

CIVIL SOCIETY IN POST-CONFLICT IRAQ

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What future is there for post-Saddam Iraq? What resources can it draw on to exit from the impasse and to become a democracy? Can civil society be regarded as a resource in this direction? Which constraints and opportunities does the relation between State and society in today's Iraq produce? The purpose of this study is to investigate the identity and role of civil society in Iraq in the aftermath of the US-led invasion and ensuing ethno-religious conflict. The questions which shall be addressed are several. What shapes does civil society in Iraq present in the context of fragmented multi-ethnic and multi-confessional political communities and massive displacement? What kind of mutual relations exist between governmental and non-governmental actors in Iraq? Is it possible to talk about the existence of modernising and progressive segments of society acting with the aim of bringing about democratic change? Does the overarching ethnosectarian character of Iraqi society impinge on the development of engaged civil society organisations and sound democracy in this phase of the country's evolution? This study will argue that the democratic advance of today's Iraq is to a large extent hindered by the kind of mutual relations which exist between State and society and which are supposedly the result of the precariousness and weakness of State structures and by the precedence of ethnosectarian concerns over true democratic ones on the part of civil society organisations.

A substantial volume of attention is currently being devoted to the genesis, development, and performance of civil society in Iraq, although a much more pragmatic appreciation is needed of the micro-processes under way which sometimes risk being subsumed under broad macro-tendencies. This analysis will provide a description and tentative evaluation of the shapes and roles of civil society in Iraq, bearing in mind broader assumptions about domestic and international political trajectories.

Ethnicity, Tribalism, and Confessionalism in Iraq in Historical Perspective

Identity in Iraq remains an extremely complex concept. Talking about identity, or more appropriately about "identities" in the plural form, is relevant in order to critically explore how they impact upon the democratisation process in the country. Sami Zubaida, a scholar of Iraqi Jewish origin, contends that "*Iraq is much more than the sum of conflicting ethnic and religious groups. It*

is a country where people have developed a sense of being Iraqi" (Zubaida, 2003). Despite the unquestionable preponderance of local and traditional allegiances in today's Iraq which are seen as endangering the unity of the country on a very concrete basis and as hindering the twofold and interlinked processes of pacification and democratisation, a hint at the country's past experience shows that this has not always been the case. The recent emphasis on internal divisions obscures the long and successful process of modern civil society formation which informed Iraq during the first half of the 20th century. At that time, the creation of a modern nation State spurred the evolution of political and cultural networks and identities which, as argued by Zubaida, drew active participation from members of various communities, not on the basis of communal solidarity but through ideological commitment and commercial and political interests. *"It was the suppression of this autonomous process under successive governments, and its near-elimination under the Ba'athist regime, which now makes the internal divisions based on ethnicity and religion so threatening and significant"* (Zubaida, 2003). It is the main contention of this section that the tragedy of Iraq is not the non-existence of social binds, but rather their manipulation and incorporation in the framework of State-society relations.

Modern nationalism, which reached its apex in the Middle East, in general, and in Iraq, in particular, during the Fifties and Sixties in the form of pan-Arab nationalism, started from the assumption that communalism (*ta'ifiyya*), tribalism, and all local identities had to be rejected in order to promote a unified national identity. People were gradually drawn out of the bonds and horizons of kinship and primary loyalties into the civil society of citizens. Political parties, cultural associations, and professional associations proliferated (Zubaida, 2003). The advent of the authoritarian Ba'ath regime brought with it the étatisation of civil society, that is *"the repression of political opposition or difference, coupled with an incorporation of all institutions and associations into the State"* (Zubaida, 2003). All manifestations of civil society were eliminated and citizens were forcibly regimented into the ranks of the party which became the showcase of loyalty towards the ruling clique. Political élites in Iraq were at that time centred on competing identities and based on the support of shifting coalitions. For most people, relations to the networks of power were mediated through informal connections and solidarities of kinship and community.

Since the Nineties, tribal and religious symbols and slogans became vigorously apparent in the regime's rhetoric and practice, timed with the unprecedented surge in religious fervour displayed by Saddam Hussain himself. Communal, religious, and tribal identities were accordingly reinforced and charged with additional meanings. Chieftains and bosses, with their strong connections with the

social environment, proliferated and became the obliged interlocutors of each citizen to the regime. Thus, religion and ethnicity became the unique factors of identity, generating fear and insecurity. It is possible to argue that ethnosectarianism was purposely institutionalised in the political body and in the mindset of the Iraqi people. Saddam's rule itself was openly centred on family, clan, and tribe from his own Sunni heartland. The situation has remained unchanged after the collapse of the authoritarian regime of Saddam Hussain. In this sense, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) has tried to promote inclusiveness as the harbinger for democratic transition. However, the actual outcome of this institutional engineering was the routinisation and institutionalisation of a situation in which particularistic concerns, rather than the national interest, become the driving force behind governmental policies and civil society objectives. The question arises about what kind of future it is possible to envision for Iraq given the current state of affairs. The risk is that, as in the case of Lebanon's confessional system, *"when state positions are apportioned according to some ethnosectarian formula that is advertised openly as the modus operandi of the new political order, then it is a matter of time before sub-national identities get embedded in the social fabric of the society"* (Dawisha, 2008:222). Just as a way of introducing a point which will be discussed at some length in the final session of the paper, it becomes apparent that ethnosectarianism is reproduced not only in the political establishment but also in the echelons of the civil society movement and as such it works against democracy.

In the aftermath of the US-led war on Iraq the picture emerged of a rich and fragmented Iraqi society which had been dormant under the surface during the regime of Saddam Hussain. When the Ba'ath regime was dislodged, a plethora of social, economic, and cultural voices started being heard, at the beginning timidly, and competing with existing active political and social forces within and outside Iraq. During Hussain's domination these voices had been silenced and public discussion banned. Nevertheless, his rule could not eliminate the fracture lines, old and new, running through society along the confessional, ethnic, tribal, political, economic, and cultural dimensions. Thus, the analysis of the Iraqi political development since 2003 leads to the realisation that in the reconstruction of the country, civil society did not start from the level of zero despite the lack of norms granting the freedom of participation and association under previous regimes¹. It is indeed a dynamic environment which has long manifested this face. As stated in a report by the United Institute of Peace dating 2004, *"Iraqi society is renowned for its passion for debates, for new ideas, and for the ways of living"* (Faleh, 2004:14).

¹ See Salam Malo, H. "The Future of Civil Society in Iraq: a Comparison of Draft Civil Society Laws Submitted to the Iraqi Council of Representatives", *The International Journal of Not-For-Profit Law*, Vol. 10, n° 4, August 2008, pp. 5-24.

Iraq's newly emancipated society is in the process of formation and it is hard to anticipate the forces and groups which will come to the forefront in the coming months and years. Several trends can be observed which are significant to our analysis of civil society in post-conflict Iraq. On the one hand, the reappearance of almost all political-ideological trends which had existed in Iraq since its independence in 1921. On the other, the debate has been centred on the role which manifold new civil society organisations – though in their embryonic form – are playing in the wake of the ethno-sectarian conflict and collapse of state structures which have invested the country since 2003. These trends are associated with a growth in ethnicity-based politics, the formation of pan-Iraqi tribal leagues, and the resurgence of faith-based movements and institutions (Faleh, 2004). These three elements, ethnicity, tribalism, and confessionalism, have long played a fundamental role in the political development of Iraq.

Before turning to the analysis of the actual and expected role of civil society in Iraq, a consideration is in order here concerning the situation of the country after more than six years from the Western-led invasion. Not just with respect to the persistent military presence of foreign actors, but also in light of the situation on the ground, characterised by the persistence of large-scale ethno-sectarian violence and repeated waves of displacement, both internally and towards the neighbouring countries², it is highly incorrect to speak about “post-conflict Iraq”. A better definition for the same empirical referent is the more neutral “post-2003 Iraq”.

The Role of Arab Civil Society in Promoting Democracy and Peacebuilding

Civil society is nowadays a very familiar term in Arab political and developmental discourses. Much of the talk about civil society appears, nevertheless, to be inaccurate and ambiguous. The lack of consensus around a working definition which is restrictive enough not to allow for confusion and ambiguities impinges on the possibility to adopt the correct framework for analysis. For the purpose of this paper, the definition in question should take into account both the conclusions reached thus far by the literature concerning civil society development in the Arab world and the peculiarities of the post-2003 Iraqi context.

² For a thorough account and analysis of the Iraqi refugee crisis and its impact on the Middle Eastern region see International Crisis Group (2008), *Failed Responsibility: Iraqi Refugees in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon*, Middle East Report n° 77, 10 July 2008, Amman/Brussels.

Concerning the debate centred around the definition and meaning of civil society manifestations in the specific context of the Arab world, the above-mentioned elusiveness and controversy arise from the fact that different views are offered on a single fundamental issue, namely whether civil society is a descriptive or a normative concept (Nasr, 2005:5). The distinction is relevant in terms of its implications on the ground which exceed its theoretical significance. On the one hand, by regarding civil society as a purely descriptive concept one assumes that there are no restrictions to the inclusion into its definition of a full array of groups which appear to fulfil the only condition of occupying the social space outside the family, the State, and the market. On the other hand, the normative slant of some definitions of civil society proves too restrictive to fully account for the complex situation of post-2003 Iraq. Indeed, understanding civil society as a normative concept is directly linked to the actual meaning of the expression “civil society” and to the supposed existence of peaceful politics as the inherent characteristic of civil society engagement and action.

Against this backdrop and for the purpose of this analysis, a descriptive definition of civil society will be adopted, encompassing all associations, organisations, and groups which are private, voluntary, not for profit, at least partially structured and independent or autonomous from the State, and pursuing a common interest. The often invoked connection between civil society and the adoption of specific values or the commitment to peaceful management of conflict and democracy promotion is here disregarded on the basis of the analysis of the Iraqi context suggested further on in the paper. This analysis shows that secular orientation, civility in dealing with others, and respect for differences do not always constitute the defining features of civil society in Iraq. On the contrary, ethnic and religious partisanship is so widespread to the point that both kinship based groups and faith based organisations and charities will be included in our investigation of the identity and role of civil society in Iraq in the context of multiple ethnic and religious communities. Political parties will be will also taken into account since there is a clear effort to establish new political groups which can indeed contribute to mould a public conscience sensitive to the values of peaceful coexistence, development, and change. A further reason behind the inclusion of political parties in our analysis lies in the realisation that they are far from representing new elements in the Iraqi social landscape. To this picture it should be added that civil society groups in today's Iraq tend to rely on local, particularistic networks of support and to embrace distinctly localised perspectives and agendas to answer the needs of specific societal groups. Such parochialism, it is argued, will gradually disappear once nationwide institutions are able to function and a common sense of belonging is moulded. The challenge in today's Iraq is thus to recreate a common space, a

common geography, within which shared values can accommodate striking differences and variations (Allawi, 2006).

It is now time to assess the width of the gap between unrealistic hopes and structural pessimism concerning the actual or potential role of Arab civil society organisations, in general, and the Iraqi ones, in particular, as agents of public governance reforms, public policies alternatives, accountability, and democratisation. We will first address the nexus between civil society and democracy and then move on to the analysis of its peacebuilding role.

Since the middle of the Eighties, the concept of civil society has been cited in every discourse related to “democracy” or “democratisation”. At the practical level the democratisation process, especially when it is top-down, requires the development of both institutions and political culture among the population. In the writings of political theorists of every sort civil society has become the ubiquitous, *sine qua non* condition for democracy as well as an essential counterweight to the State. A constant refrain is that Iraqi democracy cannot be successful without a vigorous and home-grown civil society movement composed of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), schools, political parties, and others. Moreover, on the relations between State and society, “*progressive intellectuals no less than their conservative counterparts write and talk about civil society as if it were utterly separable from the State*” (Fontana, 2006:51), thus contradicting Mitchell’s argument concerning the porousness and fluidity of the “boundaries” between State and society (Mitchell, 1991). This approach is problematic in two respects. First of all, by emphasising the inherent fracture and distinction between the “State”, on the one hand, and “society”, on the other, one falls into the trap of the reification of the State and of its autonomy from society. Second, by directly equating civil society with democracy, other fundamental aspects tend to be overlooked, namely the role played by power structures, patronage networks, and neopatrimonialism within society. Indeed, civil society forces in Iraq have been stripped of or failed to develop a positive role in the democratisation process. This is largely due to the fact that the weakness, and almost irrelevance, of State institutions have caused the deepening of ethnosectarian faultlines. The reification of fixed ethnic, religious, and tribal cleavages in the Iraqi society is reproduced and reinforced in the variegated and often conflicting stances of the civil society movement and its manifestations.

Another role often invoked for civil society organisations is that of facilitator in peacebuilding actions. The link between civil society and peacebuilding has been explored theoretically in two interesting articles appeared on the latest issue of *The International Spectator*. In “Civil Society and

Peacebuilding: Mapping Functions in Working for Peace”, the author claims that “*civil society can play roles at every point in the development of conflict and its resolution: from bringing situations of injustice to the surface to preventing violence, from creating conditions conducive to peace talks to mediating a settlement and working to ensure it is consolidated, from setting a policy agenda to healing war-scarred psyches*” (Barnes, 2009:131). This role is often viewed in a controversial way by official State structures and international organisations working from outside or on the ground in conflict situations: there is a sort of reluctance to consider civil society organisations’ role as legitimate. On the one hand, fragile or “failed” States, as in the Iraqi case, often contest the legitimacy of home grown civil society initiatives and regard such forms of intervention as a threat to the sovereign prerogative of States to maintain the security monopoly. On the other hand, evidence provided by Kaldor (2003) shows that civil society organisations have become complicit functionaries in the US-led “war on terror” in Iraq and Afghanistan. This significantly undermines their ability to provide spaces for positive engagement in responding to conflicts. This can be attributed to the fact that although formally independent from the security-development nexus which informs Western directed international peace operations, such initiatives are confronted with the burning issue of autonomy from multiple centres of power, both domestic and external. In practical terms, they tend to receive various forms of external aid, ranging from funding to organisational-logistical support, including training and solidarity, both from external donors and global civil society counterparts, thus risking being instrumentalised as a tool of Western-led geopolitical projects and their agendas subsumed under external ones.

Bearing in mind these critiques, it is not possible to disregard the often indirect ways in which home grown civil society initiatives can contribute to foster a durable peace, by working next to governmental and international agencies. This capacity lies in the fact that they are primarily self-motivated and self-organised responses to the conflict situation. Indeed, they tend to be rooted in the conflict-affected communities themselves and to enjoy strong ties with “*existing forms of social organisation, ranging from faith-based institutions and traditional/customary structures to modern NGOs, women’s organisations and academic networks*” (Barnes, 2009:132). These local efforts address specific conflict situations by resorting to non-military and non-violent strategies³, focussing on the everyday causes and manifestations of conflicts and working to reweave the societal fabric torn by violence and division. This represents a problematic aspect with respect to the Iraqi situation since such divisions are reproduced and reinforced in the Iraqi civil society multi-faceted landscape, as it will be discussed at some length in the final session.

³ The tremendous growth of clandestine armed groups in post-2003 Iraq participating in and perpetuating the armed conflict falls beyond the scope of this analysis.

Another way in which self-mobilisation from below works towards spurring innovative responses to conflicts and towards normalising the conditions of the communities involved in the conflict is represented by the parallel or substituting role which civil society organisations can play in relation to the several functions which States are expected to carry out. These include basic functions which are supposed to give substance to the claims to full citizenship arising from the population. The last and most important constituent of the concept of citizenship, as outlined by Thomas Marshall in his *Citizenship and Social Class*, is here addressed. By the social element the author means “*the whole range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in the society. The institutions most closely connected with it are the educational system and the social services*” (Marshall and Bottomore, 1992:8). As a result of the conflict which has been raging in Iraq since 2003, the collapse of State structures has brought with it the failure to adequately respond to basic needs and to provide the much needed protection. Grass-roots organisations, feeding into inherent, pre-existing structures of power, are better equipped to answer the needs of common people and to address widespread grievances. This substituting function is primarily feared by the representatives of official State apparatuses, be they old or new, since its spokespersons reflect diverse interests and values which can oppose and undermine the sanctioned version of State ideology and practices. As other renowned cases in the Middle Eastern area testify, namely the case of post-civil war Lebanon and Palestine/Occupied Territories, the disintegration of the State and its inability to cope with urgent, basic needs arising from the population have led to the reinforcement and legitimation of non-State actors – Hizb Allah and Hamas *in primis* – espousing counter-views regarding the path of national development.

Given the clarifications exposed above concerning the mixed perception and reality of civil society organisations in promoting democracy and peacebuilding, the analysis of the Iraqi case will suggest that although the fundamental nexus existing between home grown civil society initiatives and virtuous practices in peacebuilding and democratisation cannot be disregarded, other equally important conditions, both domestic and external, need to be fulfilled for the democratic change and stabilisation which we want to see happen in the country to materialise. In this sense, the inherently positive role attribute to civil society should not be given for granted but on the contrary tested on the empirical level.

Constraints and Opportunities for Civil Society Engagement in Iraq

State-society relations have been the object of intense debate in the field of political science. Contrary to what some authors tended to assert starting from the postwar period and throughout the following decades⁴, far from representing a strict dichotomy, the relationship between State and society in the Middle East is nuanced and ambiguous. As critically assessed by Joel Migdal in his book *Strong Societies and Weak States*, the relative strength of the State in relation to society in its manifold manifestations restrains or increases the ability of the latter to act as a counterbalance to the former's actions. More specifically, and looking at this issue from the perspective of the components of society, a crucial determinant of the capacity of non-governmental organisations to be self-regulated and self-organised, to provide public goods and services, often in substitution or parallel to State apparatuses, to conduct efficient social actions, and to influence the public sphere and policy lies in the nature of State-society relations and in the existence of legal and regulatory frameworks which are conducive to task-sharing and partnership between the governmental and non-governmental sectors, the formal and the informal ones.

Many problems and limitations besetting Arab civil society organisations and stemming from both constitutive and external factors also apply to the case of Iraqi civil society. On the one hand, the lack of a stable and consolidated democratic system in Iraq imposes restrictions on the autonomy and action of local civil society organisations. On the other, their efficiency is also restrained by internal factors, ranging from structural dependency on the public sector as a producer or a client to weak internal governance and organisational structure, which prevent these organisations from supporting complex mobilisation activities and which appear to be similar to the bureaucratic structures of the State. Another source of inefficiency concerns the precarious character of external funding which is too often linked to exogenous objectives and agendas. The fear of foreign interference in "sensitive" issues, such as nation-building and human rights protection, have made foreign funding, also in the case of Iraqi civil society, the object of controversy and sometimes ban by national central authorities. The landscape of civil society activism in Iraq remains highly fragmented due to the multiplication of competing and overlapping organisations which are active in the fields of health services, women's rights, and human rights. Furthermore, as a result of decades of clandestine activity and repression, Iraqi civil society organisations are inexperienced in the arts of consensus building, compromise, and agenda setting.

⁴ Mitchell, T. (1991), "The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and their Critics", *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 85, n° 1, March 1991, pp. 77-96.

Talking about ideology, it is relevant to speak about a growing polarisation or rift which has materialised between faith-based organisations, on the one side, and secular, leftist-oriented groups, on the other side. This ideological polarisation concerns both the views regarding the architecture of society and the modes of mobilisation and action. Given the religious plurality which, as we have already discussed, characterises today's Iraq, it comes as no surprise the fact that faith-based organisations play a predominant role. Minority groups, secular-oriented organisations, and Ba'athist sympathisers are very active among the diaspora community which is spread both in the Middle East, Europe, and America. The proportion of the forced exodus which has taken place in Iraq as a consequence of the Western invasion and ensuing ethno-religious conflict is still debated and object to controversy. The situation appears particularly delicate in neighbouring Syria where a huge, albeit not exactly quantified, number of Iraqi refugees have sought refuge since 2006, thus posing serious threats to the stability of the Syrian State and the Middle Eastern region in general.

Taking into account these weaknesses and although pre-2003 Iraqi society appears to have suffered tremendously under the authoritarian regime of Saddam Hussain, it is possible to assert that the necessary pre-conditions for the re-burgeoning and development of civil society in today's Iraq already exist. Pluralism and renewed freedom are such pre-conditions. "*For a country that has lived under a dictatorship for more than 30 years*", suggests Daniel Serwer, Director of Peace Operations at the United States Institute of Peace, "*post-war Iraq appears as a surprisingly pluralist place*" (Serwer and Bajraktari, 2003:2). Indeed, in the case of post-2003 Iraqi society, "*by reflecting diverse interests and values, [civil society organisations] enable the articulation, mobilisation, and pursuit of the aspirations of the constituent elements of the society*" (Barnes, 2009: 133). These forces represent the mainstream of politics and are expected to shape the future of Iraq.

Nevertheless, the case of Iraqi civil society organisations shows that constraints and opportunities exist within the realm of State-society relations. The question arises whether it is possible to identify a meaningful link between the relative maturity and development of a robust civil society and the peculiar characteristics of a State. In other words, does the structural weakness of State structures in Iraq which has become apparent also during the latest provincial elections of January 2009 impinge on the development of a sound and engaged civil society movement? Given the strong interlinkages between State and society in the Arab Middle East, the failure of the State to create a cohesive national structure and to integrate all segments of society hinders the possibilities of civil society engagement for conflict transformation and democratic advancement. In the case of Iraq, the great hopes entrusted to resurging civil society under the banner of "regime change"

slogans, by both internal and external actors, risks to be wrecked because of the weakness of the State and its inability to perform its fundamental duties. A strong State, or more precisely a State which is perceived to be strong by its citizens, has the capacity to respond to the people's most essential needs. This is a necessary condition for the legitimacy of the State and the ruling élite. The "retreat of the State" during the Eighties and Nineties from many spheres of life, meaning the advent of a marked emphasis on privatisation and liberalisation policies aimed at rectifying the inefficiencies and idiosyncrasies of the public sector, coupled with the inability to reach out to several segments of society and provide meaningful services and rights, must be better understood as a re-positioning of the State in relation to society. Despite all the declaratory statements and the attempt by the US-led coalition to impose an exogenous, supposedly democratic model of development, the State in Iraq is still struggling with the preponderance and inefficiency of the public sector and with an economy which is hugely dependent on rents deriving from oil. These rents are then partially redistributed from the central government to the citizens in the attempt to "buy" legitimacy and complacency. Much of the space which has been freed from the State presence is now occupied by civil society organisations which appear to better serve the interests and the needs of the various groups which constitute society. Nevertheless, the palpable weakness of the State which emerged after 2003, entailing the structural failure in the provision of essential services, means that sub-national identities are charged with the need to provide such services. It could be argued that these circumstances do not appear to be conducive to a positive role of civil society organisations in the democratic transition which is under way in the country, as it will be highlighted in the next section.

Taking stock of Past Experiences: What Prospects for a Positive Role of Civil Society in Iraq?

In concluding this analysis of civil society of the prospects of civil society engagement in Iraq, one thing which becomes apparent is that two different understandings of civil society are being enacted: one conforms to the liberal notion of "civil society as pathway to democracy" and, in his framework, encouraging home-grown organisations which seem to foster this development has been part of an external and internal drive by Iraqis and others hoping to ground the faltering national democratic institutions in local practices and formations which espouse universal values of human, labour, minorities, and women's rights. The other understanding is closer to the Gramscian idea of civil society as a terrain of struggles for power in the long term and in this light civil society incorporates organisations which are or may be opposed to a democratic project as well as organisations which are entangled in the existing and consolidated patronage networks which

mediate power at multiple levels, including the political, the economic, and the entrepreneurial spheres, and through a variety of means, across Iraq. Gramsci's view, unlike the predominant conception of civil society, exposed in the writings produced under the direction of Richard Norton in English and Sa'ad Eddin Ibrahim in Arabic, sees a potentially negative role for this sphere of social activity. The experience of post-2003 Iraq appears to confirm the view according to which civil society in the Arab region and its engagement in the public sphere and policy does not necessarily play a democratising role. Structural dynamics and the issue of the dependency of civil society from governmental apparatuses are the core reasons of its vulnerability to manipulation.

Also the role of “service provider” which has been entrusted to civil society organisations, which are active on a variety of fronts, as a way of compensating the failure of the State in this is mainly performed within a space characterised by powerful networks of power based on familiar, tribal, sectarian and ethnic cleavages. These networks provide the normative terrain and the moral universe in which patronage power structures make sense and are indeed sanctioned on the basis of the mutual expectations fulfilled and the sense of reassurance they breed. Civil society groups are indeed shaped by the same neo-patrimonial, ethnosectarian dynamics which inform society at large. This means that people from a certain background tend to rely on and interact with other members of the same group in their search for meaningful responses to their needs. This significantly hinders the prospects for an active engagement in a true democratic process since this dynamics tends to reinforce cleavages and competition among different groups both for resources and power. It comes as no surprise, for example, that the dynamics of the “war economy” in Iraq is sustained and its benefits reaped by opposing groups who are inclined to preserve the *status quo*.

In conclusion, one final consideration is in order here concerning the prospects for survival and development of Iraq. Beyond the existence of powerful centrifugal forces in the body of formal politics and their institutionalisation at the level of societal allegiances and although “*the increasing physical and psychological distance among the country's various communities makes it difficult to visualise the future Iraq as a truly unified political entity*” (Dawisha, 2008:230), an alternative argument can be suggested which goes against the much feared political disintegration and social strife in the country. This argument contends that given the innate interest of each community to limit the power of the other groups, a system of checks and balances could emerge which would in turn lead to the promotion of democracy at the expense of rigid communal particularisms. In sum and talking specifically about civil society in Iraq, while civil society as a whole is not necessarily a force for peace and democratisation, it can be the motor for it. The simple existence and

engagement of a varied civil society movement does not guarantee in itself that all the prerequisites for conflict transformation and democratic development are fulfilled.

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