



From *Muhasasa* to *Mawatana*: Consociationalism and Identity Transformation within the Protest Movement in Federal Iraq, 2011–2019

Taif Alkhudary

To cite this article: Taif Alkhudary (2023): From *Muhasasa* to *Mawatana*: Consociationalism and Identity Transformation within the Protest Movement in Federal Iraq, 2011–2019, *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, DOI: [10.1080/13537113.2023.2230712](https://doi.org/10.1080/13537113.2023.2230712)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537113.2023.2230712>



© 2023 The Author(s). Published with license by Taylor & Francis Group, LLC



Published online: 19 Jul 2023.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 319



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

From *Muhasasa* to *Mawatana*: Consociationalism and Identity Transformation within the Protest Movement in Federal Iraq, 2011–2019

Taif Alkhudary

London School of Economics

ABSTRACT

This article uses Margaret Somers' and Charles Tilly's work on discursive approaches to identity to argue that failures in Iraq's sectarian power-sharing system, *Al Muhasasa Al Ta'ifia*, have led to the transformation of identity in the country. This is demonstrated by the emergence of a unitary nationalist protest movement, which has called for a civic state, as captured by the idea of *Mawatana*. This alternative system would represent Iraqis based on their citizenship as opposed to their sect or ethnicity. By tracing how and why a new shared identity emerged within the protest movement in Federal Iraq between 2011 and 2019, I demonstrate that conflict does not inevitably harden identities, as assumed by some scholars of consociationalism, but that it can also soften them and allow shared formulations to emerge. In addition, I examine how three of the main principles of consociationalism—proportionality, veto power, and elite pacts—contributed to the demobilization of this movement, preventing changes in identity from translating into a profound transformation of the *Muhasasa* system itself.

In the 20 years since regime change, Iraq's sectarian power-sharing system known as *Al Muhasasa Al Ta'ifia* has failed the population, leading to the entrenchment of ethno-sectarian identities, politically sanctioned corruption, and a state that is unable to provide the most basic services to citizens. In this article, I use Margaret Somers'¹ and Charles Tilly's² work on discursive approaches to identity to argue that these failures have led to the transformation of identity in Federal Iraq; this is demonstrated by the emergence of a unitary nationalist protest movement, calling for a civic state, captured through the term 'mawatana'. Under this alternative system, Iraqis would not be represented on the basis of their ethnicity or sect but on the basis of their Iraqi citizenship. By tracing how and why a new shared identity emerged within the protest movement in Federal Iraq between 2011 and 2019, I demonstrate that conflict does not inevitably harden identities, as assumed by some scholars of consociationalism, but that it can also soften them and allow shared formulations to emerge. In addition, I examine how three

CONTACT Taif Alkhudary  T.alkhudary@lse.ac.uk  LSE Middle East Centre, London School of Economics, 1 Clement's Inn, London WC2A 2AZ, UK.

*The word "*mawatana*" is derived from the Arabic word for citizen "*mawatan*". In general parlance it refers to a person's identification with the state. However, throughout this paper, I use the term as it has been conceived by members of the Iraqi protest movement which is as meaning is being represented by the state on the basis of their Iraqi citizenship as opposed to sect or ethnicity.

© 2023 The Author(s). Published with license by Taylor & Francis Group, LLC

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

of the main principles of consociationalism—proportionality, veto power, and elite pacts—contributed to the demobilization of this movement, preventing changes in identity from translating into a profound transformation of the *Muhasasa* system itself.

I begin by examining the approach some scholars of consociationalism take to identity transformation and conflict. I then outline the theoretical framework underpinning the arguments advanced in this article, with a focus on Somers' and Tilly's work on discursive approaches to identity. After this, I discuss the development, implementation, and failures of the *Muhasasa* system in Iraq. In the remaining sections, I undertake a comparative analysis of the 2011, 2015, and 2019 mobilizations, to demonstrate how and why identities changed during each instance of protest, as well as how the three principles of consociationalism mentioned above contributed to these mobilizations fragmenting.

The article's findings are based on 17 interviews with protesters carried out between August 2020 and June 2022. The interviews were supplemented by informal conversations and research workshops held during the same period as well as a number of research trips to the epicenter of the movement, Tahrir Square, Baghdad, in December 2019. The findings of this article also draw on research into Arabic-language media coverage of the protests as well as a review of secondary literature. In this article, I chose to focus on the 2011, 2015, and 2019 mobilizations because they were the largest instances of mass protest after regime change that included more than one social, economic, and/or political group and spread to more than one geographical area. It is also important to note that this article focuses solely on protests that occurred in Southern and Central Iraq, and therefore it is beyond the scope of the article to examine protests in Kurdistan. It is for this reason that the fourth principle of consociationalism—federalism—is not discussed in any detail.

Identity transformation and consociationalism

Consociationalism is increasingly used as a means of mediating conflict in ethnically divided societies. By giving communal leaders from dominant groups who were previously in conflict with each other a proportional share in governance, consociationalism is meant to instigate peace and stability. Those communal leaders are then expected to use the positions that they are afforded to represent the interests of the communities to which they supposedly belong. Consociationalists broadly advocate for the implementation of power sharing based on the four conditions that Arend Lijphart³ defined as the pillars of consociational democracy. These conditions encompass a governing coalition composed of elite communal leaders, veto power on policy granted to all leaders of the different groups, proportional representation in parliament and in the distribution of civil service jobs and state resources, and segmental autonomy for the various communities.⁴

Scholars advocate for the adoption of consociationalism, which seeks to accommodate multiple communal identities, because they argue that, while identities can change, this remains very difficult in situations where they have been mobilized for violent ends. It is as a result of this ambiguity that Lijphart⁵ developed his theory of consociationalism to include a distinction between pre-determination and self-determination. The former reserves political seats for particular ethnic segments and fixes the size of their shares as

a means of guaranteeing their representation.⁶ The latter, meanwhile, is based on electoral outcomes and allows segments to emerge spontaneously and to define themselves, giving them greater flexibility in how they participate in politics. Building on this, McGarry and O’Leary⁷ developed a distinction between “liberal” and “corporate” consociationalism. Corporate consociationalism is pre-determined, accommodating different ethnic and religious groups based on ascriptive criteria.⁸ In contrast, liberal consociationalism, which they argue is the type implemented in Iraq, “rewards whatever salient political identities emerge in democratic elections, whether they are based on ethnic or religious groups or subgroup or transgroup identities”.⁹ McGarry and O’Leary can develop this distinction because for them, while identities can change to an extent, in “certain places and times they may be inflexible, resilient, crystallized, durable and hard”.¹⁰

Other scholars of consociationalism have advanced similar arguments, suggesting that while identities can change, they tend to harden or become consolidated further as a result of conflict. For example, John Nagle and Mary-Alice C. Clancy have “challenge[d] the constructivist proposition that identities can be transformed and remolded into new, shared formulations”.¹¹ They draw on the work of Stephen Van Evera to argue that this is because “ethnic identities, while constructed, are hard to reconstruct once they form ... the conditions needed for reconstruction are quite rare, especially in modern times, and especially among ethnic groups in conflict” (Van Evera, as quoted in Nagle and Clancy).¹² Joanne McEvoy and Eduardo Wassim Aboultaif, on the other hand, have argued that violence works to increase the crystallization of group identities according to religious belonging or ethno-national identification.¹³ Similarly, Dylan O’Driscoll has suggested that federalism for each of the main ethnic groups in Iraq is the only way for the country to maintain its integrity after the rise of Daesh.¹⁴ Caroline A. Hartzell and Mathew Hoddie argue that armed conflicts undermine the feeling that “survival can be taken for granted” and lead to the “rejection of out-groups as well as spawn intense feelings of in-group solidarity”.¹⁵

I contend that despite arguing that identities can sometimes change, scholars of consociationalism often fail to examine how and why this happens. Thus, for example, while acknowledging this possibility, McGarry and O’Leary do not discuss the circumstances under which identities are likely to change, nor do they elucidate the conditions under which subgroup or transgroup identities might emerge.¹⁶ The lack of engagement with how and why identities change suggests that the authors’ argument takes for granted that identities are external to economic, political, and social variables. For Nagle and Clancy, in comparison, the difficulties associated with the reconstruction of identities do not seem to apply to identities hardening but rather seem to lie in them softening into new “shared formulations.” Similarly, all the above-mentioned scholars suggest that ethnic identity hardens or is consolidated as a result of conflict, but they do not explain why this is *necessarily* the case. However, as Stathis N. Kalyvas has argued, “even when ethnic divisions cause the eruption of civil war in the first place, these identities do not always remain stable and fixed during the conflict; if they do change, they may soften rather than only harden”.¹⁷

Furthermore, proponents of consociationalism fail to explain why having a communal leader who purports to identify with a particular “ethnic segment” in power will

necessarily mean that the interests of those who identify in a similar way will be represented. This argument suggests that there is some essential tie that binds communal leaders to particular ethnic demographics and that such communities are homogenous and externally bounded.¹⁸ As a result, they do not consider that communal leaders might use their positions to pursue their own interests, for example, through corruption¹⁹ or through violently suppressing those who oppose them even if they are from the community that, according to the logic of consociationalism, they are meant to represent.

The other major debate that this article touches upon is the extent to which it is possible for non-ethnic actors to emerge in consociational regimes. Cera Murtagh has argued that liberal consociationalism is more likely to allow for the emergence of civic parties and to give them a meaningful role in government alongside their ethnic counterparts.²⁰ In addition, she argues that civic parties in consociational settings can find “critical entry points” from which to challenge the dominance of ethno-sectarian parties. Similarly, Chiara Milan²¹ has argued that the ethnic basis of consociational regimes does not just work to constrain non-ethnic movements but can also be used as an opportunity to create solidarity during civic mobilizations. In addition, Nagle²² has brought to light the different ways that civil society actors in Lebanon have organized to challenge the naturalness of ethnic and religious identities that underpins consociational regimes. In particular, Nagle²³ identifies a distinction between “commonist” and “transformationist” social movements. The former may not mobilize to replace consociationalism but can create unity around certain political issues of importance to all ethnic groups.²⁴ The latter aims to transform identities by undermining the sectarianism on which consociationalism is built.

In what follows, I outline Tilly’s²⁵ and Somers’²⁶ work on identity narratives. I then use this framework to demonstrate how and why a new shared identity emerged within the protest movement in Federal Iraq between 2011 and 2019. To this end, I show that as identities shifted over time, so did protesters’ demands and the way that they claimed them. In 2011, protesters transcended ethnic and sectarian divisions to come together as “the people” in a cross-sectarian mobilization for reform of the political system, whereas the 2015 mobilization was anti-sectarian, bringing protesters together in the name of a unitary nationalist Iraqi identity. By 2019, this had transformed into a post-sectarian movement where demonstrators wanted to be represented on the basis of their “Iraqiness” as opposed to their sect or ethnicity (see [Tables 1](#) and [2](#)). In addition, I argue that the emergence of these non-ethnic actors was enabled by the profound and consistent failures of the power-sharing regime to govern²⁷ and represent those it was meant to serve. I also examine how three of the principles of consociationalism—veto power, elite pacts, and proportionality—contributed to the fragmentation of these mobilizations during each instance of protest.

While there is little consensus over the meaning of the term “sectarianism,” or what is meant by the various terms used to describe challenges to it,²⁸ I argue that the distinction I make in this article between cross-, anti-, and post-sectarianism is useful because it allows me to trace how identities changed over time and to highlight the different types of challenges that the protests posed to the regime during each instance of mass mobilization. By “cross-sectarian” I mean the coming together of people from

Table 1. Prominent narratives of the protest movement over time and concurrent shifts in political identity^a.

	Prominent narratives	Political identity	Type of mobilization
2011	- The people want the reform of the system - Oil for the people, not for the thieves - Liar Liar Nouri al-Maliki; bring electricity	The people, cross-sectarian	Commonist
2015	- In the name of religion the thieves have robbed us - No to sectarianism, no to sectarian quota sharing, yes to citizenship - Secularism, secularism! Neither Shi'a or Sunni	Iraqis, unitary nationalist, anti-sectarian	Transformationist
2019	- We want a homeland - No to <i>Muhasasa</i> , no to political sectarianism - Iran out, Iran out: Baghdad remains free	Iraqis, unitary nationalist, civic principles, post-sectarian	Transformationist

^aIn this paper, I focus on those narratives that were most popularized during the three instances of mass protest discussed in this article. These narratives were often featured in slogans and chants of protesters, recalled during media interviews with demonstrators, and were prevalent in news coverage of the protests and in academic literature on the topic. They also featured heavily in the way that protests spoke about themselves, their peers, and the relationship to the state during the 17 interviews carried out for this paper. I also use an expansive definition of the form that narratives can take. I include chants, slogans, and stories recalled to me by demonstrators as a means of acknowledging the different tools that can be used, following Somers, in speaking about the self and identity.

Table 2. Triggers and key turning points of each mobilization over time and consociational principles that contributed to their fragmentation.

	Triggers	Key turning points	Consociational principles that contributed to demobilization
2011	- Lack of electricity	- Arab Spring - Violence against protesters - Use of sectarian rhetoric	- Elite pact of communal leaders - Proportionality
2015	- Lack of electricity	- Killing of protester Muntadhar Ali Ghani Al-Hilifi - Sadrist co-optation of protests	- Elite pact of communal leaders
2019	- Razing of informal settlements - Redundancies in Interior Ministry	- Violence against protesters - Assassination of Qassem Soleimani	- Elite pact of communal leaders - Veto power

different sects and ethnicities for a common cause; by “anti-sectarian” I refer to the rejection of sect and ethnicity as the predominant forms of identification, a critique of sectarianism at the heart of the political system and calls for its reform; and by “post-sectarian” I mean calls for the transformation of the political system and the development of alternative forms of belonging based what unites people, such as nationalism and/or citizenship.²⁹

Identity narratives

Somers³⁰ has argued that identity is constructed through ontological narratives. In other words, narratives shape who we are and how the stories that we are told and tell affect how we act. Ontological narratives make the self and identity something that one becomes, placing identity within temporal and spatial relationships. This works to challenge the idea that identity is stable and fixed and that it is possible to predict the behaviors of actors or that they will be uniform. What is more, ontological narratives are crucial if we are to understand agency and “the practices of social and historical actors, their collective actions, their modes and meanings of institution-building and group-formations, and their apparent incoherencies”.³¹

For Somers, identity is relational. It is formed within a matrix of narratives as well as other temporal and social forces such as politics, demographics, market patterns, institutional narratives, and organizational constraints. In this way, it can be argued that identity formation takes place within a “relational matrix” of contested relations between narratives, people, and institutions.³² She argues that examining relational settings over time requires thinking about “if and when relational interactions among narratives and institutions appear to have produced a decisively different outcome from previous ones. Social change, from this perspective, is viewed not as the evolution or revolution of one societal type to another, but by shifting relationships among the institutional arrangements and cultural practices that constitute one or more social settings.”³³

Tilly links the discursive approach to identity to political mobilization and public claim making.³⁴ He argues that identities become political when governments become parties to them. Moreover, political identities are not merely byproducts of political processes but make a difference in themselves. This means that when political identities change, so do other meanings, relations, and practices. Thus, when people in specific times and places adopt different collective identities, they make public claims in distinctly different ways and activate different obligations and rights, which bind participants in political action.³⁵ In addition, Tilly argues that political identities are made up of four components: boundaries that separate “us” from “them,” a set of relations within a boundary, a set of relations across boundaries, and a set of stories about boundaries and relations.³⁶

Tilly is also interested in what causes the relational matrix to shift and new politically consequential stories and identities to emerge. To this end, he comes up with the concepts of “entrepreneurship” and “cultural ecology.”³⁷ The former refers to the way that social processes result in the articulation of “Us and Them” boundaries, where they did not previously organize political action, whereas the latter is akin to a distributed form of intelligence, where unity is created through negotiations and interactions between different sites.

Consociationalism in Iraq

Iraq’s consociational system took shape through a series of conferences hosted by exiled Iraqi politicians and their allies from the early 1990s through to 2003³⁸ Among the most significant of these gatherings was the 1992 Salah Al-Din conference, where exiled Iraqi politicians formed an executive committee of 25 members and an advisory council. Positions on both bodies were allocated on the basis of attendees’ assessment of the proportion of each sect in the country. In addition, they formed a presidential council made up of so-called representatives of the three major sects and ethnicities in Iraq—Shi’a, Sunnis, and Kurds. The principles of ethno-sectarian division established at the Salah Al-Din conference would go on to become the basis on which the post-2003 political system in Iraq would be formed.

By mid-2003, the Civilian Provisional Administration established the Iraqi Governing Council based on a balance between exiled Iraqi politicians from the dominant opposition parties. Each party appointed ministers who controlled the resources and payrolls of their ministries, sacking civil servants who had served under the previous regime and

hiring individuals with affiliations to their parties and from the communities they supposedly represented. This system was then used to form the Interim Iraqi Government in 2004 and during the five elections that would follow, dividing ministries and control of their resources between the dominant ethno-sectarian parties.

Toby Dodge³⁹ has argued that consociationalism implemented in Iraq after 2003 functions in an informal norms-based way. The Iraqi constitution does not feature any of the principles of consociationalism apart from a limited form of federalism as applied to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.⁴⁰ Despite this, Dodge argues that an examination of how government formation has played out since 2005 suggests that a “consistent and inflexible set of informal rules has imposed a consociational logic on the system.”⁴¹ Once the votes have been counted and agreed upon, the government votes for the Speaker of Parliament, which according to the informal rules must be Sunni. Then the President is chosen from one of the two dominant Kurdish parties—the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan. Finally, the President is given the task of naming the Prime Minister, who must be Shi’a. Each Prime Minister since regime change, then, in accordance with the principle of proportionality, appoints a cabinet of “national unity,” awarding ministries and their resources to various parties that claim to represent Iraq’s ethnic and religious communities.

As Dodge⁴² argues in this special issue, the principle of proportionality has also been used since at least 2010 to divide senior civil service positions between the dominant post-2003 parties, who have appointed party loyalists to ministries so that they can siphon off resources to fund their parties and personal interests. Thus, it can be argued that while political machinery continues to function on the basis of power sharing in Iraq, it is the way that this system has entrenched politically sanctioned corruption that accounts for its failure. Indeed, corruption is so widespread in the country that some estimates put the amount of public money lost to corruption since 2003 at 551 billion USD.⁴³ The impact of this manifests itself in the lack of provision of even the most basic public service to the population, such as clean water, electricity, and adequate housing.

By entrenching sectarianism, consociationalism has also resulted in constant periods of violence in Iraq. While it is beyond the scope of this article to discuss this in detail, it includes the sectarian civil war that took place between 2005 and 2007 and where rival ethno-sectarian parties and associated militias fought to either increase their share in or overthrow Iraq’s elite pact.⁴⁴ Further, seven years later the sectarian policies pursued by former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki would go on to alienate a large number of the Iraqi population, fueling the rise of Daesh.⁴⁵ In turn, this led to continued protracted conflict and the rise of a powerful network of paramilitaries known as the Hashd Al-Shaabi, who have systematically cracked down on dissenting voices and severely limited civic space in the country.⁴⁶

2011 – “The people want the reform of the system”

In the summer of 2010, dire electricity provisions meant that as temperatures hit 50 degrees Celsius in the South, protests were launched that began in Basra and spread to other areas including Nasiriyah, Hillah, Karbala, Kufa, Ramadi, and Kut and Sunni-majority areas such as Ramadi and Fallujah. Protesters called for accountability for

corrupt politicians, 50 percent salary cuts for the three presidencies, provision of social welfare and services, including ration cards, electricity, and water, job opportunities, the dissolution of municipal councils⁴⁷ and the redistribution of oil revenues among Iraqi citizens.⁴⁸

The dominant narrative used by protesters during the 2011 demonstrations was “the people want the reform of the system”.⁴⁹ This was because at the time the protests took place, Iraq’s consociational system was in its infancy and demonstrators felt it was too early to make radical demands such as calling for the overthrow of the regime and wanted to give it a chance to see if it was capable of reform (Author’s interview, June 2021). Other protesters emphasized that they were calling for reform because they feared that to call for the overthrow of the regime might mean a return to Baathism⁵⁰ or that they would be accused of being affiliated with the old regime at a time when Nouri al-Maliki was using de-Baathification to strengthen his rule by persecuting Iraq’s Sunni community.⁵¹ Thus, another key slogan used during the demonstrations was “with our lives and blood we will sacrifice for Iraq,” juxtaposed against the popular Baathist chant “with our lives and blood we will sacrifice for Saddam” as means of showing that protesters’ loyalty was to their country as opposed to the former regime.⁵² In 2011, the formation of protesters’ identities took place within a matrix of politics, demographic considerations, and organizational constraints, which worked to limit their demands to reform of Iraq’s power-sharing system. Nevertheless, through a process of entrepreneurship, protesters drew new “us” and “them” identity boundaries between “the people” of Iraq and the government. In other words, “the people” previously separated across ethnic and religious lines came together through a cross-sectarian mobilization to call for reform of the political system. In this way, the ethno-sectarian divisions created by the *Muhasasa* and deepened by the sectarian civil war were transcended, demonstrating that contrary to arguments that conflict necessarily works to harden ethnic and religious identity, people with different ethnic and sect-based affiliations can work toward a common goal without violence.

However, the dominant narratives deployed by protesters in 2011 also suggest that their critique of the political system was underdeveloped. For example, one of the key Facebook groups that were used to organize protests was called “The Blue Revolution.” For those organizing in the years leading up to the 2011 mobilization, this color was supposed to symbolize that the “sky is the limit” for what demonstrators could achieve.⁵³ This is further exemplified by the rhetoric on a poster used to advertise the “Day of Rage,” which read: “Iraqis stand up and raise your voice! No to unemployment, yes to equal opportunities in gaining employment. For a dignified and free life”.⁵⁴ In both instances, protesters employed depoliticized language around raising aspirations, freedom and equal opportunities rather than a systematic critique of structural issues. What is more, key chants used by protesters, such as “Liar Liar Nouri al-Maliki; bring electricity,” “government officials are thieves,” and “oil for the people not for the thieves”,⁵⁵ attributed blame to individual politicians and only went so far as to make demands for services and the redistribution of oil wealth. As such, it can be argued that the 2011 protests were commonist as demonstrators from different ethnicities and sects came together to call for the provision of better services and jobs and not necessarily the end, or the total transformation, of the sectarian basis of the *Muhasasa* system.

The 2011 mobilization came to an end as a result of a three-part strategy used by the ruling elite, consisting of the deployment of violent coercion, concessions, and the use of sectarian rhetoric. On February 25, 2011, alone, known as the “Day of Rage,” it was reported that at least 23 protesters had been killed and hundreds injured due to the use of live ammunition by state forces.⁵⁶ In addition, state forces arbitrarily arrested demonstrators and journalists and used low flying helicopters, sound bombs, water cannons, and tear gas to disperse them (Author’s interview, June 2022).⁵⁷ Beyond deploying coercion, al-Maliki promised to implement reforms within 100 days, including cutting his own salary, providing 288,000 state jobs, and giving 15,000 IQD to each citizen monthly as a food subsidy.⁵⁸ In response to the protests, several local politicians also resigned.⁵⁹ Finally, al-Maliki deployed sectarian rhetoric to scare protesters into submission, as well as to give justification for the suppression of the demonstrations. Indeed, in the run up to the “Day of Rage,” al-Maliki appeared in a televised address accusing some groups among the protesters of having links to Baathists and al-Qaeda and of “wanting to take the country backwards”.⁶⁰

As a result of the deployment of repression by the political elite, while the 2011 wave of protests were marked by an attempt at cross-sectarian mobilization, it failed to produce a cohesive oppositional identity. To return to Tilly’s ideas about how politically consequential narratives and identities emerge, it could be argued that the process of cultural ecology was relevant here. This is because unity was created through the common demands articulated by different sites that had previously been divided across ethno-sectarian lines. However, this was loose and temporally limited. I argue that this was at least in part because al-Maliki reverted to one of the key narratives that had worked to naturalize the *Muhasasa*, claiming that without an elite pact of communal leaders, the country would see the return of Baathism and the violent suppression of the Shi’a population. Consequently, the protests were demobilized, meaning that the cross-sectarian alliances forged on the streets could not translate into reforms of the political system. Secondly, since the principle of “proportionality” has allowed the ruling sectarian elite to capture the state and its resources, when it seemed that their interests were being threatened, they turned to violent coercion as means of defending their stakes in it.

2015 – “In the name of religion the thieves have robbed us”

The 2015 protests emerged in the context of the fall of Mosul to Daesh, which was enabled by politically sanctioned corruption under al-Maliki that had left the army ill-equipped, understaffed, and lacking the sufficient training to be able to tackle the insurgency.⁶¹ This was compounded by the introduction of austerity measures and cuts to already dire services, with the government slowing down or stopping payments of public sector jobs altogether. The protests initially began in Basra against the lack of electricity provision. In mid-July, a group of people who had gathered to protest outside a power plant were fired at, including 18-year-old Muntadhar Ali Ghani Al-Hilifi, who was fatally shot.⁶² By July 31, protests in solidarity with Basra had spread to Baghdad, growing to include other cities in the South including Kut, Amara, Nasiriyah, Karbala, Najaf, Hila, and Diwaniya. The mobilization was predominantly made up of middle-

class demonstrators with high to intermediate education who held white-collar occupations, with most of them being over the age of 30.⁶³ The protests differed from any that had come before because, in the words of Falah Abdul Jabbar, they were “neither sectoral (by workers, professionals or students) nor local (confined to a certain geographic area) nor factional (solely owned by a certain community or sect). It was an all-embracing protest against the entire political system as an institution, culture and practice.”⁶⁴ At the time, the demonstrations were also the largest and most enduring mobilization that Iraq had seen after 2003, lasting for five months and growing from 50,000 demonstrators on July 31 to one million people taking to Tahrir Square just two months later.⁶⁵

Like the 2011 mobilization, the 2015 protests were also reformist. Abdul Jaber summarizes the ideological position of protesters as encompassing “a critique of corruption, political Islam, sectarianism, the executive branch, the judiciary and specific sectoral demands—wages, salaries, services and tributes to fallen protesters”.⁶⁶ This was because the protests continued to be restricted by organizational and political constraints. In the context of the rise of Daesh, protesters feared that making demands beyond reform would lead to accusations of them being part of the group and wanting to overthrow the post-2003 political system in the same way (Author’s interview, June 2021). It is perhaps for this reason that protesters equated their fight against corruption with the fight against Daesh. To this end, they used slogans including “corruption and terrorism are two parts of the same cause,” “the Hashd is fighting Daesh and our Civil Hashd is fighting corruption,” and “terrorism and corruption are two sides of the same coin.”⁶⁷ The dominant narratives employed by protesters competed with those used by al-Maliki and his affiliates, who accused protesters of detracting from the fight against Daesh. This meant that protesters had to alter the way that they made their demands to counteract the political elites’ attempts to delegitimize their movement by showing that their cause, just like that of the Hashd, was aimed at restoring the integrity of the state.

The 2015 mobilization developed into an explicitly anti-sectarian movement. During the demonstrations, protesters linked the politicization of communal identity under the post-2003 settlement, corruption, lack of stability, and the deteriorating quality of their lives for the first time.⁶⁸ As a result, they formed politically consequential narratives about identity represented by the key slogan “in the name of religion the thieves have robbed us.”⁶⁹ Similarly, other banners read “No to sectarianism, no to sectarian quota sharing, yes to citizenship” and “I am Sunni but against sectarianism; I am Shi’a but against sectarianism; I am Yezidi but against sectarianism.”⁷⁰ These slogans are demonstrative of how protesters’ ontological narratives had changed over time. They now saw themselves as being united across different ethnic and religious communities through their disdain for the sectarianism at the heart of the political system, which they perceived as having robbed them of the public goods to which they were entitled. An activist from Baghdad interviewed for this article argued the reason that protesters deployed anti-sectarian narratives was because the rise of Daesh had led to a recognition among demonstrators of the violence that sectarianism had wrought in the country, resulting in their opposition to the politicization of communal identities (Author’s interview, June 2022).⁷¹ In addition, the maturation of protesters’ critique was also enabled by an increase in demonstrators’ organizational capacity since 2011. While the protests in

Basra had been spontaneous, in Baghdad they were led by coordination committees that had developed out of the groups and activists who participated in the 2011 protests.⁷² The largest of these was the *Mustameroun*, which included members of the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP), prominent leftist activists, and civil society organizations.⁷³ The fact that protests were led by seasoned and highly organized networks enabled the emergence of a more nuanced critique of the political system and its failings in Iraq.

Additionally, the 2015 protests marked the beginning of the development of calls for a civic state in Iraq based on unitary nationalism. Thus, some of the main slogans that were used by protesters were “Secularism, secularism! Neither Shia or Sunni”⁷⁴ and “Brothers Sunni and Shi’a, we won’t sell out this country” (Author’s interview, June 2022). In this way, the 2015 protests worked to delegitimize the norms on which the *Muhasasa* was built by using narratives that drew identity boundaries between an “Us” represented by a civic tendency articulated by a majority Shi’a population and a “Them” represented by the political elite and a system that stood for sectarianism and divisiveness. In these slogans, the key unifying factor that determines the relations between protesters is a joint commitment to their country and a particular vision of a civic state. This show of solidarity is also significant because it existed even though by and large, Sunnis did not participate in the protests out of fear of real or perceived persecution, including being arrested on terrorism charges.⁷⁵ In this way, it can be argued that the 2015 protests were transformationist, insofar as through the articulation of national unity and explicit critique of sectarianism they sought to transform identities and to undermine the sectarianism on which Iraq’s consociational regime is built.

The 2015 mobilization, then, demonstrates that rather than identities being “hard” or “crystallized,” they can be reconstructed in specific moments and under certain circumstances. In the case of the protest movement in Federal Iraq, the emergence of a unitary nationalist identity was enabled by the failures of consociationalism in the form of poor service provision and the resurgence of sectarian violence as well as an increase in protesters’ organizational capacity. What this shift in identity also demonstrates is the possibility of reconstructing identity among groups previously in conflict into shared identities, as it was members of the Shi’a community—who had been persecuted under Saddam Hussein’s regime and suffered like all Iraqi through years of sanctions and protracted wars both before and after regime change—that largely mobilized during the 2015 demonstrations under a unitary nationalist mantra.

In 2015, the demobilization of protests was the result of their co-optation by the Sadrist Movement. Beginning in August 2015 and into early 2016, Muqtada al-Sadr repeatedly called on his supporters to join the demonstrations.⁷⁶ In April 2016, Sadrists stormed the Green Zone, entered the parliament building and staged a sit-in. The Sadrists’ participation in the protests caused a rift between the leaders of the protest movement. Notably, the ICP decided to ally with the Sadrists to leverage their 34 seats in parliament to put pressure on the government to meet protesters’ demands. Other protest leaders, however, saw the Sadrists as being part of the same corrupt elite that they had been protesting against. This led to the withdrawal of most protesters from the streets. Later, during the 2018 elections when the Sadrists ran in an electoral alliance with the ICP, the latter boosted the Sadrists’ votes in some provinces, leading to their victory in the elections, whereas the ICP did not seem to gain any similar benefits and

despite fielding 58 candidates only won two seats.⁷⁷ Therefore, the alliance of anti-sectarian activists with the Sadrists in an attempt to make a space for themselves within the coalition of ethno-sectarian elites worked to demobilize the 2015 movement. It meant that the movement itself and the party at its helm became fragmented and lost its legitimacy and could not obtain the strategic position within the ethno-sectarian power-sharing system it had sought to secure.

2019 – “We want a country”

The protests that started in 2019 were the culmination of years of built-up socio-economic grievances. A global fall in oil prices, which accounts for 90% of public spending in Iraq, saw the country’s gross national income fall from 7,040 USD in 2013 to 4,800 USD in 2017.⁷⁸ Moreover, while 600,000 young people enter the labor market each year, the 2019 budget only allocated 50,000 new job opportunities for them.⁷⁹ Consequently, in the run up to the protests, around 40% of all youth were unemployed in Iraq, with this figure going up to 50% in the Southern Provinces.⁸⁰ Moreover, in the weeks leading up to major demonstrations, the authorities began razing informal settlements across Baghdad and the Southern Provinces, leading to small outbursts of protest. These provide housing for five to six million people across Iraq and are in areas where there was large participation in protests such as Sadr City.⁸¹ Taken together, these factors meant that while in 2012–2013 34% of Iraqis thought that the performance of the government was either good or very good, in 2019, only 16% indicated that they are generally satisfied with its performance.⁸²

By October 1, 2019, mass protests erupted in Baghdad, with over a million demonstrators repeatedly taking to the streets demanding services, employment, and an end to corruption.⁸³ However, this mobilization saw the deployment of unprecedented elite-sanctioned state and extra-state violence, resulting in the death of some 700 demonstrators and injuries to at least 25,000 others.⁸⁴ This, in turn, put into motion a process of entrepreneurship, which saw protesters draw new identity boundaries that set them up collectively against the political elite. This manifested itself by October 25 in the development of their demands into calls for the overhaul of the political system and the parties at its center (Author’s interviews, August 2020, June 2021, June 2022).

However, it was not just the amount of violence that led to an alteration in identity boundaries and protesters’ demands but rather that it was clear to them from the areas where demonstrations were taking place that they were Shi’a demonstrators who were being attacked by the Shi’a elite who were meant, under Iraq’s consociational system, to protect them.⁸⁵ This worked to challenge the “groupist” assumptions on which the *Muhasasa* was built. It demonstrated that it should not be taken for granted that the inclusion of communal “leaders” within government necessarily ensures the protection of the interests of those they are meant to represent. Consequently, protesters began to recognize that the system that was presented as one that would protect them was increasingly oppressing them, leading to a loss of the common-sense justifications that had thus far sustained the *Muhasasa*.

Demonstrators’ identity narratives were also formed through boundaries drawn up within the opposition itself. In 2019, there was a significant shift in the protest demographic, with most protesters being between the ages of 15 and 35, 60% of whom had

not completed their high-school education and 49% were unemployed.⁸⁶ When questioned about why this shift in protest demographic had taken place, activists argued that the Sadrist-Communist alliance had created deep distrust within the opposition camp due to the collapse of the 2015 demonstrations back into sectarianism. This, in turn, shaped later mobilizations in that the loss of credibility of established activists meant that by 2019, protests were led by young socio-economically disadvantaged people who defined themselves against an older generation of activists who allowed their movement to be co-opted by sectarian interests. This shift can be further accounted for by the fact that many of the young people who participated in the 2019 protests may have been too young to partake in earlier instances of protest. They were also the first generation to come of age following the sanctions period and grew up with access to the internet and the ability to travel. As such, the change in demographics and increase in protester numbers in 2019 may also be accounted for by the coming of age of a more politically astute and mobile generation of young Iraqis.

Furthermore, in comparison to earlier mobilizations, the 2019 protests saw the development of the most coherent critique of the *Muhasasa* of any mass mobilization in Iraq to date as well as an attempt to envision the alternative state that demonstrators wanted for themselves. While in 2011 protest slogans focused on individual acts of corruption, by 2019, most, if not all, of the activists interviewed for this article seemed to have a strong grasp of how the mechanisms of ethno-sectarian apportionment worked to limit their life opportunities. Protesters lamented how clientelism meant that only those with connections to political parties could gain access to public goods (Author's interviews, August 2020, June 2021). As such, the most prominent slogan to emerge during the 2019 demonstrations was "we want a homeland." This would see the state transformed from a "state of parties" to a "state of citizens," where Iraqis would be represented based on their "Iraqi-ness" as opposed to their ethnic or sectarian affiliations.

For protesters, the idea of a "state of citizens" was captured by the notion of *Mawatana*, which was set up against the ills of the *Muhasasa* system. Activists explained that the "state of citizens" is made up of individuals committed to Iraq and who have the competence necessary to serve the Iraqi people, as opposed to using the state as a means of fulfilling narrow sect and party interests (Author's interview, June 2021). Arguably, this shift could be termed post-sectarian insofar as the dominant narratives of protesters suggest that their primary loyalty was no longer to their ethnic groups or sects but rather to the state and their fellow citizens above all else. In this way, the 2019 protests challenged the understanding among some scholars of consociationalism of identities as rigid and difficult to change when they have been mobilized for violent ends, as activists developed a new way of relating to each other based on unitary nationalism and citizenship. Further, contrary to Nagle's and Clancy's contention that "an overarching public identity is unrealistic for ethno-nationally divided societies at least for the short-to-medium term",⁸⁷ this development took place within the space of just eight years after the beginning of the mass-protest movement in Iraq and less than two decades after regime change. Having said this, much has been made of the use of Shi'a iconography during the protests, however, as Fanar Haddad⁸⁸ has suggested, rather than being assertions of difference within the context of the demonstrations, they

functioned more as good luck charms that reassured protesters, many of whom had been raised at least culturally religious, of the righteousness of their cause.

Furthermore, by the time the 2019 protests broke out, it had been two years since Daesh had been defeated and the specter of the sectarian civil war was a distant memory, meaning that protesters' sect-based identities were no longer under threat. In addition, as Haddad⁸⁹ has argued, for many of the young people who participated in the protests, the idea of "Shi'a rule" was not a dream as it had been for older generations but was the only reality that they had ever known. Thus, their expectations of what was politically possible were not contrasted against the Baathist era but envisaged in relation to the dire socio-economic conditions they had experienced under the *Muhasasa* system. These three factors—the stabilization of the security situation, generational differences, and a context where "Shia rule" is certain—created an enabling environment that allowed young people to develop new forms of belonging captured by the notion of *Mawatana*.

The 2019 mobilization was brought to an end by elite-sanctioned violence. The assassination of Qassem Soleimani, head of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and Abu Mahdi Al Muhandus, commander of Al Hashd Al-Shaabi, by a U.S. drone strike on January 3, 2020, allowed the Sadrists to co-opt the dominant narratives of the protests and turn them into demonstrations against U.S. interference. While the Sadrists had initially participated in demonstrations and were vital to boosting numbers and protecting protest squares from militia violence (Author's interview, August 2020), they seized the assassination as an opportunity to take over the demonstrations, with Sadr calling for a million-man demonstration against U.S. presence in Iraq⁹⁰ and his followers attacking protesters with knives and burning down their tents (Author's interview, June 2022). This was made possible because the installation of Islamist parties in the post-2003 political system, the vast majority of whom have links to regional powers, has led Iraq to become a battlefield for their rivalries. This gave Sadr the space he needed to bring protests to an end at a convenient time for him. Protester anger meant that following Adil Abdul-Mahdi's resignation, it was impossible to appoint an interim Prime Minister from any of the dominant post-2003 parties. As such, those parties needed to agree on a "consensus" independent candidate. At the time, the involvement of Sadr's supporters in the protests and the fact that he had the second-largest number of MPs in parliament meant that he had the upper hand and could veto candidates for Prime Minister that did not serve his interests. As such, once he had approved the nomination of Mustafa Al-Kadhimi, he turned against the protests, which were no longer beneficial to him and effectively brought them to an end.

Conclusion

In this article, I have shown that it is the failure of the *Muhasasa* to govern that has led to the emergence of a new shared identity based on unitary nationalism within the protest movement in Federal Iraq between 2011 and 2019. This was demonstrated by the changes in the narratives that protesters told about themselves and their relationship to the state. As identities transformed, so did protesters' demands and the ways that they

went about claiming them. Thus, in 2011 protesters came together as “the people” in a cross-sectarian mobilization for reform of the political system. In 2015, protesters’ ontological narratives had changed, allowing them to draw new “Us” and “Them” boundaries, which saw them mobilize in the name of a nationalist Iraqi identity united in its disdain for the sectarianism at the heart of the post-2003 political system. By 2019, the protests had transformed once again, becoming post-sectarian and calling for the development of a “state of citizens” captured by the notion of *Mawatana*, where they would be represented on the basis of their “Iraqi-ness” as opposed to their sect or ethnicity. In this way, I challenged the tendency in some of the literature on consociationalism to argue that identities can change without elucidating the circumstances under which this might happen.

In this article, I have also used the protest movement as an example to show that conflict can sometimes soften identities instead of only hardening them, as scholars of consociationalism often assume. In addition I have demonstrated that it should not be taken for granted that communal leaders will represent the interests of their community or that the members of said communities are homogeneous and their behaviors predictable. As a result of these misconceptions, consociationalism in Iraq, and elsewhere, has worked to promote instability rather than peace and security in the long term. When faced with such instability, the experience of the protest movement in Federal Iraq suggests that the core principles of consociationalism work to thwart challenges to sectarian power sharing. These findings point to the need for further examinations of how the mechanisms of power sharing work to quash civic movements. In addition, they invite further study into how identities may have transformed within broader Iraqi society beyond the protest movement, 20 years after regime change.

Notes

1. Margret Somers, “The Narrative Construction of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach,” *Theory and Society* 23, no. 5 (1994): 605–649.
2. Charles Tilly, *Stories, Identities and Political Change* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2002); Tilly, Charles, “Political Identities in Changing Politics,” *Social Research* 70, no. 2 (2003): 605–619.
3. Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).
4. *Ibid.*, 25, 33, 36–37.
5. Arend Lijphart, “Constructivism and Consociational Theory,” Newsletter of the Organised Section in *Comparative Politics of the American Political Science Association* 12, no. 1 (2001): 11–3.
6. *Ibid.*, 11–12.
7. John McGarry and Brendan O’Leary, “Iraq’s Constitution of 2005: liberal Consociationalism as Political Prescription,” *International Journal of Constitutional Law* 5, no. 4 (2007): 670–98.
8. *Ibid.*, 675.
9. *Ibid.*, 676.
10. John McGarry and Brendan O’Leary, “Power Shared after the Deaths of Thousands,” in *Consociational Theory; McGarry and O’Leary and the Northern Island Conflict*, edited by R. Taylor (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2009), 15–84, 17.

11. John Nagle and Mary-Alice C. Clancy, "Constructing a Shared Public Identity in Ethno Nationally Divided Societies: Comparing Consociational and Transformationist Perspectives," *Nations and Nationalism* 18, no. 1 (2012): 78–97, 80.
12. Nagle and Clancy, "Constructing a Shared Public Identity in Ethno Nationally Divided Societies," 80.
13. Joanne McEvoy and Eduardo Wassim Aboultaif, "Power-Sharing Challenges: From Weak Adoptability to Dysfunction in Iraq," *Ethnopolitics* 21, no. 3 (2022): 238–257, 245.
14. Dylan O'Driscoll, "Autonomy Impaired: Centralisation, Authoritarianism and the Failing Iraqi State," *Ethnopolitics* 16, no. 4 (2017): 315–322, 324.
15. Caroline A. Hartzell and Mathew Hoddie, "The Art of the Possible: Power Sharing and Post-Civil War Democracy," *World Politics* 67, no. 1 (2015): 37–71, 46.
16. Toby Dodge and Renad Mansour, "Sectarianization and Desectarianization in the Struggle for Iraq's Political Field," *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 18, no. 1 (2020): 58–69, 149.
17. Stathis N. Kalyvas "Ethnic Defection in Civil War," *Comparative Political Studies* 41, no. 8 (2008): 1043–1068, 1045.
18. Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).
19. Toby Dodge, "Iraq, Consociationalism and the Incoherence of the State," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* (2023).
20. Cera Murtagh. "The Plight of Civic Parties in Divided Societies," *International Political Science Review* 41, no. 1 (2020): 73–88, 75.
21. Chiara Milan, *Social Mobilization beyond Ethnicity: Civic Activism and Grassroots Movements in Bosnia And Herzegovina* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2020); Chiara Milan, "Navigating Ethnicity: Collective Identities and Movement Framing in Deeply Divided Societies," *Nationalities Papers* 50, no. 6 (2022): 1057–70.
22. John Nagle, "Sectarianism: Danger': Nonsectarian Social Movements and Identity Politics in Divided Societies," in *The Identity Dilemma: Social Movements and Collective Identity*, edited by Aidan McGarry and James M. Jasper (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015), 45–64; John Nagle, "Beyond Ethnic Entrenchment and Amelioration: An Analysis of Non-Sectarian Social Movements and Lebanon's Consociationalism," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 41, no. 7 (2018): 1370–89; John Nagle, "Crafting Radical Opposition or Reproducing Homonormativity? Consociationalism and LGBT Rights Activism in Lebanon," *Journal of Human Rights* 17, no. 1 (2018): 75–88; John Nagle, "Disarticulation and Chains of Equivalence: Agonism and Non-Sectarian Movements in Post-War Beirut," *Third World Quarterly* 43, no. 6 (2022): 1343–60.
23. Nagle, "Sectarianism: Danger'."
24. *Ibid.*, 48.
25. Tilly, *Stories, Identities and Political Change*; Tilly, "Political Identities in Changing Polities."
26. Somers, "The Narrative Construction of Identity."
27. Irene Costantini and Dylan O'Driscoll, "Conflict Mitigation versus Governance: The Case of Consociation in Iraq," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* (2023).
28. Morten Valbjorn, "What Do we Talk about When we Talk about anti/Counter/Multi/Post/de/Trans-Sectarianism – And How to Go about It?," in *Memo for the Workshop 'the Challenges of Transnational Movements and Inclusionary States in the MENA* (Beirut: The Lebanese American University, 2019).
29. *Ibid.*, 4.
30. Somers, "The Narrative Construction of Identity."
31. *Ibid.*, 618.
32. *Ibid.*, 626.
33. *Ibid.*
34. Tilly, "Political Identities in Changing Polities," 608.
35. *Ibid.*, 610.
36. *Ibid.*, 608.
37. *Ibid.*, 615.

38. Toby Dodge. *Iraq and Muhasasa Ta'ifia; the external imposition of sectarian politics*. 2018. <https://fpc.org.uk/iraq-and-muhasasa-taifia-the-external-imposition-of-sectarian-politics/>. (accessed 29 June 2023).
39. Toby Dodge, "Iraq's Informal Consociationalism and Its Problems," *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 20, no. 2 (2020): 145–52.
40. Ibid., 146–147.
41. Ibid., 147.
42. Dodge, "Consociationalism and the Incoherence of the State."
43. Renad Mansour, *The Deadly Greed of Iraq's Elites*, 2022. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/the-world-today/2022-10/deadly-greed-iraqs-elite> (accessed 3 January 2023).
44. Toby Dodge, *From War to New Authoritarianism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 54.
45. Renad Mansour. *The Sunni Predicament in Iraq*. 2016. https://carnegieendowment.org/files/CMEC_59_Mansour_Sunni_Final.pdf. (accessed 27 June 2022).
46. Mina Aldroubi, "Iraq: The murder of Activist Ihab Al Wazni Highlights Widespread Political Killings." *The National*. 2021. <https://www.thenationalnews.com/mena/iraq/iraq-the-murder-of-activist-ihab-al-wazni-highlights-widespread-political-killings-1.1219482>.
47. Al Madah, 'Solidarity and Peace' Support Peaceful Protests, Call for a Reduction in the Salaries of The Three Presidencies. p. 2. 2011. <https://almadapaper.net/file/archiveto2615//2053/2.pdf> (accessed 27 June 2022).
48. Al Madah, *Popular Protests Take Over the Country's Governorates*. 2011. <https://almadapaper.net/file/archiveto2615/2055/4.pdf> (accessed 27 June 2022).
49. Falah Abdul Jaber, "The Iraqi Protest Movement: From Identity Politics to Issue Politics," *LSE Middle East Centre Paper Series* 25 (2018): 11.
50. Al Madah, *Friday Activists Reject Baathism, Al Qaeda and Change their Place of Residence Due to Unknown Persons Following Them*. 2011. <https://almadapaper.net/file/archiveto2615/2053/1.pdf> (accessed 22 June 2022).
51. Mansour, *The Sunni Predicament in Iraq*.
52. Al Madah, *Popular Protests Take Over the Country's Governorates*.
53. Ahmad H. Hatif, *A Blue Revolution for Change is Launched in Iraq*, 2009. <https://iraqlife.files.wordpress.com/2010/01/a-blue-revolution-english.pdf> (accessed 26 June 2022).
54. Ahmed K. Al Rawi, "The Arab Spring and Online Protests in Iraq," *International Journal of Communication* 8 (2014): 916–942, 919.
55. Al Rawi, "The Arab Spring and Online Protests in Iraq," 917; Balsam Mustafa, "All about Iraq: Re-Modifying Older Slogans and Chants in Tishreen [October] Protests," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 58, no. 3 (2023): 401–420, 5; Haifa Zangana, 2013. "Iraq," in *Dispatches from the Arab Spring*, edited by P. Amar and V. Prashad (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 308–324, 314.
56. Stephanie McCrummen, *23 Killed in Iraq's 'Dage of Rage' protests*, 2011. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/13-killed-in-iraqs-day-of-rage-protests/2011/02/25/ABJOv6I_story.html (accessed 27 June 2022).
57. Amnesty International, *Iraq: Days of Rage: Protests and Repression in Iraq*. 2011. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde14/013/2011/en/> (Accessed 27 June 2022).
58. Rima Majed, *Contemporary Social Movements in Iraq: Mapping the Labour Movement and the 2015 Mobilisations*, 2020, p. 26. https://www.rosalux.de/fileadmin/images/publikationen/Studien/Studien_10-20_Social-Movements-Iraq.pdf (accessed June 2022).
59. Daniel A. Kaysi and Marina Ottaway, *Iraq: Protest, Democracy and Autocracy*, 2011. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2011/03/28/iraq-protest-democracy-and-autocracy-pub-43306> (accessed 27 June 2022).
60. Al Madah, *Protests Gather Today... and Al-Maliki Calls for Them to be Aborted Because of the 'Saddamists'*. 2011. <https://almadapaper.net/file/archiveto2615/2054/1.pdf> (Accessed 22 June 2022).
61. Yassir Abbas and Dan Trombly, 2014. *Inside the Collapse of the Iraqi Army's 2nd Division*. <https://warontherocks.com/2014/07/inside-the-collapse-of-the-iraqi-armys-2nd-division/> (accessed 27 June 2022).

62. Abdul Jaber, "The Iraqi Protest Movement," 17.
63. Ibid., 23, 25.
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid., 17.
66. Ibid., 18.
67. Al Madah, *Popular Protests in Dhi Qar and Babil Against Corruption and Terrorism*, p. 1–2. 2015. <https://almadapaper.net/file/archiveto2615//3421/Issue%20817.pdf> (Accessed 27 June 2022).
68. Abdul Jaber, "The Iraqi Protest Movement," 16.
69. Ibid., 9.
70. Ibid., 18.
71. Zahra Ali, "From Recognition to Redistribution? Protest Movements in Iraq in the Age of 'New Civil Society,'" *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 15, no. 4 (2021): 528–42: 12–13.
72. Majed, *Contemporary Social Movements in Iraq*.
73. Ibid., 43.
74. Ibid., 27.
75. Abdul Jaber, "The Iraqi Protest Movement," 20.
76. Majed, *Contemporary Social Movements in Iraq*, 40
77. Benedict Robin-D'Cruz, *The Sadrist–Communist Alliance: Implications for Iraq's Secular Politics*, 2018. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/2018/06/06/the-sadrist-communist-alliance-implications-for-iraqs-secular-politics/> (accessed 27 June 2022).
78. Lina Khatib and Renad Mansour, *Where is The State in Lebanon and Iraq*, 2021, p. 19. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/2021-04-21-where-is-the-state-iraq-lebanon-mansour-khatib.pdf> (accessed 19 July 2021).
79. Ali T. Al Hamoud, "A Sociological Perspective into What Happened and What is Possible," in *The Tishreen Protests in Iraq*, edited by F. K. Nadhmi and H. Hassan (Baghdad: Al Madah, 2021), 63–77, 64.
80. Ibid., 66.
81. Al Madah, 2021. *Residents from the Slums: We are Nothing but Purple Fingers for Election Candidates*. 2021. [Online] Available at: <https://almadapaper.net/view.php?cat=236731> (accessed 19 July 2021).
82. Khatib and Mansour, *Where is The State in Lebanon and Iraq*, 19.
83. Dodge and Mansour, "Sectarianization and Desectarianization in the Struggle for Iraq's Political Field," 65.
84. Amnesty International, *Iraq: Iranian Tear Gas Grenades Among Those Causing Gruesome Protester Deaths*, 2019. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/10/iraq-gruesome-string-of-fatalities-as-new-tear-gas-grenades-pierce-protesters-skulls/> (accessed 26 January 2021).
85. Ahmed Al Sheikh Majid, "Iran's View towards the Tishreen Protests ... Enemies of Iraq's Shia," *Tuk Tuk*, no. 1 (2019): 2.
86. Al Hamoud, "A Sociological Perspective into What Happened and What is Possible," 64.
87. Nagle and Clancy, "Constructing a Shared Public Identity in Ethno Nationally Divided Societies," 80.
88. Fanar Haddad, *Hip Hop, Poetry and Shia Iconography: How Tahrir Square Gave Birth to A New Iraq*, 2019. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/iraq-new-political-awareness-and-culture-have-been-formed> (accessed 5 August 2022).
89. Haddad, *Hip Hop, Poetry and Shia Iconography*.
90. Arwa Ibrahim, *Sadr Calls for 'Million-Man March' Against US Presence in Iraq*, 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/1/14/sadr-calls-for-million-man-march-against-us-presence-in-iraq> (accessed 27 June 2022).

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the protesters and activists who generously gave up their time to speak to me. I would also like to thank Toby Dodge, Bassel Salloukh and Allison McCulloch for the opportunity to participate in this special issue, as well as all the participants in the “Consociationalism and the State” workshop series and the two anonymous peer reviewers for their feedback.

Ethics approval

Approval for the interviews used for this article were received from the LSE Ethics Committee under project approval numbers 87689 and 1062.

Notes on contributor

Taif Alkhudary is a PhD student at the Department of Politics and International Studies (POLIS), University of Cambridge, and a Research Officer at the LSE Middle East Center.