

## INTRODUCTION

### Hybrid Iraq

ISAIAH BERLIN once cautioned historians not to minimize the achievements of the Russian intelligentsia of the nineteenth century, despite the fact that their ideals were not materialized after the October Revolution. We should consider, wrote Berlin, their contribution to literature, culture, philosophy, and social criticism.<sup>1</sup> The same remarks are equally relevant to the achievements of the Iraqi intelligentsia. Whether collaborating with or persecuted by colonizers or local political elites, Iraqi intellectuals were deemed, at best, impotent in the face of political oppression and, at worse, responsible for many of their country's miseries.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the story of Hashemite Iraq is that of nation building. Regardless of its success or failure, a national project cannot occur without intellectuals fostering new notions of both time and space. Intellectuals were the historians who wrote, rewrote, and reinvented their nation's past, the teachers who educated its youth, and the novelists who depicted their social, cultural, and political milieu. Iraqi intellectuals, however, were also the harshest critics of the national project and the group most active in exposing the transgressions of modern colonialism. Furthermore, Iraqi critics theorized about such modern phenomena as colonialism, nationalism, and print capitalism, and their views provide us with indispensable insights into not only the history of the Iraqi state but also, and more important, the ways that public spheres, state apparatuses, and civil societies are created and cultivated within colonial and postcolonial contexts. In this study, therefore, I investigate how Iraqi intellectuals defined their relationship to their national community by focusing on their activities in the print media.

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In this book I take a functional rather than an ethical approach to the meaning of the term *intellectual*. An intellectual is seen as a person who expresses opinions concerning the nature of society, whether to generate change or to preserve the existing political order. The intellectual's authority can be based on professional expertise or ethical commitments. However, the intellectual must also be a person with some means of propagating ideas through journalism, literary activity, or affiliation with an institution. The intellectual's ideas must have an effect on society, whether in a cultural or a political realm. Thus an intellectual could be a marginalized communist, a bureaucrat working in the Ministry of Education, or a religious scholar attempting either to advocate reform or to protect religious practices from Westernized elites.

The representations of intellectuals and their social functions changed in Iraq over time. In 1921–1923, when the state had not fully consolidated its power, there was more room for the simultaneous existence of various views in the public domain. Intellectuals saw themselves as agents of nationalism and democracy who envisioned ideal forms of governance. Jürgen Habermas's theory underscoring the links between political participation and democracy is applicable to this milieu. Habermas described a European bourgeois public sphere whose functions were to negotiate the interests of the individuals with the demands of public life and to foster public debate through the activity of clubs, salons, cafés, and the press. Habermas's parameters of the public sphere, namely, tolerance, debate, and consensus, were shared by Iraqi writers.<sup>3</sup> The desire for democracy and the will to be free from colonial rule was instrumental in shaping public discourses and found advocates from the early 1920s on in the newly established press.

Beginning in 1924, the state started to strengthen its grip on Iraqi society. In 1924–1958 bureaucratic networks took form, and the educated middle classes (the *effendia*) underwent urbanization and growth. Many intellectuals worked for the state and evaluated the capacities of its subaltern classes to absorb new ideas. These intellectuals often thought that many elements of the Iraqi population were ignorant and irrational and thus ill prepared to be a part of a democratic regime. This antidemocratic frame of thinking was most evident in the 1930s, although it typified the 1940s and 1950s as well.

Nevertheless, during the 1940s and 1950s, socialist and communist thinkers challenged the state's political leadership and its intellectuals. Groups such as the Ahali social-democratic group and the Iraqi Communist Party were established in the 1930s, but they reached larger audiences in the 1940s

and 1950s. Their intellectuals argued that the Iraqi state and the British had failed in their plans to reform Iraqis and offered alternative models instead. They championed the representation of intellectuals as individuals deeply entrenched in their society and committed to its change. The means of altering society were accordingly revolutionized and included not only activities in the public sphere but also more radical and violent solutions.

Frantz Fanon observed that, although colonized intellectuals endeavor to either charm or denounce their colonizers, nationally conscious writers produce a committed literature that aims at liberation and democracy. In the postcolonial stage, however, Fanon criticized the intelligentsia that articulated its national aspirations in undemocratic, chauvinistic, and racial fashions. The alternative, to him, was a native class of intellectuals (civil servants, technicians, and revolutionary elites) who would radicalize and politicize the people and give them a place in history.<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, Iraqi intellectuals in the 1950s made similar claims. They tried to assess the influence of the anti-British struggle on culture, denounced the undemocratic features of their state, and were encouraged to create literary and artistic works that would speak directly to and on behalf of the people. Moreover, Iraqi Marxist and socialist writers argued that their transparent representations of the lives of rural inhabitants and the poor accurately mirrored the experience of the Iraqi people.<sup>5</sup>

### IRAQI HYBRIDITY

Homi Bhabha's formulation of colonial hybridity is extremely constructive for understanding Iraqi culture and the location of the intellectual in it. To Bhabha, the categories of "East" and "West" or "the colonized" and "the colonizer" are not inseparable monoliths. Rather, both the colonized and the colonizers are changed and transformed during the colonial interaction. Moreover, this hybridity signifies a process in which the nature of colonial domination itself is challenged. The constant fusion and mutual synthesis between the cultures of the colonizer and the colonized creates an ambivalent space in which a symmetric differentiation between the colonizer and the colonized and their representation as "self" and "other" become impossible to maintain. Translation, bilingualism, bilingual education, and migration to and from the metropolis further dissipate such categories. These hybrid relationships thus contest the assumption of the colonizers to identify a recognizable colonized subject who is in need of civilizing and guidance.<sup>6</sup>

In Iraq, such hybrid cultural models signified not only the meeting of the

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British/colonial and the Iraqi/national but also the processes that rendered unfeasible the conceptualization of the Sunna and the Shi'a as inseparable monoliths. Migration from the countryside to Baghdad, the emergence of Iraqi education, and the rise of a shared Arab print market read by both Sunnis and Shi'is contributed to the hybrid nature of Iraqi culture. In fact, three hybrid cultural models existed in Hashemite Iraq: colonial and national, national and transregional, and hybridity between various sects.

##### **Colonial and National**

In this book I cover intellectual activity during the mandate period and during the period of Iraqi "independence" (1931–1958). My aim in this study, however, is not to present a coherent chronological sequence of events in which the beginning and the end of British rule are clearly marked but rather to draw attention to the blurry boundaries between the colonial and postcolonial eras. Although Iraq has been considered an independent entity since October 1932, Britain maintained its geostrategic interests in Iraq until 1958. Most significant, however, is the fact that British rule shaped categories and concepts that survived well after the official termination of the mandate.<sup>7</sup>

Iraqi national elites were profoundly immersed in Western culture. From 1921 onward, and particularly during the 1950s, Iraqi bureaucrats, policymakers, and intellectuals were educated in American and European universities. Moreover, Iraqis, especially Jews and Christians, studied in schools constructed by European institutions. In the 1920s, Iraqi educators, administrators, and politicians worked with and under the supervision of British advisers and colonial bureaucrats. With the writings of national historiographies in the 1930s and 1940s, Iraqis familiarized themselves with accounts written by British colonial administrators. Similarly, Iraqis cooperated with British and American experts in projects concerning the status of Iraqi education and the reform of the nation's tribes. Moreover, Iraqi intellectuals wrote in English and French and translated works from European languages into Arabic. In the 1950s, Iraqi exiles found themselves living in Russia, Western and Eastern Europe, or the United States because of political pressures at home.

These processes meant that Iraqi intellectuals constructed narratives reflecting the interests of Arab nationalism in the language of the Western metropolis. Moreover, urbanized national Iraqi elites and British colonial officials shared many common themes with respect to subaltern groups, such as Iraqi peasants and tribesmen. For example, Sunni urban elites often defined Shi'i and the Kurdish tribalism as "problems" that jeopardized national order and

needed to be placated. Certain sets of qualities, such as violence, unmanageability, and ignorance, were attributed to these groups by both Iraqi elites and British colonizers. The print culture of Hashemite Iraq was thus produced by intellectuals who were well grounded in the various metropolitan traditions and who used their works to communicate ideas shaped in a metropolitan context. Their delimitation of the history of Iraq, their ethnographies of diverse Iraqi populations, and the modes they proposed to reform Iraqi society could certainly pass as texts produced in Western academia or in a European print market. On the other hand, a careful reading of such texts equally mirrors other voices, traditions, and oral histories that were unique to the Iraqi and Arab setting. The hybrid nature of such studies, therefore, reflects the inability to separate between an “authentic” Iraqi culture and a British one and the diverse ways that Iraqi culture changed because of its interaction with Britain.

### **Iraqi and Transregional**

Dina Rizk Khoury defined Mosuli-Ottoman intellectuals as a class at the crossroads of several cultural traditions—Syrian, Iranian, Central Asian, Arabian, and Indian—and privy to debates on reform current among the scholars of Istanbul, Iran, India, and other parts of the Middle East.<sup>8</sup> Khoury’s observations are applicable to Hashemite Iraq, given the links that Iraqi culture maintained with many intellectual traditions. Iraq in the interwar period was dependent on publications imported from Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria, and many of its leading writers were educated in Iran, Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon. Furthermore, the strong bonds between Istanbul and Iraq before World War I, described at length by William Cleveland and Reeva Simon, lasted well into the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>9</sup>

Albert Hourani observed that in the interwar years “new media of expression were creating a universe of discourse.” Products of Egyptian or Lebanese publishing houses—newspapers, textbooks, poetry collections, novels, and works of popular science and history—were read by educated Arab elites outside Egypt and Lebanon.<sup>10</sup> Iraqi intellectuals were a part of this universe; they highly respected the works by and sought the approval of fellow Arab writers. They shared similar cultural concerns about such topics as structural and thematic changes in Arabic literature and social and political dilemmas relating to social reform and the anticolonial struggle. Moreover, when pressures of Iraqi censorship increased at home, many Iraqi intellectuals published articles, poems, and short stories in Lebanese and Egyptian magazines. The diverse and hybrid intellectual sources generated a pluralistic synthesis of ideas and traditions. Thus the examination of Iraqi intellectual production reveals

the movement of ideas in the Middle East from the cultural centers (Istanbul, Cairo, Beirut) to the cultural periphery (Iraq) and the transformation of these ideas, once relocated into the periphery.

The movement of ideas, journals, and peoples from and to Iraq advanced the popularity of Pan-Arabism, an intellectual and political movement that champions the unique cultural and historical heritage of Arabic-speaking peoples. Pan-Arabism in the Hashemite period was challenged by the map created by the British and the French in which separate Arab nation-states were carved out under the mandate system. Iraqi Pan-Arabism was important for a number of reasons. It served as a legitimizing narrative for the Hashemite monarchy, which emphasized its role in the anti-Ottoman Arab Revolt during World War I. In the interwar period, Pan-Arabism was adopted by the radicalized Iraqi middle classes as an anticolonial, national mode. In the 1940s and 1950s, Iraqi Pan-Arabists localized the theories of Nasserism and Ba'athism in the Iraqi milieu. Various forms of Pan-Arabism were consequently used by both the ruling elites and the opposition. In addition, Shi'i, Christian, Jewish, and Sunni intellectuals all attempted to present their own images of Arab culture and history. In other words, familiarity with the rich Arabic literary and cultural tradition was not a mere obligation forced on non-Sunnis by a Sunni state. Rather, many members of all religious communities sought to use Arab culture as their entry ticket to the realm of the state.

The nature of this Pan-Arab culture should also be seen in a social context. Iraqi Sherifian officers (officers who participated in the Arab Revolt) maintained links with other Arab officers who tied their lot with other Arab nation-states. The dynamics of Pan-Arab discourses were invigorated by the constant flow of intellectuals from the Arab world into Iraq.<sup>11</sup> Seen from this perspective, Pan-Arabism was an ideology located within shared social and intellectual networks. However, in the Iraqi context, it was often difficult to clearly define what "Arab culture" entailed, because the boundaries between Iraqi, Arab, and Ottoman cultures were often difficult to define.

### **Hybridized Sectarian Discourse**

The modern Iraqi print market transcended religious and ethnic boundaries. Shi'i and Sunni reformers of the early 1920s read works of Muslim religious reformers as well as works by Lebanese Christian intellectuals propagating the theories of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer. In the 1940s and the 1950s, Sunnis and Shi'is alike were grappling with the works of Marx, Lenin, and Sartre. The reading of the same texts by Sunni, Shi'i, Christian, and Jewish

intellectuals provoked local discussions on such issues as progress and civilization. Moreover, Iraqi thinkers were preoccupied with the question of sect in relation to other themes, such as knowledge, commitment, and class. This is not to say that sectarian politics were unimportant in Iraq. Yet, in the intellectual realm, many writers strove to create a shared universe of discourse. For example, a discourse on constitutionalism was prevalent among both Sunnis and Shi'is in the early 1920s. Although Sunni writers were mostly inspired by debates in the Ottoman-Arab press following the 1908 revolution, the Shi'is were also inspired by reflections on the Iranian constitutional revolution. Nevertheless, both communities used a modern language that spoke of ending tyranny through the power of rationality and law.

Ussama Makdisi has shown that in the Lebanese context, sectarianism was an act of interpretation whose articulators manipulate the historical past to justify their social and political claims. Sectarianism was thus a form of hybridized modernist knowledge echoing European hegemony, Ottoman concepts of reform, and nationalist desires.<sup>12</sup> Makdisi's analysis is applicable to Iraq, in whose national discourse the battle against sectarianism (*ta'ifiyya*) was often used to reduce acts of resistance against the state's power (revolts, refusal to be conscripted or to pay taxes) to irrational sectarian deeds inspired by dissatisfied Kurdish and Shi'i sheikhs. Hanna Batatu, Samira Haj, and, more recently, Faleh Abdul Jabbar have done much to problematize the validity of sectarianism as the *only* relevant category for interpreting Iraqi social and cultural realities during the Hashemite period.<sup>13</sup> Peter Sluglett and Marion Farouk-Sluglett have convincingly shown that the fundamental division in Iraqi society was between the rural members of the Shi'i community on the one hand and residents of the urban centers on the other.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, as Sami Zubaida has argued, tribal and ethnic identities were both consolidated by the state (British mandatory and Hashemite "independent") and conceived by it.<sup>15</sup> The concept of sect itself was thus produced, hybridized, and changed over time.

## SOME HISTORIOGRAPHICAL OBSERVATIONS

### Sources

British officialdom left memoirs and monographs written by colonial officials that illuminate various aspects of Iraqi intellectual life. British archives contain personality files consisting of biographical details about intellectuals, documents describing their activities, and documents transcribing certain conversations that British representatives held with intellectuals. However,

one cannot base a study of intellectual history primarily on British sources, because such reliance silences voices not recorded in the British archives. Ranajit Guha's exploration of the vocabulary attached to tribal revolts in the British colonial archive demonstrates how certain words were defined in the context of hypothesizing about the nature of the rebels.<sup>16</sup> The Israeli novelist David Grossman has shown a similar process. Grossman argues that when occupiers described the actions, intentions, and even termination of the occupied, whether in their media or in official accounts, a certain "word-laundry" comes into play. He noticed, for example, that when the Israeli press refers to Palestinian intellectuals, the word *intellectual* in itself is rarely used and is often replaced by other synonyms such as *educated* or *learned men*.<sup>17</sup>

In Iraq, the British tended to refer to writers as extremists or dissenters rather than as intellectuals. Moreover, British sources often reflect colonial fears, predominantly because of their concerns about the penetration of Kemalist ideas during the 1920s and pro-Fascist and pro-Nazi propaganda during the 1930s. Nevertheless, during the 1930s the voices of liberal Jewish writers who were active in intellectual life or influential anti-Fascist Egyptian intellectuals who taught in Iraq were mostly absent from official colonial records. Similarly, during the 1950s Iraqi governments brutally suppressed communist activities and communist writers. British reports often depicted communists as saboteurs and scalawags. Clearly, if we rely solely on such accounts, we perpetuate either British representations or the silencing of many Iraqi intellectuals by the state.

To examine intellectual life in Iraq according to publications in Arabic, we must scrutinize numerous and varied sources: textbooks, review essays, novels, short stories, and memoirs as well as the Iraqi, Lebanese, and Egyptian press. Other representations of the intellectual as a bureaucratic professional are ample in blueprints and programs designed by Iraqi officials. Such blueprints, however, were often ineffective in changing social realities. For example, some of the tribal education plans produced in the Ministry of Education were never implemented in the rural areas. Nevertheless, these blueprints reflect how state officials (teachers, bureaucrats, and experts) viewed the public whom they were to discipline and the means they offered to generate change.

The Iraqi press in this period is important. Benedict Anderson has scrutinized the role of the press in the formation of an imagined national community to suggest that the simultaneous reading of contemporary texts by numerous readers facilitates the belief that all readers belong to the same lin-



guistic, cultural, and political unit.<sup>18</sup> The Iraqi press of the Hashemite period clearly played such a role, because a significant number of newspapers discussed various aspects of Iraqi nationalism, reported on the anticolonial struggle, and addressed, in Arabic, a growing number of middle-class readers. Moreover, the ways that journalists framed their answers to readers seeking advice, the manner with which writers of narrative prose popularized their works in the press, and the reviews of literary and cultural works that readers and journalists published in various journals provide interesting insights into the print market, the intellectuals who worked in it, and their interactions with their middle-class readership. Furthermore, the fact that several newspapers were highly critical of Iraqi governments or alternatively escaped censorship because they were labeled cultural or literary allows us to hear the voices of intellectuals who operated outside official state sponsorship and to delve into issues that engaged intellectuals and their readers yet were not recorded by politicians and diplomats.

Novels, short stories, and drama fashioned images of intellectuals and popularized them. Edward Said, for instance, referred to Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* and Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* as texts portraying and representing intellectuals.<sup>19</sup> In a context of nation building, Anderson observed that novels formed similar notions of time and space within their readers.<sup>20</sup> Fredrick Jameson characterized third-world texts as "national allegories, even if their forms developed from predominantly western machineries of representation."<sup>21</sup> Third-world texts "necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory. The story of the private individual density is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public in third world culture and society."<sup>22</sup> Iraqi narrative prose was read within a defined political and historical context. Novels, short stories, and plays examined specific political parties and organizations, addressed conventions and norms by either challenging them or reinforcing them, and introduced themes from Arab geography and history. Their writers tackled questions of "class, gender, . . . religious community, trade union, political party, village, prison."<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the plots of many Iraqi novels and short stories were populated with intellectuals: writers, journalists, and poets. These texts were later discussed in review articles published in the press. Iraqi social-realist fiction from the 1950s can similarly be used to study the representations of the rural and urban poor in circles of middle-class intellectuals. The reading of such novels, however, is not meant to reduce their significance to an

anthropological remark on the nature of society; rather, the idea is to use methodologies that emphasize the link between narrative prose and issues of class, race, and gender in order to understand the imagery connected with the intellectual.

Another variety of indispensable sources is the memoirs of scholars, poets, and journalists. They reveal the links between intellectuals and politicians, their interactions with the British, their education, and their activities in various cultural centers. Texts published in Ba'ṯhi Iraq were subjected to limitations of censorship. Nevertheless, precisely because their writers were aware of the prevalent ideas of their censors regarding the nature of the Hashemite period, the memoirs reflect a complex dialogue between the Ba'ṯhi and monarchic representations of the past. Exiled Iraqi intellectuals have likewise published an impressive body of memoirs. The exilic location liberated writers from censorship and allowed them to critique various aspects of Iraqi political culture, although some of the writers developed a sense of nostalgia for the Hashemite period. Moreover, many memoirs contain poems, articles, and stories that the writers had either read or composed during their stay in Iraq, giving us a glimpse into cultural life in Iraq and telling a story of their own relevant to Hashemite rather than Ba'ṯhi Iraq.<sup>24</sup>

Another underappreciated source is the writings of Egyptian, Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian intellectuals on Iraqi culture. Arab intellectuals were certainly familiar with Iraq's history and geography even before their arrival in Iraq because of Iraq's prominent role in Islamic history and culture. The study of Arab-Islamic culture, moreover, was reinvigorated in this period, as a conscious effort to reappropriate the knowledge of "Islamic civilization" from the West. The Egyptians, Syrians, and Palestinians who resided in Iraq left many accounts of cultural life in Baghdad in which they often compare Iraq's present with its glorious past. Because Iraqi intellectuals valued the contributions of other Arab writers to their cultural milieu and because the accounts written by non-Iraqis often produced scandals and intense debates inside Iraq, such sources illuminate the intellectual scene and dynamics of Pan-Arab culture.

### **Modern Arab Intellectual History**

Arab intellectual history, especially the Egyptian case study, produced significant monographs devoted to the achievements of individual intellectuals.<sup>25</sup> The earliest works studying Arab intellectual history were deeply rooted in

the Orientalist tradition. Nevertheless, as Edward Said himself noted, some scholars have also viewed Muslim men of letters as articulating a certain *esprit humaine a travers l'espace et le temps*, as manifested, for example, in Louis Massignon's exploration of al-Hallaj. Scholars such as Hamilton Gibb, however, were tempted to study modern Arab subjects after they studied medieval Islam. For this reason, many were interested in notions of revival or the reform of "classical Islam."<sup>26</sup> The fact that such scholars were not divided into medievalists and modernists (as accepted in the field of Middle Eastern studies today) also allowed them to examine the impact of streams of thought from the medieval to the modern era.<sup>27</sup>

An important focus of modern Arab intellectual history was Arab nationalism, which assumed importance in the mid-1950s. The functions of intellectuals were thus evaluated with respect to their contributions to the national project. One of the earliest works in the field was George Antonius's landmark *The Arab Awakening*, which tended to classify intellectuals as the precursors, pioneers, and followers of Arab nationalism. Ernest Dawn, William Cleveland, and Albert Hourani, however, critiqued Antonius's idealization of the Arab national movement, especially his overstatement of the impact of national thought before World War I, his stress on the activity of Christian intellectuals, and his turning a blind eye to the Ottomanized nature of notable politics.<sup>28</sup> Commenting on the metahistory of Arab nationalism that followed Antonius, Israel Gershoni identified a narrative in Western historiography that emphasized the utopian and romantic characteristics of Arab nationalism without reference to issues of class, social mobility, or gender.<sup>29</sup> Evoking Quentin Skinner's critique of genealogies of ideas devoid of a social and linguistic context,<sup>30</sup> Gershoni identified the anachronistic attempts to find a unified message in the diverse works of intellectuals, which produced an ahistorical reading of Arab nationalism.<sup>31</sup> Rashid Khalidi pointedly observed that when certain scholars did address the question of context, they tended to "reduce ideology to the pettiest of personal motivations, on the part of its formulators." Consequently, works of leading Arab intellectuals were often understood as promoting trivial and self-centered causes, such as desires for political influence or financial benefits.<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps the boldest effort to appreciate the vigor of ideas in the Arab Middle East is Albert Hourani's masterwork, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, which gives an overall view of the philosophical and theological currents of thought in the Arab world of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>33</sup>

Highly respectful of Arab culture and its modern projects of interpretation and translation, Hourani's monograph supplied later scholars of Arab intellectual history with intellectuals who became the subjects of many studies. Nonetheless, the text concentrated on the founders of grand theories and did not probe into issues of their dissemination and reception.<sup>34</sup> In the 1980s and 1990s the theories of Anthony Smith, Ernest Gellner, and Benedict Anderson generated a new view of Arab nationalists whose articulators responded to the modern processes of urbanization and industrialization.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, following their readings of Pierre Bourdieu, Robert Darnton, Lynne Hunt, and Jürgen Habermas, scholars explored questions related to dissemination of knowledge, canonization, and reception, not always related to the national project. These works examined publishers, editors, booksellers, and newspapers and underscored the ways that writers, entrepreneurs, and intellectuals utilize literary and cultural products to modify public opinion.<sup>36</sup>

The idealized notion of the intellectual as an agent of Western secular modernity, liberalism, and nationalism was revisited following a critical appreciation of the activity of national elites with respect to peasants and workers that cast doubt on the emancipatory functions of Arab intellectuals.<sup>37</sup> Historians consequently devoted attention to intellectuals whose participation in national discourses had been marginalized. An important contribution was made in the field of gender studies, where works explored the culture of women writers.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, methods of discourse analysis were used to critique Arab elites themselves. Texts produced by Arab intellectuals were viewed as mirroring the attempts of a modernizing project whose aims, as Timothy Mitchell argued, were to introduce order into an orderless and hence meaningless Middle East. The construction of new disciplinary institutions and their methods of visibility facilitated the creation of a modern bureaucratic state and assigned new roles to intellectuals. Arab intellectuals were indeed agents of modernity; yet it was their modernity that allowed them to bring the Middle East under the regime of European representation and to introduce newer mechanisms of regulation in the service of a global capitalist machinery.<sup>39</sup>

In recent years, postcolonial theory has emphasized the links between the premodern and the modern, the colonized and the colonizer, and has deconstructed national narratives and historiographies.<sup>40</sup> Studies of Arab nationalism, for instance, have expanded the national experience to the domain of the popular, in which discourses produced by elite intellectuals were translated,

distorted, and subverted by nonelites. Scholars likewise have explored the construction of differences based on sect, race, and gender in the intellectual field. This criticism of nationalism likewise has generated an interest in trans-regionalism, exile, and exilic production.<sup>41</sup>

Within the field of Arab intellectual history, modern Iraq received relatively little attention. This was often explained as the outcome of the lack of academic and political freedom in which “original and innovative scholarship could flourish.”<sup>42</sup> Another factor that limited the interest in Iraqi intellectual history, especially during the interwar period, was the self-image of Iraqi intellectuals. Repeatedly, Iraqi intellectuals complained that their cultural production did not match the creative activities of their Egyptian and Lebanese peers. Last, as Hayden White reminds us, historians choose to impose a structure and story type on historical events to endow them with meaning.<sup>43</sup> Iraqi history was often narrated as a story of a failed Enlightenment and liberalism. The end of the story, Ba’thi authoritarianism under Saddam Hussein, thus determined its beginning and the way it was narrated. An example is *Republic of Fear*, by Kanan Makiya, which subjugated Iraqi intellectual history to a narrative in which many intellectuals are depicted as perpetuating dictatorship and oppression already in the Hashemite period.<sup>44</sup>

Iraqi intellectual history, however, parallels, in many ways, Arab intellectual history. Early scholars of Arab nationalism focused on Iraqi national educators, ideologues, and bureaucrats.<sup>45</sup> The shift from the history of ideas to social and cultural history was apparent in the important works of Phebe Marr, Michael Eppel, and Reeva Simon, which focused on urban intellectuals and accentuated the role of Pan-Arabism as an option that was popular among both Sherifian elites and the educated urban middle classes.<sup>46</sup> ‘Abd al-Salaam Yousif was one of the first scholars to explore the works of novelists, poets, and journalists as reflecting a battle for cultural hegemony among various political groups under the monarchy and Qasim.<sup>47</sup> Hanna Batatu’s magnum opus, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, although not dealing directly with intellectual history, delineated the ideological developments of various political groups, especially the communists. Nevertheless, Batatu occasionally communicated his notions about the “correct” ways in which Iraqi intellectuals ought to have interpreted Marxism and socialism.<sup>48</sup> In doing so, he missed the opportunity to explore how the translations and adaptations of such theories in the Iraqi context produced new and interesting cultural models.

In the 1990s and in the present decade, a revisionist approach to Iraqi history began taking shape. Scholars increasingly are emphasizing the *Iraqi* nature of the public sphere, its pluralistic dimensions, and the variety of actors who participate in the print market.<sup>49</sup> For example, Eric Davis insightfully examines the roles played by intellectuals in negotiating a variety of competing memories of the nation's past.<sup>50</sup> Muhsin Musawi's inspiring *Reading Iraq* illustrates the richness of the Iraqi intellectual field and its unique national features.<sup>51</sup> Finally, Peter Wien's thoughtful assessment of Iraqi nationalism investigates the ways that national discourses shape aesthetic values, spatial projects, and perceptions of the body.<sup>52</sup>

A response to Moshe Behar's recent suggestions for "a relaxation of the explanatory role assigned to the ideational realm in shaping the region's macro sociopolitics" might serve as a concluding comment. To Behar, economic transactions by indigenous clients of Bank Misr or military operations by Hamas and Tanzim have a greater impact on national movements than editorials in the Egyptian press (given the high rates of illiteracy in Egypt at the time) or a year's worth of writings by Edward Said and "other intellectuals of his caliber."<sup>53</sup> Although, admittedly, ideas cannot solely explicate the behavior of particular agents in the public domain, intellectual activity remains highly important. First, Arab intellectuals were political activists leading opposition movements, bureaucrats devising state policies, ministers, and parliament members. Intellectuals were important witnesses, theoreticians, and activists who reflected on the modern world. The ways in which middle-class intellectuals *experienced* colonialism and nationalism are mirrored in their writings. Ghasan Kanafani's texts might not have directly inspired the actions of his peers, but they certainly echo what it means to be a Palestinian in a particular historical moment. Second, as we seek the theoretical advice of an intellectual such as Frantz Fanon, we could turn to the texts of highly original Iraqi intellectuals, such as 'Abd al-Fattah Ibrahim or 'Ali al-Wardi, as brave and perceptive critics. Finally, we should consider the contribution of the works of 'Abd al-Malik Nuri or 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati to our human culture, esthetics, and language; their long-term influence on generations of readers and critics; and the opportunity to read and reread these texts critically and hence politically.

In conclusion, the availability of unexplored sources in Arabic—a broad spectrum of novels, short stories, newspapers, and memoirs—and the relationships between the undemocratic state (colonial and postcolonial) and

intellectual activity turn Iraq into an intriguing case study for the cultural historian. In 1929, Jewish Iraqi intellectual Anwar Sha'ul published an open letter to the British high commissioner, titled "I Wish to Speak, But . . ." in which he complained that "my mouth is shut and my hands are tied." In this study I examine the ways that the hands of Iraqi intellectuals were tied and the strategies they adopted to untie these bonds.<sup>54</sup>