Chapter 6

Between *Aqalliya* and *Mukawin*:
Understanding Sunni Political
Attitudes in Post-Saddam Iraq

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The April 2003 American invasion turned the Arab Sunnis, once the hegemonic group in Iraq, into a marginalised group. Further steps by the American authorities, particularly the extensive measures of de-Baathification and the ban on the Iraqi army and security forces, added more fuel to the fire, culminating in a Sunni upheaval and later Iraq's first sectarian civil war (2006–8). The political process began to take root meanwhile, and the Sunnis finally joined it in 2005, voting against the approval of Iraq's permanent constitution in October and participating in the general elections of December the same year. Before 2010, Sunnis never fared well in elections. Despite that, they were pivotal in getting the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), the roadmap for American withdrawal, approved by parliament in 2008. In the 2010 elections, the Sunnis voted in large numbers for a non-sectarian Shiite candidate, Iyad Allawi, only to be disappointed by his failure to establish a coalition and his eventual mishandling of the party. From this point on, Sunni politics become overtly sectarian. This chapter will delineate the Sunni perception and its limitations.

Sunni integration into the political process in Iraq has been defined as a 'harsh readjustment' (Zeidel 2008). Today, the shadow of a resumption of civil war is looming high as the Sunnis, politically more disunited than ever before, conduct a struggle against the Iraqi regime in Baghdad along civil, sectarian but also provincial and regional lines. Despite their delayed inclusion in the political process, Iraq's Sunnis never accepted the cause of the upheaval, namely the American invasion, and consequently do not recognise the legality of the current Iraqi government. Only the threat of yet another sectarian civil war prevents a much deeper rift between Sunnis and Shias.

Fanar Haddad (2011: 25–31) offers a useful typology of sectarian behaviours: passive, assertive and banal. Passive behaviour backgrounds

sectarian identity, assertive foregrounds it (not necessarily by violent means) and banal takes it for granted, 'like a flag hanging unnoticed on a public building' (Billig 1995: 8). Applying that typology to Iraq's Sunnis, one can discern a movement after 2003, and even more so after 2010, from banal sectarianism to a more assertive kind. This is due to the Sunni reaction to what they perceive as an increasing sectarianism on the part of the Shias, who now control the government and assert their numerical superiority in elections. As we shall see below, this process involves the Sunnis not only setting their own boundaries between the 'in-group' (Sunnis) and the 'out-group' (Shias), but also giving content and shape to their own group identity.

In 2014, as they face another general election and doubt is cast over Sunni secession as a valid option, Iraq's Sunnis appear doomed to being left in political limbo. Contemporary Iraqi political discourse offers two useful terms between which the Sunni appear to fall: *aqalliya* ('minority') and *mukawin* ('component'). *Aqalliya* can be defined as a 'smaller number, numerical inferiority or minority'(Hans Wehr 1976: 783). In current Iraqi political usage, it refers exclusively to the smaller minorities such as the Christians, Turkmens, Yazidis and so on (Salloum 2013: 12–16). The 2005 Iraqi constitution avoids the use of this term and substitutes it with the term *mukawin*, referring to all components of the Iraqi population, whether large or small. This was done to eliminate from the constitution any reference to the numerical inferiority of minorities and create a semblance of equality and possibly 'partnership'.[1]

Mukawin is a more egalitarian term, but, as Saad Salloum rightly demonstrates, it is not a 'magic solution' to the problem of the smaller minorities as the term is unofficially sub-divided into 'small components' and 'large components' (Salloum 2013: 15). Sunni politicians prefer the term to describe their constituency, referring to the Sunnis as '*mukawin min mukawinat al-Iraq*' ('one of the components of Iraq'). Today the term has become synonymous with the Sunnis and is rarely applied to the other major groups in Iraq, the Shia and the Kurds. It is used as a substitute for the word *ta'ifa*, which means 'sect, denomination, confession or religious minority' (Hans Wehr 1976: 574). This term focuses on the sectarian conflict and places the Sunnis on uneasy ground. As part of the dominant branch of Islam worldwide, Sunnis in Iraq and elsewhere have not been accustomed to consider themselves as a 'sect'. In religious terms, they consider themselves adherents of 'orthodox Islam' and in political terms, have a history as Iraq's political elite. As such, they had a share in shaping an anti-sectarian national identity throughout the twentieth century. For the Sunnis, accepting the term *ta'ifa* means accepting sectarianism in the political arena and the end

of their anti-sectarian version of Iraqi nationalism. However, now that sectarianism is entrenched in Iraqi political life, the Sunnis are obliged to respond and craft their own sectarian identity. Nevertheless, they still do so with a measure of reticence. Sunni politicians are following the general trend and becoming less inhibited in using the term 'Sunnis' in reference to their constituencies, in an ongoing process of forging a distinctive Sunni identity (discussed below). Prior to 2006, they were much less inclined to do so. Using this term, however, does not resolve the difference between 'sect' and 'component', which is connected to the identity of the Sunni group.

In Sunni eyes, the term *mukawin* is not a substitute for *aqalliya* because they do not believe the latter word should be applied to them. The Sunnis correctly argue that this term applies only to the small minorities in Iraq and that they are on a different level. In general, they urge Iraqi politicians and those engaged in political discourse to refrain from calling the Sunnis *aqalliya*; even if technically they are a 'minority' they should not be associated with 'numerical inferiority'. However, their marginalisation pushes them towards the state of being a *de facto aqalliya*.

Underneath this semantic and legal dispute, there is a hidden debate over the significance of numbers in a political system based on democratic elections. Before 2003, Sunnis were a political majority and a numerical minority in Iraq. After 2003, they became a political as well as a numerical minority. While Shias after 2003 adopted the mantra of 'majority rule', Sunni Arabs reacted by rejecting the claim that they were a numerical minority, arguing that they form 42 per cent of the population (by adding the predominantly Sunni Kurds to the calculation) whereas the Shias make up only 41 per cent ('Alyan 2005: 196–8; Haddad 2011: 94). Faced with the new reality after 2003, the Sunnis reacted first by delegitimising the change of April 2003, then by denouncing the 'sectarianism' of the Shia-led government and finally by concentrating on their 'marginalisation' and asserting their claims as Sunnis.

From Semantics to Politics: The Sunnis in the Political Process

Accepting the consequences of change in 2003 was not easy for the Sunnis. After two years of fighting a crusade against the political process and boycotting the first general election in January 2005, the Sunnis finally got involved in the political process during the second half of 2005. First they demanded to take part in the draft committee of the constitution and were given the status of 'observers' there. Later they

participated, for the first time, in the referendum on the constitution, held in October 2005, and voted against it. At the end of the year the Sunnis participated in the general election although the voting rates in Sunni areas were modest.

From then on, and despite the continuing American presence, the Sunnis were definitely in the political process. However, this came at a cost. The general election of December 2005 was conducted on clear ethno-sectarian lines, ending with a convincing majority for the Shia coalition. The Sunni parties, disguised as Islamic and national parties, but in one bloc, won only 55 of the 275 seats in parliament. This was the first time that the Sunnis had to cope with the significance of numerical inferiority. After the initial shock, Sunni politicians discovered the advantages of bargaining in the negotiations for the formation of a coalition. With the country rapidly deteriorating into a sectarian civil war in 2006, and despite their marginal number in parliament, Sunni politicians were invited to form the first 'Cabinet of National Unity' under Nouri al-Maliki in June 2006. It was during this troubled period that Shias, Sunnis and Kurds agreed to share key political positions. The most important political roles given to the Sunnis were the speaker of the parliament and the Minister of Defence portfolio. During the term of this government, Sunni politicians habitually complained of marginalisation and discrimination towards Sunni areas, and the Cabinet of National Unity came to an end in 2009 when the Sunni ministers resigned. However, the same period saw episodes of cooperation between Sunnis and Shias in parliament, especially in 2008 over the issue of signing the SOFA with the Americans, putting an end to the American military presence in Iraq. The fact that Sunni tribal militias, trained and financed by the Americans, were winning the battle against al-Qaeda also contributed to the sectarian rapprochement. In 2008 the Iraqi parliament approved the Justice and Accountability Law, limiting the purges against those who were suspected of membership of the Baath party – a Sunni request.

The first bad omens that Maliki was targeting leading Sunni politicians came with the sacking of Dr Mahmud al-Mashhadani, the parliamentary speaker and holder of the highest position among the Sunnis in early 2009. The 2010 election campaign was marred by the disqualification of hundreds of Sunni candidates due to allegations of previous membership in the Baath party. The most prominent was Saleh al-Mutlaq, who, thanks to American pressure, was allowed to return to his post. It seems that Maliki, encouraged by his success at the municipal elections of 2009, was eager to weaken the Sunni bloc as well. We may never know whether he was pursuing this policy simply for the sake of

weakening the Sunnis or whether it was part of his broader goal to centralise power. Whatever Maliki's true intentions, the disqualification of candidates was certainly viewed as part of a broader sectarian agenda.

In the run-up to the 2010 elections the Sunni bloc, headed by the Iraqi Islamic Party, fell apart. The Sunnis tried to realign on a non-sectarian agenda. Rafi al-Issawi, who was serving as deputy Prime Minister at the time, expressed that disposition when he said: 'The project of 2005, having sectarian blocs in politics, is now over.' (al-Issawi 2009) The epitome of this trend was the formation of the Iraq National Movement, more commonly known as the al-Iraqiyya list. Headed by a Shia politician and former Prime Minister, Iyad Allawi, this party seemingly offered a non- and even anti-sectarian line, featuring an equal number of Sunni and Shia candidates. The Sunni voters pinned all their hopes on al-Iraqiyya and turnout in the Sunni areas reached an all-time high. Al-Iraqiyya was the sensation of the elections, winning the largest number of seats in parliament: 91 out of 325. Maliki's State of Law party came second with eighty-nine seats. With these two parties winning over half of the seats between them, and conservative sectarian parties seriously weakened, this could have been an opportunity for the non-sectarian 'grand coalition' which so many Iraqis desired – especially as the two parties had similar agendas on many issues. Ultimately, the two leaders, especially Maliki, could not overcome personal animosities and join forces. Maliki opted for a sectarian Shia coalition and dedicated much effort to successfully dismantling Allawi's party.

The 2010 elections represented the peak of Sunni electoral gains. Al-Iraqiyya won votes from Sunnis and Shias to become the biggest party in parliament. However, when this achievement failed to translate into political influence, the Sunnis began to despair, losing faith not only in this particular party, but also in the political process as a whole. The period following the swearing of the second Maliki Cabinet in September 2010 saw a loss of credibility for two leading Sunni politicians: Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi was accused in 2011 of instigating murders and fled to Turkey, and in Sunni eyes Mutlaq's reputation was irreparably tarnished by accepting the position of Deputy Prime Minister and deserting Al-Iraqiyya. The Sunnis also partially lost their most important ministerial job: Maliki seized the Ministry of Defence, sidelining the politically weak Sunni acting minister, Sadun al-Dulaymi. Only the speaker of the parliament, Osama al-Nujaifi, emerged as a possible electoral hope.

From 2012, Sunni fatigue with the political process was expressed by a rise in increased parliamentary protest, especially in Sunni provinces: marches, demonstrations, sit-ins and hunger strikes were held, led by

local activists and targeting the Maliki government and Sunni politicians alike. Since April 2013, the government has shown signs of growing impatience and has frequently resorted to force to disperse these demonstrations. In Hawija, an area with a Sunni majority, there was a massacre when government troops shot and killed dozens of unarmed Sunni demonstrators. Extremists from the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) infiltrated Fallujah and Ramadi, and left only when a military operation was imminent. On the eve of the third general election, planned for late April 2014, the situation in the Sunni-majority province of Anbar was extremely tense.

The Sunnis and Federalism: A Double-edged Sword

Iraq is defined by its constitution as a federal state. The constitution enables three provinces to establish a 'federal region' (*iqlim*) if the provincial councils agree. At present, only the Kurdish provinces in the north enjoy federal status. Initially, Sunnis were apprehensive about federalism. The first Arabs to accommodate the idea of a federal status were those in the Shia provinces in the south and centre. The Shia claim for a federal status was related to material gains: retaining oil money in Basra and preserving the financial autonomy of the Shia religious establishment in Karbala and Najaf. Calls by the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), a Shia party, to establish a Southern region (*Iqlim al-Janub*), consisting of nine Shiite provinces, were probably motivated by security concerns and an inflated sense of political power. By contrast, the Sunni areas had nothing to gain from federalism and feared that the dismemberment of Iraq would leave them without resources (especially oil) of their own.

The Sunni estrangement from Baghdad boosted provincial politics and an increasing support in the provinces for decentralisation, but not federalism. Since 2011, provincial politicians, headed by Atheel al-Nujaifi, the governor of Nainawa (Mosul) and brother of Osama al-Nujaifi, the parliamentary speaker, have become the foremost exponents of Sunni claims. The four Sunni provinces (Anbar, Diyala, Salah al-Din and Nainawa) are now a central factor in Sunni politics. Whereas Kurdish politics is ethno-national and Shia politics, despite the existence of regional issues, is predominantly sectarian and national, Sunni politics is becoming increasingly provincial.

This provincialism is also nurtured by the awareness that many problems are unique to each province. Thus, for example, the discovery in 2011 of large gas fields in the province of Anbar triggered a local struggle against the central government in Baghdad over future sharing

of the gas profits (ARTE 2011). The province of Nainawa confronts Kurdish autonomy on several territorial issues. Salah al-Din and Diyala are multi-ethnic and multisectarian regions where Sunnis enjoy a narrow majority. Calls for the establishment of a united Sunni province or a federal entity are rare and inconsistent.[2] However, that the Sunni provinces support and champion almost every Sunni cause beyond their borders shows that the pursuit of a Sunni sectarian identity is not yet abandoned at the provincial level.

The Syrian civil war poses a real challenge to Sunni territorial tenacity. The occupation of neighbouring provinces in Syria by fellow Sunni rebels did not go unnoticed by Iraqi Sunnis. Moreover, the emergence of radical Islamic and jihadi forces on the Syrian side had immediate repercussions on Sunni areas in Iraq. The border is porous and jihadis easily cross it. The most daring challenge comes from ISIS, led by an Iraqi, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. A splinter group from al-Qaeda, this organisation has declared that it does not recognise the border between the two countries (as implied by their name). It has further declared that it intends to annex the Sunni province of Anbar to its holdings in Syria. Regardless of what Sunni Iraqis think about the war in Syria, the large majority expects to see an end to al-Qaeda violence in their areas and, if necessary, they are ready to fight the extremists. ISIS's declaration was not supported by the al-Qaeda leadership, let alone by the Sunnis of Iraq. However, the fact that ISIS manages to find some safe havens on Iraqi soil (in the Tharthar area, west of Tikrit) is cause for alarm.

Iraqi Sunnis in the provinces are calling for a larger measure of decentralisation rather than a federal status. Federalism is a divisive issue in Sunni provinces. Apparently, an increasing number of Sunnis in the provinces favour the formation of province-specific regions – an unconstitutional measure – instead of the unification of some provinces. Sunni politicians and Sunnis in Baghdad, still a significant part of the community, are more in favour of a central Baghdad-based government, but one in which the Sunnis would have more power. These politicians are conducting political manoeuvres to weaken Maliki and amend the constitution, mostly within the walls of the 'Green Zone' away from the public eye. So far they have been unsuccessful. By contrast, provincial politics are much closer to the ground. However, the politicians in Baghdad retain a unified vision of the Sunni cause, unlike provincial politicians, who fail to have influence in the capital; Baghdadi politicians can potentially have more impact on national politics. Eventually, these politicians will lead Sunni parties in the coming elections.

Forging Sunni Sectarian Identity

The Sunni reticence towards defining their group as a *tai'fa* (religious sect) implies that their sectarian identity has been feeble. In the first years after the occupation only the extreme organisations openly admitted to representing the Sunnis and fighting against the Shia. The introduction of Shia sectarianism into politics and the revival of Shia practices further aggravated the Sunni alienation. The sectarian civil war of 2006–7, especially in mixed areas like Baghdad, served as a 'laboratory' for the forging of a Sunni sectarian identity with its own symbols, practices and 'heroes'.

After the civil war Sunnis adopted a host of attributes that separated them from other groups (especially the Shia) and declared their 'Sunniness'. The Sunni writer Diyaa al-Khalidi lists these Sunni traits, mostly related to religious practices and Islamic history: the Sunnis pray in the Friday mosque (*jami*) and swear 'by God, the Khalifs and Abi Hanifa'. A stranger who finds himself in a Sunni quarter should recite the names of his Sunni friends and their tribal sheikhs, as well as sayings of the famous Islamic jurists Abu Hanifa and Ibn Hanbal. He should also be able to recite the *da'aa*: the ending of the muezzin's call in which Sunnis mention only the prophet while the Shia add his family (*ahl al-bayt*) (al-Khalidi 2012: 82, 93, 122). A major issue is the different mode of prayer: the Sunnis pray differently to the Shia. In addition, articles of clothing, such as the white or red and white *yashmagh* or *keffiyeh* (head covering), the short gown of the Wahabis and logos of organisations, are used to declare Sunni sectarian affiliation. Supporting certain Baghdadi football clubs (Mansur, Rashid) is another signifier which might also be related to sectarian violence. Sometimes Sunnis also use the previous Iraqi flag or pictures of Saddam Hussein as signifiers though *not* as expression of support for the former president and his regime.

To match the extravagance of the Shia holidays, the Iraqi Sunnis have turned *al-Mawlid al-Nabawi* (the Prophet's Birthday) into the major Sunni holiday (Haddad 2013: 108–10). The imitation of Shia rites in preparation for this holiday had already been seen in early 2010. Reporting the festivities in February 2010, the Sunni TV channel al-Baghdadiya focused on Aa'thamiyaa, Baghdad's most traditional Sunni quarter, which took centre stage in the celebrations, claiming an attendance of 'millions'. Interviewees wished that 'Iraq would be united and distant from sectarianism', which, in this context, should be explained as the end of the exclusion of Sunnis and sectarian violence. One might also notice the appearance of a new Sunni logo in the celebrations: a calligraphic version of the name of the prophet accompanied by the word *qudwatuna* ('our role model')

(Haddad 2013: 108). Compared with the Shia holidays, the celebration of al-Mawlid is rather dull, comprising speeches and some music.[3] However, visiting Baghdad in 2012, Fanar Haddad was surprised to see a band of Sunni youth carrying a large drum and marching in preparation for al-Mawlid in obvious imitation of Shia Ashura marches (*mawakib*, 'procession') (Haddad 2013:110).

This situation is very similar to other conflict areas (Bosnia, Rwanda, Northern Ireland) where two groups sharing many similarities and speaking the same language become segregated and choose a set of signifiers to create borders. Insignificant items from the past, a head cover or a mode of speaking, take on major significance as they become the markers for deciding who people are. In this situation, al-Qaeda and the other jihadi organisations are also filling a certain function and consequently find followers and a place. As Haddad shows, sectarian civil wars create 'warlords', but they also generate a certain understanding and even a need for such 'warlords' who 'protect' the community and revenge the actions of their rival 'warlords' (Haddad 2011: 187–99). The jihadis are also signifiers of extreme devotion to the Sunni cause. They are like the 'ultras' in a football club: marginalised but adored, vilified and feared but also touching a common chord, yet always few in number. Their invitation, by the local population to Fallujah and Ramadi in January 2014, as part of the struggle against the Iraqi government was an admonition to the government.

The Sunni sectarian cause is not composed solely of religious and historic aspects or particular clothes. Contemporary Sunni identity is also constituted by grievances: being dismissed from the army, the security services or government solely for being Sunnis; purged for being junior members of the Baath as part of the process of de-Baathification (Zeidel 2014); being held in secret detention centres and tortured on suspicion of terrorist activity; and suffering from discrimination in the allocation of resources. All these, and many more, advance a common secular Sunni identity, which is more relevant to Sunnis who are neither religious nor interested in the sectarian issue per se.

Significantly, the Sunni religious establishment has largely been absent. The Iraqi Islamic Party, once a leading Sunni party and now in decline, was a party of politicians rather than clergymen. With the demise of the Association of Muslim Scholars (*Haiat al-Ulamaa al-Muslimin*), who in any case boycotted the political process between 2003 and 2005, the Sunni political scene was left in the hands of traditionalist or even secular politicians who abhorred the idea of turning Iraq into a theocracy or a Sharia state. The only official Sunni institution in Iraq today is a religious institution: the Sunni Waqf, established after 2003 and headed since

2005 by Shaykh Ahmad Abdel Ghaffour al-Samaraai. Efforts to unify the Sunni clerical establishment by renewing the position of the Grand Mufti, which was vacant for many years (some say since 1955), failed. The Sunni Waqf is state controlled and, as such, cannot provide political and spiritual guidance. In addition, the Sunni clerical world has so far not created leading charismatic personalities to match Shia's Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani (Rabkin 2014; Zeidel 2009: 20–35). Similarly, neither the Sunni tribal world nor the provincial council of the Sunni provinces has produced politicians of a national calibre (Marr 2006, 2007; Zeidel 2010: 159–73)

The 2014 Elections

The end of April 2014 saw Iraq preparing for a general election, the first national election to take place since the American withdrawal. None of the existing Sunni parties expected to fare well in the polling given that al-Iraqiyya was split and the Iraqi Islamic Party had not recovered from the resignation of its head, Tariq al-Hashimi, in October 2009.[4] In December 2013 Sunni politicians decided to run in three blocs, headed respectively by the parliamentary speaker, Osama al-Nujaifi, Saleh al-Mutlaq and Iyad Allawi (a Shia who appeals to Sunni voters). Each bloc is composed of smaller political groups. The biggest block is Nujaifi's, which includes tribal and provincial groups as well as Turkmen parties. Of the three, only Allawi's remains loyal to al-Iraqiyya's anti-sectarian line (Habib 2013b).

   To evaluate Sunni options for the elections, one has to observe Sunni electoral behaviour in previous campaigns. The first elections in January 2005 were officially boycotted by the Sunnis, who, at that time, objected to the political process. The result was the election of a parliament lacking Sunni representation and their exclusion from the Draft Committee of the Permanent Constitution. The Sunnis realised that this was a mistake and the Sunni politicians responsible were ousted. In the following months, the Sunnis gradually joined the political process and participated in the elections of December 2005 and 2010 as well as in provincial elections. However, Sunni parties understand that boycotting the 2014 elections would repeat the error of January 2005 with serious consequences to the community and therefore refrain from issuing such calls. Nonetheless, a low Sunni turnout would mean a decline in Sunni representation in parliament and might be translated into an increase in extra-parliamentary activity and the *de facto* delegitimising of the political system.

   In the second campaign of December 2005, the first in which Sunnis participated, a large number of Sunnis voted for political Islam, represented

by the Iraqi Islamic Party. This may have been a Sunni reaction to Shia voters voting for their representatives of political Islam. It is interesting that, at that stage, the immediate response to sectarianism in politics was expressed in terms of political Islam. However, perhaps due to the weakness of the Sunni clerical establishment, the performance of political Islam in politics left the Sunnis unenthusiastic, to say the least. On the sidelines of the Sunni community, Sunni Islamists are radicalising and tilting toward the Salafi or even the jihadi options.

One thing that still sustains the anti-jihadist and anti-sectarian line is that the bulk of Sunni intellectuals refuse to adhere to a sectarian identity and continue to background their Sunni affiliation. In his novel *Qatala* ('Murderers'), the writer Diyaa al-Khalidi harshly criticises the rise of Sunni identity during the sectarian civil war and attributes it to a perpetual Iraqi need to cling to grand ideologies in order to explain reality: communism, Baathism and pan-Arabism in the past and now political Islam and sectarianism in the present. He alleges that the communists and Baathists of yesterday are the sectarian militiamen of today (al-Khalidi 2012). The book was a bestseller in Iraq. Intellectuals are often unjustly ignored in the discussion of political patterns. Sunni intellectuals could have been instrumental in the forging of Sunni identity, but so far they have preferred not to be part of the process. Apparently, sectarian identity is an alien idea to those who had nothing to do with its creation and who have always dissociated themselves from it.

Finally, though some regional, provincial and tribal alignments show up in Sunni politics, they never stand by themselves as an option for the entire Sunni constituency, but rather always shelter under bigger coalitions. These alignments fail to exceed their parochial agendas and present a national and sectarian agenda that would appeal to Sunnis across Iraq. If, however, Sunnis voted in large numbers for their tribal, regional or provincial parties, the Sunni cause would be 'privatised' and lose much of its resonance. The common denominator of Iraqi Sunnis would disappear in an ocean of local and tribal claims. At present it seems that the future of Sunni Arab politics in Iraq lies in two potential options: the openly sectarian option and the anti-sectarian option, represented by the declining al-Iraqiyya. A third option, of non-participation in the elections and radicalisation, might also have an impact on Sunni politics in the longer term.

Legacy

The Sunnis in Iraq were closely associated with the state. Moreover, they were associated with a highly centralised state, run from Baghdad.

During the decades under Saddam the state was a 'Leviathan', employing many and dispensing favours to those close to the leadership. After the 2003 invasion, the Sunnis could no longer preserve their hegemony. Hasty steps by the Americans, such as the dissolution of the armed forces, contributed to the creation of a Sunni cause which was predominantly civilian and best summarised by the word 'marginalisation'. All this still lacked an ideological dimension that would give context to this group. With the rise of ethno-sectarian politics after the invasion, the Sunnis first faced an uneasy situation, since years of being in power had weakened their sectarian identity. In retaliation against the increasing sectarianism of the Shia, the Sunnis first opted for political Islam, then in 2010 voted for an anti-sectarian party headed by a Shia. When all these options failed, Sunnis discovered their Sunniness.

This newly found sectarian identity is still rather poor in comparison with Shia identity and rituals. It also fails to evoke the same emotions. Within this identity and within Sunni politics, diverse forces are working in different directions, hindering the emergence of a vision common to all the Sunnis. Are Sunnis still in favour of a centralised state or do they prefer a decentralised one? Do they accept the rule of the ballot box? As of mid-2013, the Sunnis were in a rebellion against the central government, refusing to accept its rulings or acknowledging its legitimacy. This represents a step back from participation in the political process. The central government, on its part, would like to resume dialogue with the Sunnis but shows little tolerance of Sunni protests. It is this state of affairs that is driving Iraq into a quagmire. If anything is to be learned from the re-emergence of this schism following the invasion, it is that in the absence of a fully fledged democracy based on a civil pact, politics in societies riven with ethno-religious divides can arouse latent conflicts in which previously amicable factions can descend into the worst kinds of sectarianism.

Conclusion

Returning to the discussion of the terms in the first part of the chapter, the Sunnis justifiably reject the term *aqalliya* (minority) in reference to their community. Technically, Sunnis are an *aqalliya* in Iraq but their numbers equal those of the Kurds and they have a majority in four provinces, while the Kurds control three provinces. Moreover, the Sunnis' political influence and their historic role in Iraq that preceded the formation of the new state make them a central actor and certainly not a small minority. Any attempt to exclude or marginalise the Sunnis harms the process of peace and stability in Iraq.

Nevertheless, the Sunnis are taking the first steps towards adjusting to the new realities. Of all the major actors in Iraqi politics, only the Sunnis refer to themselves as a *mukawin* (component). This is significant. It implies not only that the Sunnis consider themselves equal to the other major groups, but also that they are not alone in Iraq. A component is always part of a whole and if the components can come together – by cooperation and consent – then there will be a stable future. In this context, developing a Sunni sectarian identity is not necessarily a negative trend. Sectarianism has a bad name in Iraq and many still wish it to disappear, at least from the political sphere. However, knowing who you are as a Sunni and what it means greatly helps to define the Sunni role in Iraq. Sunni sectarian identity is not only an esoteric invocation of the distant past, it also includes the Sunni role in the formation of Iraq as well as their many grievances since 2003. The final outcome of Sunni identity may not be as historically rooted and rich in emotions as the Shia identity, but that is hardly the point.

Finally, Sunnis should not 'arm' themselves with a solid sectarian identity in preparation for a sectarian civil war. They should develop a sectarian identity as their input for a pluralistic and inclusive Iraqi national identity that would embrace all of Iraq's components and find a protected space for the smaller minorities. At the end of the process, the Sunni sectarian identity should be banal and not have political connotations: a Sunni should be able to say, 'I am a Sunni, but it does not affect my vote.' For this to happen, Sunnis need to make certain that forging their identity is left neither to the extremists nor to the politicians, both of which groups have a blatant agenda. It should be the task of the Iraqi Sunni Arab intellectuals.

Notes

1. The Iraqi constitution of 2005 is available at: http://www.washington-post.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/10/12/AR2005101201450.html (accessed 17 October 2014).
2. The Sunnis failed in their bid to follow the letter of the constitution and form federal regions in the provinces of Salah al-Din and Nainawa.
3. See al-Baghdadiya's report of 25 February 2010 from the main scene in Aa'thamiya and celebrations in Fallujah.
4. In October 2009 al-Hashimi resigned from the Iraqi Islamic Party to establish a new party, the Renewal List (al-Tajdid), which joined al-Iraqiyya.

This chapter discusses how the toppling of the Sunni-dominated Baathist government in 2003 and the subsequent Shia Arab and Kurdish power grabs has left...Â Between Aqalliya and Mukawin: Understanding Sunni Political Attitudes in Post-Saddam Iraq. Ronen Zeidel. Â The Legacy of Iraq ; doi:10.3366/edinburgh/9780748696161.003.0007. Publisher Website. Google Scholar.