and Social Change**

**Sanctions always hurt the poor, the weak, and the children.**

**-Brian May**

The sanctions period began with the passing of U.N. Resolution 660 the same day that Iraq invaded Kuwait. Yet, it was Saddam Hussein drawing the all media attention that day.<sup>70</sup> Meanwhile the people in Iraq were seeing their world turned upside down. Whenever the topic of sanctions is discussed, the focus tends to gravitate between one of two topics: Iraq's inability to extend help to its people and numbers. First, Iraq *did* make attempts to help sustain their citizens from the very beginning although it was undoubtedly beneficial to the U.S. government not to share these details. Second, questions like "how much is coming in and going out?" and "how many people are affected?" are important, but they dehumanize the issue. What they fail to recognize is the real individuals behind all these numbers and inaccurate reports. People not unlike themselves, who have families, children, dreams, and ambitions.

<sup>70</sup> Gordon, Joy. *Invisible War: The United States and the Iraq Sanctions*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010. Pg. 20

## Sanctions and Food

When Iraq’s sanctions were first implemented in 1990, the government went to work immediately to meet the nutritional needs of the population. Through fixed prices for grain, farming loans, rationing of food and commodities, and prearranging food supplies that could last 3-4 months if necessary. Of course, not all dietary needs could be met, however according to records from The Red Cross the rationing system was predominately fair to all in need excluding no one.<sup>71</sup> During the invasion, acts like these were overshadowed by the myriad of exploits committed by Saddam Hussein’s regime and while helpful, were simply not enough to prevent tragedy.

When you went to the market it was half empty because you have to have the stuff your country make. In Iraq we don’t make that much stuff. It was hard to buy anything. Some people

Pre-90*	1991	1992	1993	1995	1996	1997	1999	2002
3,315	1,300	1,770	1,654	1,093	1,295	2,030	2,150	2,215

Figure 2: Caloric availability following the sanctions. \*Pre-1990 figures stand for total estimated caloric availability. Subsequent figures are ration only. An average 500 additional calories are estimated to have been available off ration.<sup>72</sup>

would bring stuff from another country to sell it, but it was really expensive. I remember there was a store. It has everything: nice chocolates and coke. ...when I was a kid you cannot buy it. It was really expensive. We would look at that store like ‘Mom I want this’ and [hearing] ‘No no I’m going to buy you something else.’ This store was my dream.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. Pg. 128

<sup>72</sup> Alwan, A. “Health in Iraq: The current situation, our vision for the future and areas of work. 2004” Baghdad Ministrey of Health 2.

<sup>73</sup> Gordon, Joy. *Invisible War: The United States and the Iraq Sanctions*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010. Pg. 91

<sup>74</sup> K, Reem. “Sanctions Thesis Interview” Interview by Heather A. Rodriguez. May 9, 2018

The memories my interviewees shared regarding food were always hysterically funny or completely heartbreaking. Although these stories were about the food, I feel they were also describing a way of life that had once been common among most Iraqi people, yet now seemed completely out of reach. We all have stories from our childhood about an item we wanted but were denied by our families. Yet to be able to recall this memory 27 years later demonstrates how one small moment can leave a lasting imprint.

Nevertheless, the ability to navigate an empty market yet still managing to survive shows the resilience of the Iraqi people. Instead of merely accepting their circumstances, the people were determined to circumvent the restraints imposed from the sanctions by any means necessary. By recreating missing goods such as soda, they were able to experience short-term happiness and adding a bit of normality back into their lives. Reem mentioned some of the more “inspired” recipes she encountered during mealtimes:

Pepsi they used to make it from dates. It was disgusting! And I remember a cake once we made and it was something really weird,” she laughs, “but we had to eat this cake! You cannot use egg, the flour ...is really bad and no milk. I remember it was like a brick! Now we laugh about it, but back then it wasn’t funny. I look back now like we used to do that?<sup>75</sup>

Even with incredible resolve, daily life in Iraq remained a constant struggle for survival which was not easily corrected by turning dates into soda pop. The deficiency and quality of rations entering Iraq, combined with the nation’s inability to produce its own foodstuffs, only made circumstances worse. A few of my interviewees compared the transformations of the Iraqi people between the Iran-Iraq War and the Gulf War. During the war against Iran families

<sup>75</sup> K, Reem. “Sanctions Thesis Interview” Interview by Heather A. Rodriguez. May 9, 2018

watched out for each other's well-being to the extent that most homes never felt the war around their dinner tables. The Gulf War period was just the opposite.

To survive, the people of Iraq were turning on each other or working only for the benefit of their own families. War and sanctions had created a Darwinian "survival of the fittest" human experiment built from the hardships of the Iraqi people.<sup>76</sup> Despite the harsh realities, those who discussed it also stressed the point that greed and deceitful acts committed within the community were never done with pride. In other words, people felt shame in observing and participating in these behaviors, yet to survive what other choice did they have?

Yahya recalled an example of a similar scenario as he recounted a story told to him by his cousin whose family owned a candy store at the time. He claimed they would buy candy from outside of the country then melt it down to make various sweet things. To do this required working during the night, as well as moving their machines so they could work out of their home. He went on to say that if the government discovered what they were doing they would be killed, but it was the only way to keep the business moving. It was what they had to do to survive.<sup>77</sup> Because of this it didn't take long for the basic realities of the situation to trickle down to the children of Iraq.

The art of survival may have begun as an adult burden, but soon Iraq's children carried it as well. Reem, like most children, caught on to the sanctions probably a little bit quicker than her

<sup>76</sup>Darwin, Charles, Lambert, Samuel W., John Murray, Publisher, and William Clowes Sons, Printer. *The Variation of Animals and Plants under Domestication*. Second Edition, Rev. ed. London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1893. "Survival of the Fittest", a phrase first coined by Herbert Spencer in his book *Principles of Biology* (p. 1864). After reading Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (p. 1859), Spencer used this phrase to express the parallels between each of their theories. With Darwin's approval this soon became an accepted alternative to Darwin's original phrase "natural selection." Pg. 6 [Darwin didn't use this phrase and you're not using it in a scientific sense, but in a colloquial sense, so this citation isn't necessary]

<sup>77</sup> Algharib, Yahya. "Sanctions Thesis Interview" Interview by Heather A. Rodriguez. May 9, 2018

parents wanted. She recalls always asking questions, endlessly curious about the reason they could no longer travel to certain places or buy items because they were either too expensive or simply unavailable. She also conveyed to me the story of the first time she became conscious that people were starving:

One time the teacher was saying ‘Don’t throw food on the floor because some people don’t have nothing to eat.’ And I noticed that after she said that in my class there is a couple of kids. I watched them every day knowing they don’t eat. Oh my God this is real! I never noticed it before then.<sup>78</sup>

From that point on Reem said she chose to share her lunches with her classmates. Partly because she felt compassion for their situation, but she also noted, like a typical child, that it was also because she didn’t like her lunch! Luckily for Reem and her family, the strains of sanction life were lessened because her grandfather owned a date farm. “Dates are not really expensive in my country, so everyone can buy it which was good at that time.”<sup>79</sup> Other farms in the countryside were not so lucky, leaving many people and animals to starve. Meanwhile, it only took six years for the United Nations to become involved.

To offset Iraq’s humanitarian crisis, the United Nations established the Oil for Food Program in 1995 through the passage of UN resolution 986. The intent of the program was to allow Iraq to sell their oil on the world market at a fixed capacity to obtain food, medicine, and other supplies without allowing Iraq to boost its military strength. Throughout the lifespan of the program, from 1996 until 2003, it was fraught with problems and seemingly solved very few. A rarely acknowledged fact is that the program was funded by Iraq’s own money. All the

<sup>78</sup> K, Reem. “Sanctions Thesis Interview” Interview by Heather A. Rodriguez. May 9, 2018

<sup>79</sup> K, Reem. “Sanctions Thesis Interview” Interview by Heather A. Rodriguez. May 9, 2018

references made to this program as one based on ‘humanitarian assistance’ paints a false picture that external financial support was involved.<sup>80</sup> In essence Iraq was working a summer job to save up for a car, but they had to let their parents hold their money, so they wouldn’t spend it on frivolous things like weapons. However, instead of receiving the car they were promised, their parents hand them the keys to a Ford Pinto. The idea behind the program was far superior to its reality as Reem explains:

They used to give us every month like a bunch of meals. It has flour, sugar, oil, and a small pocket for lentil and the other I think were beans. And for the people who have kids they have probably a bit of milk for the babies. People made their food just from this stuff.... the food that they sent they were replacing. The government was selling the food. They send it to a different country and gave us the cheap ones [meals]. Sometimes it’s not just the government. Even the shops, the government gives some shops food...so the shops used to change these to the bad, bad ones and sell it. It was really hard.<sup>81</sup>

The sanctions were intended to force Saddam’s hand by attacking the Iraqi people, but as I mentioned earlier, the sanctions did not reduce Saddam Hussein’s power. They only crippled the people of Iraq. While Saddam was conducting backdoor oil sales to U.N. Security Council member nations, Russia, France, China, and the U.S., in exchange for kickbacks to undermine the sanctions, mothers were mixing sugar and water in bottles to give their babies because they had nothing else. As a result, many babies and children would die.<sup>82</sup>

## **Sanctions and Medicine**

<sup>80</sup> Sponeck, Hans-Christof. *A Different Kind of War: The UN Sanctions Regime in Iraq*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2006.

<sup>81</sup>Gordon, Joy. *Invisible War: The United States and the Iraq Sanctions*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010. Pg. 174; K, Reem. “Sanctions Thesis Interview” Interview by Heather A. Rodriguez. May 9, 2018

<sup>82</sup> K, Reem. “Sanctions Thesis Interview” Interview by Heather A. Rodriguez. May 9, 2018

In Iraq under the sanctions, even if one went to a hospital there was no guarantee that of any type of treatment would be available. Sanctions impacted even the most common of medical procedures from the treatment of diabetes to childbirth. In their report from 2004, the WHO states: "Maternal mortality began to rise following the Gulf war in 1990. It has more than doubled since then (maternal mortality ratio was 117 per 100,000 live births in 1989)."<sup>83</sup> The aspect of maternal mortality pertains to this subject many ways. The death of mothers was a substantial loss to Iraqi families. Bereavement of the family was certainly an issue, yet motherless children became a bigger problem. Women provide the backbone to the Iraqi household by managing their family and rearing the children. Without the mother's presence, even more pressure was placed on the role of the father complicating an already difficult existence. With enough time this situation had the potential to be disastrous for a nation.

To compound their misery, was the destruction of Iraq's water supply by U.S. bombers. In an interview Professor Thomas J. Nagy reported to *The Progressive* in 2001 that he uncovered Defense Intelligence Agency documents providing irrefutable evidence that the United States government purposely used sanctions to destroy Iraq's water supply with full knowledge the greatest impact would be to women and children. While the argument could be made that the annihilation of the water supply was purely accidental, there was no denying the U.S. government prevented the import of parts into Iraq to make repairs. To justify their actions, the U.S. claimed these parts could be used to build weapons.<sup>84</sup>

Because Iraqi's faced a severe lack of clean water, medicine, and access to proper healthcare illnesses like measles and polio flourished in Iraq. In their attempt to combat these

<sup>83</sup> Alwan, A. "Health in Iraq: The current situation, our vision for the future and areas of work. 2004." *Baghdad: Ministry of Health 2*.

<sup>84</sup> Nagy, T. "The Secret Behind the Sanctions." *The Progressive* 65, no. 9 (2001).

epidemics, the Iraqi government, and organizations such as UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO) worked together to implement massive national vaccination programs.<sup>85</sup> Proper care wasn't just about Iraq's youth. Older members of the population also went without supplies and medications for comfort measures. Nada recalled visiting a senior home once while she was in college, commenting, "all people could do was lay around and wait to die."<sup>86</sup> Eventually the government permitted expansion in the private medical community to meet the needs of the people which they were unable to do on their own.<sup>87</sup> While it was of some help, it was clearly not enough. If Iraq's government was contributing and if the United States was bombing its cities then who is really to blame for the collapse of Iraqi healthcare?

It appears that both the Iraqi and U.S. governments played a role in this decline. According to Reem, the Iraqi government blamed the U.S. for the delayed shipments of commodities and medication. Therefore the U.S. was responsible for excess deaths, not Saddam Hussein. There is valid evidence to support this statement. The U.S. controlled which items were "safe" to enter Iraq and those deemed usable to create weapons. The trick was to place holds on certain items then lift these holds in exchange for votes from other nations to get them to acquiesce to U.S. political agendas.<sup>88</sup>

Meanwhile as millions of Iraq's population were suffering, Saddam Hussein was earning millions of dollars through oil-smuggling operations conducted under the supervision of his son

<sup>85</sup> Gordon, Joy. *Invisible War: The United States and the Iraq Sanctions*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010. Pg. 129

<sup>86</sup> S., Nada. "Sanctions Thesis Interview" Interview by Heather A. Rodriguez. May 21, 2018

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.* 129

<sup>88</sup> Gordon, Joy. *Invisible War: The United States and the Iraq Sanctions*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010. Pg.81-82

Uday Hussein.<sup>89</sup> Common sense should have prevailed in this situation causing the U.S. or Iraq to recognize the impact of their actions on the lives of those trapped in Iraq. However, since responsibility and common sense never entered this equation an international game of “chicken” ensued. If the U.S. removed the sanctions then Saddam Hussein “won.” If Saddam admitted he was making millions by smuggling oil, as though it wasn’t obvious by his lifestyle, then he violated his terms with the U.N. Now millions of innocent Iraqi lives depended upon the winner of a game that no one had agreed to submit to.

## **Sanctions and Education**

The effect of the sanctions on education was profound. Once a thriving educational mecca for men and women, Iraq was beginning to regress where it had once progressed. A severe lack of income meant less money, sometimes making it impossible to educate every child in a family. As a result, girls were usually chosen to stay back with their mothers allowing the boys to attend school.<sup>90</sup> In addition, tutors who are often employed to prepare students for major exams became an expense too extravagant to bear. In Iraq each student takes a baccalaureate exam in their final year of high school to allow them to receive placement in a university. The higher a student’s score the better the career path they had to choose from. Nada told me of her dream to attend college to become a lawyer:

...in my last year of school, I needed a tutor to pass my final exam, so I would be able to go to college. My dad couldn’t afford to pay for my tutoring because the Iraqi dinar value dropped down, but his salary remained the same. He could barely afford to pay for food. I ended up passing my exams without any help, but my average was very poor, and I couldn’t make it to law school.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>89</sup> Burke, Jason. "Baghdad Booms as Saddam Turns Sanctions into Gold." *The Observer* (1901- 2003) (London (UK)), 2001.

<sup>90</sup> Al-Ali, Nadjie Sadig. *Iraqi Women: Untold Stories from 1948 to the Present*. London; New York: Zed Books, 2007.

<sup>91</sup> S., Nada. “Sanctions Thesis Interview” Interview by Heather A. Rodriguez. May 21, 2018

Later Nada mentioned to me that she scored a 65% so she elected to study English Literature instead. The score required to study Law in an Iraqi university is an 85%. Her initial path in life may have been altered, but she was still able to move forward with her education. Many other girls would not be so lucky.

In her book *Iraqi Women* Nadjé Sadig Al-Ali describes the ways women who had once been encouraged to work were now urged to leave their jobs to facilitate more opportunities for men. As a result, society's perception regarding the "ideal" mate began to shift. For men the ability to provide for his family took precedence over the more traditional aspects such as education or social stratification. For women things were a bit trickier. Occasionally to save money, families placed their daughters into arranged marriages. Other women perceived marriage as a means of procuring a better life for themselves. However, the transition from one's daughter to another man's wife usually came with its own challenges. Securing marriages to much older European men and plural marriages, despite not being a cultural norm, became common.<sup>92</sup>

Since Iraq partakes in a collectivist culture, like Pakistan and China, multiple generations of one family typically inhabit the same household. Cohabitation provided two possible outcomes depending on the available resources: financial stability or a financially draining

<sup>92</sup> Al-Ali, Nadjé Sadig. *Iraqi Women: Untold Stories from 1948 to the Present*. London; New York: Zed Books, 2007.

situation. With employment opportunities being practically nonexistent procuring funds to support the family became a widespread problem.<sup>93</sup>

To secure work, one of two career paths became popular. Men and women who held degrees left Iraq to teach in other countries like Libya and Yemen to send money back to their families. Others opted to take whatever job opportunities they could find such as driving a cab. The Iraqi government had stopped paying the salaries of their employees and even those who did receive a wage only brought home 3 or 4 dollars a month. That wasn't enough money to pay the rent much less support an extended family. People were eating out of trash cans to stay alive.<sup>94</sup> The best jobs were doled out to those who were closest to Saddam Hussein's regime.

## **Sanctions and Culture**

Even though information has begun to emerge about the impact of sanctions on Iraq's people, several aspects, such as culture and history, are still missing. A country is much more than its politics and economy. At the heart of each country is its people and values. Culture ranges from its varied styles of clothing, literature, music, and art to its delicacies, languages, social norms. It is also comprised of the multifaceted dreams of its people. During periods of

<sup>93</sup> The term "collectivist culture" refers to cultures who represent themselves in terms of "we". These countries have large cohesive social networks within their families and throughout their communities. In these nations several generations tend to inhabit one household where everything is decided by what is in the best interest of the group not by individual. This pertains to resources, finances, marriages, and raising children. They are typically patriarchal as well. Nahai, Nathalie. "How to Sell Online to Individualist vs Collectivist Cultures." Psychology Today. July 15, 2013. Accessed November 10, 2018. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/webs-influence/201307/how-sell-online-individualist-vs-collectivist-cultures>

<sup>94</sup> K, Reem. "Sanctions Thesis Interview" Interview by Heather A. Rodriguez. May 9, 2018

political instability and war, many of these aspects become subject to suppression or complete removal. When this occurs, the effects can be as debilitating to a population's morale as a lack of food. Pictures of despair and frustration shown by contemporary Iraqi citizens is all the world has been privy to for the last 28 years; but it wasn't always this way.

The post- WWII art community of 1950's and early 1960's Baghdad was ripe with young, talented artists openly expressing themselves against the British Mandate and Iraqi Monarchy.<sup>95</sup> Lead by groups like Jama'et Baghdad lil Fen al-Hadith (The Baghdad Modern Art Group) founded in 1951 by artists Jawad Saleem and Shakir Hassan Al Said, these groups sought to reassert Iraq's national identity.<sup>96</sup> Poems, paintings, and literature conveyed the nationalist sentiments resonating with Iraq's population. Iraq's "Golden Age," as it has often been referred, laid the foundations for the artists by providing visions for the multiethnic and multicultural Iraq.<sup>97</sup>

According to Dia Azzawi (1939-), the last creative generation of artists to come from Iraq was that of Mahmoud Obaidi (1966-) in the mid 1980's. Like their predecessors they trained formally in London, Paris, and Rome and belonged to a variety of different groups. Artists were well supported by the Iraqi government, receiving the finest paints and canvases for free.<sup>98</sup> They

<sup>95</sup> Shabout, Nada. "In Between, Fragmented and Disoriented Art Making in Iraq." *Middle East Report*, no. 263 (2012): 38-43.

<sup>96</sup> Shabout, Nada. "Jewad Selim On Abstraction and Symbolism." Mathaf Encyclopedia of Modern Art and the Arab World. 2012. Accessed March 07, 2019. <http://www.encyclopedia.mathaf.org.qa/en/essays/Pages/Jewad-Selim,-On-Abstraction-and-Symbolism.aspx>.

<sup>97</sup> Al-Ali, Nadje Sadig. *Iraqi Women: Untold Stories from 1948 to the Present*. London; New York: Zed Books, 2007. Pg. 67-68; Gronlund, Melissa. "How Latif Al Ani Captured Iraq's Golden Era Through a Lens." *The National*. May 06, 2018. Accessed November 17, 2018. <https://www.thenational.ae/arts-culture/art/how-latif-al-ani-captured-iraq-s-golden-era-through-a-lens-1.727789>

<sup>98</sup> By, H. P. (2002, May 31). Artist's Rendering: After Painter Dies, A Myth is Born in Insular Iraq --- Baghdadis Believe Ms. Attar Was Target of U.S. Bombs Because of Bush Portrait --- Blaming America for Hardship. *Wall Street Journal* Retrieved from <https://search.proquest.com/docview/398814196?accountid=14784>

embraced and learned from the artist societies to move away from the political conflicts of the previous decade. Al-Ru'yah al-Jadida (The New Vision) founded in 1968 by several artists including Dia Azzawi focused on creative freedom within the context of heritage while promoting an individual working environment.<sup>99</sup> Female artists also began distinguishing themselves in a community typically predominated by males. Sisters Suad al-Attar (1942-) and Laila al-Attar (1944-1993) became two of Iraq's most famous, but for entirely different reasons. This period of free creativity was the Baghdad that Zaid was delivered into, yet within 9 years everything would change.

Zaid was born in 1970. Growing up he was fascinated by Iraq's artists and he longed to enter the art scene. By the end of the 1980's time had arrived for him to enter a university and pursue a career. He was determined to study painting, but it was not going to be easy. His father proceeded to give the typical response of any parent upon hearing his son's epiphany about his future: "If you [Zaid] would like to study art at the university that is fine, however you must also attend school to learn a profession to support yourself."<sup>100</sup>

Accepting this challenge, he told me he had in fact completed both disciplines, art and foreign diplomacy, acknowledging his father's advice had been right. During his time at the university the first sanctions were imposed on Iraq. As he recounted his experiences it was clear the government supported art world of the past was no more:

Art supplies in the university were expensive since most of what we needed to paint was not allowed to be imported. Students would have to visit other cities or buy paints from those who brought them in from abroad. People were even mixing their own paint colors from pigments [like the Victorian era]. However, to buy the paints and canvases I needed I had to sell off the videotapes I loved so much.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>99</sup> Ghareeb, E.A. and Dougherty, B., *Historical Dictionary of Iraq*, Scarecrow Press, 2004, pg. 174.

<sup>100</sup> A. Zaid. "Sanctions Thesis Interview" Interview by Heather A. Rodriguez. May 21, 2018

<sup>101</sup> A. Zaid. "Sanctions Thesis Interview" Interview by Heather A. Rodriguez, May 21, 2018.

The world of art that Zaid had longed to enter as child was to be a drastically different experience than that of his predecessors. Creativity changed from a figurative concept into a literal one. Those who chose to work under the patronage of Saddam Hussein's regime were limited in their artistic expression by the president's repressive and controlling nature. And artists like Zaid were forced to seek out new forms of media or mix supplies themselves to bring their visions to life. In the long term searching out new forms of self-expression and experimenting with new media helped Iraq's artists find inspiration when the outside world failed to do so. Meanwhile, artists such as Laila al-Attar also became a source of inspiration for some of the Iraqi people, but in a very unwanted way.



Figure 3. Two untitled paintings by Zaid from 2012.

Laila al- Attar, sister to the famous Iraqi painter Suad al-Attar, directed The Iraqi Museum of Modern Art before her death in 1993. Although she was a skilled artist in her own right, her fame rose after the Gulf War. During her tenure as director a mosaic designed by the marble cutters Mohsen and Majid Tabani was installed in The Royal Tulip Hotel in Baghdad. Their design was inspired by pictures of Bush they found in newspapers and magazines exaggerated to make him look like “an angry dog.”<sup>102</sup> This hotel was significant because Saddam Hussein was known for conducting presidential affairs from inside.



Figure 4. *Figure 4.* George Bush Mosaic in Baghdad. Saddam Hussein purposely had this mosaic of President Bush installed in the middle of the hotel lobby forcing its visitors to walk directly over the president's image. In Arab culture shoes and feet are considered “unclean” therefore, offensive. Paul Lewis Special to The New York Times.<sup>1</sup>

Despite having no direct involvement with the mosaic's design or installation, Laila became synonymous with it. On June 27, 1993 two tomahawk cruise missiles intended to strike Saddam Hussein's foreign intelligence headquarters located nearby, misfired striking the home of Suad al-Attar where Laila and her family were staying. The missiles killed Laila, her husband, and

<sup>102</sup> By, H. P. (2002, May 31). Artist's Rendering: After Painter Dies, A Myth is Born in Insular Iraq --- Baghdadis Believe Ms. Attar Was Target of U.S. Bombs Because of Bush Portrait --- Blaming America for Hardship. *Wall Street Journal* Retrieved from <https://search.proquest.com/docview/398814196?accountid=14784>

their housekeeper. Ironically, not long before this incident Laila and her family barely escaped a U.S. air raid destroying their personal home.<sup>103</sup> Laila's decision to move was intended for safety, but there were few safe havens to be found in Baghdad at this time.<sup>104</sup> Frustrated by the bombings and sanctions, Iraqi citizens used her death as a means of lashing out against the United States.



Figure 5: "Make Art Not War" Poster Set, 2004, Ink on Paper, 11x1, (Peace War, Nicole Schulman, Clamour and Faesthetic Magazines Collaboration. Reproduced with permission of the artist)

<sup>103</sup> By, H. P. (2002, May 31). Artist's Rendering: After Painter Dies, A Myth is Born in Insular Iraq --- Baghdadis Believe Ms. Attar Was Target of U.S. Bombs Because of Bush Portrait --- Blaming America for Hardship. *Wall Street Journal* Retrieved from <https://search.proquest.com/docview/398814196?accountid=14784>

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

Even though her family adamantly denies her involvement beyond merely working at the museum, many Iraqis are convinced that she was purposely targeted by the U.S. government. Her death provided Iraqi citizens with an outlet to vent their frustration about the United States. In an interview with The Wall Street Journal artist Dia al-Azzawi discussed where this anger stemmed from:

Mr. Hussein's propaganda and the U.S. bombings aren't the only reasons that Iraqi artists will believe anything bad of America. Iraqis resent U.S. support for Israel against their fellow Arab Palestinians and believe that U.S. policy toward Iraq has been hypocritical. The U.S. supported Mr. Hussein against Iran in the 1980s, then defeated him in a war a decade later, but left him in power. Saddam and his regime were made by America, which turned against him just because he got too ambitious.<sup>105</sup>



Figure 6. A true expression of the artist's anguish and confusion to the U.S. invasion of Iraq *My Broken Dream*, conveys the message of tragedy and loss in regard to his homeland. (*My Broken Dream*, Dia Azzawi 2015-2016, Acrylic on paper mounted on canvas, 166 9/10 x 3937/10 in. Reproduced with permission of the artist.)

<sup>105</sup> By, H. P. (2002, May 31). Artist's Rendering: After Painter Dies, A Myth is Born in Insular Iraq --- Baghdadis Believe Ms. Attar Was Target of U.S. Bombs Because of Bush Portrait --- Blaming America for Hardship. *Wall Street Journal* Retrieved from <https://search.proquest.com/docview/398814196?accountid=14784>

Al-Azzawi chose to leave Iraq for London in 1976 because he felt the Ba'ath Party was eager to turn from a democratic to a one-party state; and it did. He attributes Iraq's problems equally to both Saddam Hussein and the Allied Invaders; however, he maintains certain aspects were only brought on by the Allies: "Religion and sectarianism are the new viruses of the Arab world."<sup>106</sup> By 1991 Mahmoud Obaidi too had elected to leave Iraq to resettle in Canada. The Iraq of their generation which focused on developing its future had coexisted peacefully without religious divides. Yet, by 2003 the fragmentation of Iraq's people would become as distinct as the blacks and whites of Al-Azzawi's later works. Throughout their self-imposed exile, artists like Azzawi, Obaidi, and Suad al-Attar have felt a continued moral responsibility to defend their country the only way they could; through art.<sup>107</sup>

<sup>106</sup> Smith, Saphora. "Befriended by a King, Arrested, Then Forced to Fight... Artist Dia Azzawi on the Destruction of His Beloved Iraq." The Telegraph. October 17, 2016. Accessed November 1, 2018. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/art/artists/befriended-by-a-king-arrested-then-forced-to-fight-artist-dia-az/>.

<sup>107</sup> Al Jazeera. "Iraq and the Art of War." GCC News | Al Jazeera. December 10, 2016. Accessed November 1, 2018. <https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/talktojazeera/2016/12/iraq-art-war-161209154643932.html>.



Figure 7. During the Gulf War the top of the Samara Minaret was used as a lookout point by American troops. The minaret and the Statue of Liberty are symbols of freedom and the rope connecting the two, while suspending them in air, represents the organized chaos of war while their suspension shows tensions have yet to be resolved. (*Hangover, Fragments Exhibition*, 2016, Mahmoud Obaidi. Picture by Clarissa Jones. Work reproduced with permission of the artist.)



Figure 8. Representative of the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. The Winged Bull is the force of Iraqi culture and has been placed on top of columns meant to represent Assyrian, Babylonian, and Sumerian cultural history. The vandalization and looting of the country's artifacts is deeply felt by all Iraqi citizens. (*Ford 71, Fragments Exhibition*, 2016, Bronze and Corten steel, 225 x 190 x 405 cm, Mahmoud Obaidi. Picture by Clarissa Jones. Reproduced with permission by the artist.)

Meanwhile, throughout the sanction years art production in Iraq became extremely stunted. State patronage for artists disappeared and everything from architecture to abstracts were always under the watchful eyes of Saddam Hussein. Change came with the United States' invasion in 2003. As Baghdad fell to coalition forces, civilian infighting and massive looting began. Several ancient artifacts, books, and buildings were stolen or destroyed while The National Museum of Iraq lost roughly 15,000 pieces of artwork.<sup>108</sup> In an interview with Isis Nuasir for *Feminist Studies Journal* art historian Nada Shabout describes the impact on Iraq's heritage:

The destruction following the 2003 invasion became the decisive rupture between Iraq's progressive past, whose memories lingered throughout the years of sanctions, and its present, which does not even foresee a future.<sup>109</sup>

Instead of focusing on the loss of Iraq's ancient relics, in her quote Shabout is much more concerned with the nation's uncertain future. When the news of Iraq's artistic and cultural tragedy flooded the media, emphasis was always placed on the oldest pieces from ancient Mesopotamia. Coverage was not dedicated to the massive loss or destruction of Iraq's modern art collection. Shabout published an article in *The Journal of Humanities* in 2006 examining the reasons behind the media's lack of interest and why it should matter. Although she came to her own conclusion on the subject, in my opinion there is more than one relevant answer. Her theories on the importance of relics from the cradle of civilization carrying greater importance among people and preconceived, Orientalist ideas about Middle Eastern art are accurate. As is her main point: Iraq's lack of preserved modern art creates a gap in the nation's historical narrative that is vital to the growth of its future generations.

<sup>108</sup> Harms, William. "[Archaeologists review loss of valuable artifacts one year after looting](#)". *The University of Chicago Chronicle*, (15 April 2004) [Archived](#) from the original on 7 October 2009.

<sup>109</sup> Nusair, Isis. "The Cultural Costs of the 2003 US-Led Invasion of Iraq: A Conversation with Art Historian Nada Shabout." *Feminist Studies* 39, no. 1 (2013): 119-48.

Many cultures tend to look back on their history seeking solace amidst turbulent times. Leveled by multiple bombings, lootings, and the expatriation of Iraq's best artists to other countries the people of Iraq had little possibility of developing any hope for the future.



Figure 9. A dentist works on his patient while holding up a photograph of Saddam Hussein. Each photograph in the series is meant to represent the individual's feeling towards Saddam Hussein after he was removed from power. Some expressed to the artist that they wished Saddam Hussein had remained in power if only because life was considered more stable under his leadership than after the U.S. took over. (*Saddam Was Here*, 2009-2010, Jamal Penjweny. Photograph was reproduced with permission by the artist.)

When the smoke clears after a forest fire all that can be seen is pure annihilation. Soon followed by the feeling that all that was good is gone forever. However, given time nature gathers her remnants and rebuilds. Slowly after the invasion in 2003 Iraq's art community did too. Saddam Hussein was captured in December, missing artwork was beginning to be recovered, and new artists like Wafaa Bijal, Jamal Penjweny and Bassim Al Shaker emerged to continue Iraq's story. Penjweny chooses to focus on the life and future of Iraq's people while Al Shaker takes the opposite approach. Choosing to paint scenes from an older, more traditional Iraq, Al Shaker's work can provide a foundation for Iraq's newest artists to rebuild upon.



Figure 10. A boy from Basra is who lost his sight and his hand from a mine explosion is shown as a vision of hope instead of sadness with the pink additions by Penjweny. When asked he chose pink he stated: ““when I thought of a colour to represent peace and happiness, I could see only one – and that was pink” (Pink Dream, 2012, Jamal Penjweny. Reproduced with permission of the artist.)

## Part Three

### Conclusion

**You know we armed Iraq?...[laughter from the audience]. I wondered about that too. You know during the Persian Gulf War those intelligence reports would come out:**

**“Iraq, incredible weapons- incredible weapons.”**

**How do you know that?**

**“Uh, well...we looked at the receipts.”**

**-Bill Hicks, American Comedian**

On March 20, 2003 the coalition forces led by the United States invaded Iraq. According to what the U.S. government stated at the time, the coalition was undertaking this operation for several reasons including: to disarm weapons of mass destruction being hidden by Iraq, to overthrow Saddam Hussein’s Ba’athist government, and to free the people of Iraq. Many Americans never questioned the legitimacy behind the U.S. government’s decision to invade Iraq...why? After the attacks on September 11, 2001 by Al-Qaeda, president Bush’s approval rating suddenly skyrocketed from 51% to 86% in a matter of days.<sup>110</sup> For the first time in a long Americans were truly frightened and all they could do was look to the president for leadership. Albert Einstein once said: “In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity.”<sup>111</sup> President Bush caught on to this idea quickly and soon enough Americans were willing to go along with anything the U.S. government was churning out.<sup>112</sup>

<sup>110</sup> Gallup, Inc. "Presidential Approval Ratings -- George W. Bush." Gallup.com. Accessed March 07, 2019. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/116500/presidential-approval-ratings-george-bush.aspx>.

<sup>111</sup> Einstein, Albert. *The Quotable Einstein*. Edited by Alice Calaprice. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996.

It didn't matter that the United Nations had never actually found any hidden weapons or that Iraqis were still plagued by our sanctions and Saddam Hussein's torture. What *did* matter were the "alternative facts" president George W. Bush was churning out to Americans: Al-Qaeda members had been spotted hiding in Kurdistan. And even though the CIA knew their presence had absolutely no affiliation with Iraq's regime the U.S. government was intent on selling the idea of a link between groups. The spin on the speech delivered by Colin Powell not only went against information provided by CIA analysts, but also elevated Abu Musab al-Zarqawi."<sup>113</sup> Upon learning this information a few years ago two thoughts immediately crossed my mind: First, was the irony that both Iraq and Afghanistan were fighting us with weapons we had supplied to them. The second, was: "What was the U.S. government thinking" ?

If the U.S. was lying to the entire world about their reasons for invading Iraq, then it raises the question: what were the people of Iraq thinking? In his book *Voices from Iraq: A People's History, 2003-2009*, author Mark Kukis, who interviewed many Iraqis during his tenure as a TIME correspondent in Baghdad, writes that Iraqis often refer to the U.S. invasion and the period that followed as "the collapse."<sup>114</sup> Within two months of the U.S. invasion, Iraq's sanctions had ended and Saddam Hussein was on the run, yet many Iraqis were not grateful that the United States had intervened. Tensions were already high from the last time the U.S. entered the country. In 1991 many Iraqis had their arms open ready to embrace U.S. intervention against Saddam Hussein. They rose up in protest when president Bush incited them to act only to fall without U.S. support. For these acts, the people of Iraq were victimized by their jailer [Saddam Hussein] and their liberator [the U.S.]. Now the U.S. had returned, but the Iraqi people were not

<sup>113</sup> Warrick, Joby. *Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS*. First ed. New York: Doubleday, 2015. Book 1.

<sup>114</sup> Kukis, Mark. *Voices from Iraq : A People's History, 2003-2009*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.

going to put their faith back into the hands of foreigners again. This time they took matters into their own hands.<sup>115</sup>

With Saddam Hussein no longer acting as president, Iraq was about to be turned upside down . Politically active members of the long-oppressed Shia majority saw this as their opportunity to benefit. According to my subjects, before Saddam Hussein took over, Sunni and Shia identities, experienced brief problems in Iraq’s history, but no longer played a role in the life of the average Iraqi citizen. However, just because there was not a reoccurring sectarian divide playing itself out daily doesn’t meant it wasn’t festering below the surface. Now suspicions between the sects were entering an all-time high and violence was widespread. Chaos reigned like a monsoon. Into this storm, the United States sent Paul Bremer to serve as Iraq’s Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). The changes he implemented during his 14 months in office became highly criticized leading to speculation regarding the true intentions behind U.S. involvement. Most Iraqis wanted a government that worked and the simple necessities of life back. What they got wasn’t a civil war as the outside world chose to see it. What they got was pure anarchy.<sup>116</sup>

Iraq’s disintegration can be attributed to several factors, but in my opinion the two that carry the greatest amount of liability are Saddam Hussein’s regime and the United States government. In his book *Debriefing the President: The Interrogation of Saddam Hussein*, former CIA senior analyst John Nixon quotes Saddam Hussein as saying: “You are going to fail in Iraq because you

<sup>115</sup> Arango, Tim. "A Long-Awaited Apology for Shiites, but the Wounds Run Deep." *New York Times (1923-Current File)* (New York, N.Y.), 2011.

<sup>116</sup> Kukis, Mark. *Voices from Iraq : A People's History, 2003-2009*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.

do not know the language, the history, and you do not understand the Arab mind.”<sup>117</sup> In hindsight it’s hard to deny that he may have been correct. Although his brutally, repressive leadership style hardly made him popular among the people of Iraq, it was effective and provided more stability to Iraq’s people than the U.S. In addition, it was Saddam Hussein’s ability to maintain control that made Iraq’s destruction take the shape of a slow erosion. The U.S. impact on Iraqi citizens was far different.

When Paul Bremer entered Iraq as the acting Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) in May of 2003 he wasted no time implementing profoundly serious changes to Iraq. His first act was the infamous process of de-Ba’athification in which he declared the Ba’ath party illegal and removed Sunni Arabs from several positions within Iraq. Regardless of whether the citizen was directly affiliated with Saddam Hussein or merely a school teacher, if they were a supporter of Ba’athism they were dismissed. Bremer’s next action, occurring a few days later, was to dissolve the entire Iraqi military. Now thousands of Iraqis were without employment and unable to support their families. As the people struggled over extremely limited resources, sectarian divisions began to reappear, and insurgences began to rise.<sup>118</sup> The Bush administration eventually rebuilt Iraq’s military from the bottom up once it became clear that a local military presence was vital to controlling Iraq. However, the damage had already been done. Iraq was in shambles and many citizens unwilling or unable to flee to other countries, experienced new threats from terrorist groups like ISIS. There was nothing left of the Iraq they once knew and little hope for the future ahead.

<sup>117</sup> Tharoor, Ishaan. "Saddam Hussein Should Have Been Left to Run Iraq, Says CIA Officer Who Interrogated Him." The Washington Post. December 16, 2016. Accessed March 07, 2019.

<sup>118</sup> Al-Tikriti, Nabil. "US Policy and the Creation of a Sectarian Iraq." Middle East Institute. July 02, 2008. Accessed March 04, 2019. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/us-policy-and-creation-sectarian-iraq>.

Despite their various backgrounds, in the end my interlocuters all agreed on certain points. For example, everyone agreed on a general dislike of Saddam Hussein despite their disillusionment with the U.S. after its abandonment of Iraq in 1991. In addition, all agreed that life was more stable under Saddam Hussein's regime than that of the U.S. Finally, everyone felt the sanctions imposed to hurt Saddam Hussein, never impacted his way of life whatsoever.

The United States was partially responsible for the loss of everything they had, yet no resentment was expressed. Was this because they honestly felt none, because they were being interviewed by an American, or because these feeling were only expressed among themselves? All I can do is speculate based on my observations. I feel any resentment they may have held was directed towards the regime of Saddam Hussein since it was his leadership that brought about the nation's demise. Regarding the United States, I sensed shock that had evolved into disappointment brought on by the inaction of the United States during their time of despair. Although I realize some details were held back out of privacy I never felt it was due to my nationality. Regardless of what was shared or withheld, the objective of this thesis was always to present the perspective that is rarely discussed; that of the Iraqi people. I feel that I have opened the door with my research, but there is still much work to be done.

Many of the sources I used for my research focused on the numbers of deaths or were presented from the perspective of an outsider looking in. Books such as Joy Gordan's will infuriate its readers with information highlighting America's many missteps. Stories about ailing children and oil- smuggling are meant to wake up the readers of the world to the United States true nature towards international affairs, but how many read a book like this? Nadjé Sadig al-Ali's book displays great emotion regarding the women of Iraq. To scholars, students, or women associated to this topic it's an amazing piece of material. Yet, once again how many people

outside academic circles read or learned from this book? As an American, I can say almost no one.

The truth about the sanctions period continues to be limited because it hasn't gained the exposure it deserves and Americans like most people worldwide don't want to accept facts that are unpleasant. Despite repeated historical events that have unraveled over the past decades revealing the United States devious behavior in foreign conflicts, such as Vietnam, many still need to cling to the notions they were taught as children; the United States is the giver of freedom. I wanted to challenge the idea that Iraq and Saddam Hussein were solely to blame for all the events that devastated the nation of Iraq and I feel that I have.

I have found history like nature is an endless cycle that is always changing yet somehow always the same. Through my interviews I was able to discern what ultimately affects the outcome of each new cycle isn't the circumstances, but the ways in which people react to them. Along the way I discovered a few common threads among my interlocutors and the artists. In my opinion the most prominent of these threads was resilience. In this case resilience came in two distinct forms; inner and outer. Inner resilience refers to people who still reside in Iraq like Zaid or Jamal Penjweny. Rebuilding is really the only option within Iraq, but it doesn't mean they have an endless supply of hope for its future either. The reasons both men have chosen to stay are unknown to me.

Outer resilience refers to those who left Iraq like Yahya, several other interviewees, Mahmoud Obaidi, and Dia Azzawi. Although Yahya's choice to relocate was based on survival not choice, it doesn't lessen the fortitude it took to push forward once he did. I kept asking myself how those who relocated to the U.S. could embrace the country. Finally, the answer came to me. During their time in Iraq, the interlocutors understood what it felt like to live in a country

where the people were not always aligned with the government. Therefore, when they came to the U.S. they didn't hold the entire country accountable for the destruction of their homeland. I've always been able to look beyond the politics and judge a person for their merit and not by their nationality, until now it had never occurred to me that they were also doing the same.

With regards to the artists, their ability to choose to leave Iraq didn't make the decision any less disheartening. Both artists have remained dedicated to telling of Iraq's plight through their artwork, however now it's from the outside looking in. Albeit living outside Iraq provides a different perspective that can be challenging to notice when living within a certain environment, distance can also be complicated. The struggle to express their feelings about their homeland while not actually feeling the weight of living there every day has been an ongoing challenge for Mahmoud Obaidi, Dia Azzawi, and other expatriate Iraqi artists.

Despite the dismal lens that Iraq's future is often viewed through, I believe the country is slowly transitioning from a period of unraveling to a period of refurbishment. Because its transformation has been slow and arduous, it's been speculated that it will never happen. However, when I think about the history of the world and how many transformations Iraq (Mesopotamia) has endured, I cannot understand why other people don't see it too. I suppose the Iraqis who experienced the sanctions period are currently undergoing transformations of their own and making their voices heard is one more step forward.

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