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BETTER MAP VERSUS BETTER DEMOCRACY: A SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE TO ETHNIC CONFLICT IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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ABSTRACT

Ethnic conflict in the Middle East is an issue yet to be resolved by traditional theories of international relations. It is proposed that a social-psychological approach is better suited for determining the underlying causes to ethnic violence and potential solutions. This paper will employ the chosen trauma model proposed by Vamik Volkan in order to examine how social-psychological factors and historic traumas contribute to fueling conflict in the Middle East. The paper will then consider state partition and democratic reform as two potential solutions to ethnic conflict, and determine how effective they are in addressing Shi'ite and Kurdish chosen traumas. Ultimately, this paper will demonstrate that border-oriented solutions are generally ineffective in mitigating Middle Eastern sectarian and ethnic tensions, whereas those that focus on democratic reform can effectively resolve chosen traumas and prevent ethnic violence. More specifically, a case will be made for democratic models based on power sharing arrangements.

INTRODUCTION

If one were to pick a date for the beginning of the post-Saddam sectarian conflict in Iraq, a strong case could be made for February 22, 2006. On that day, insurgents affiliated to al-Qaeda in Iraq would bomb the al-Askariyya Mosque in Samarra, causing its famous golden dome to collapse. Although Samarra is predominantly Sunni and located in the so-called Sunni-triangle North of Baghdad, the al-Askariyya Mosque is one of Shi'ite Islam's holiest sites, housing the tombs of two 9th-century Imams[1]. The attack quickly ignited a sectarian civil war in Iraq, setting off escalating waves of reprisals and counterattacks between opposing Shi'ite and Sunni Iraqis. While no one was killed during the Mosque attack, the ensuing bloodshed was significant: by July, sectarian violence resulted in a death rate of over 3,000 civilians per month[2].

The February 2006 attack on al-Askariyya Mosque was important in that it marked an unexpected shift in the conflict landscape in Iraq, from an insurgency aimed at disrupting coalition and Iraqi security forces, to an internal civil war fought on the basis of Islamic sectarian identity. It would seem the lid had come off the pressure cooker, and societal tensions that had lain dormant under Saddam's authoritarian regime were threatening to tear the nation apart. This development caught many by surprise and sent political and military strategists scrambling for solutions to address the civil unrest.

In the decade that followed the al-Askariyya Mosque attack, internal conflict based on sectarian identity would quickly grow to include an ethnic dimension, and

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[1] Anthoney Cordesman, Emma Davies, and Center for Strategic and International Studies (Washington, D.C.). *Iraq's Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict*. Westport, Conn: Praeger Security International, (2008): 251.

[2] Hamit Dardagan and John Sloboda. "Iraq body count." Available online at iraqbodycount.org (2017).

spread instability throughout the region. By the Spring of 2017, sectarian and ethnic tensions were arguably the leading security concern in the Middle East. A Syrian civil war increasingly fueled by sectarianism had resulted in over 400,000 deaths and forced 4 million people to flee their homes. Sectarianism had enabled Daesh to maintain control of wide swaths of territory throughout Iraq and Syria, in its hell-bent desire to create a Sunni Islamic state in the Levant, and beyond[3]. Iraq had become a sectarian battlefield, its demographics increasingly suggesting that it consisted of three separate ethno-religious communities. Finally, Iran and Saudi Arabia were being progressively drawn into protracted ideological proxy wars, exacerbating sectarian tensions throughout the Middle East.

In June 2006, shortly after the Samarra Mosque attack, the Armed Forces Journal published an article entitled "Blood Borders: How a better Middle East would look", authored by retired U.S. Army Lieutenant-Colonel Ralph Peters[4]. Peters argued that sectarian and ethnic violence in the Middle East was a direct consequence of ill-conceived borders imagined by European powers, drawn to partition the Ottoman Empire into British and French Mandates after the First World War[5]. In his article, Peters presents a regional map (figure 1.1) featuring new national boundaries which he suggests "redress the wrongs suffered by the most significant 'cheated' population groups"[6]. Peters saw Middle-Eastern state borders as the root cause for sectarian conflict and argued that the redrawing of borders was a prerequisite for enduring regional peace.

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[3] Patrick Cockburn. The Rise of Islamic State: ISIS and the New Sunni Revolution. New York;London;: Verso, (2015): 27.

[4] Ralph Peters. "Blood borders: How a better Middle East would look." Armed Forces Journal 6, no. 06, (2006): 1.

[5] William Cleveland and Martin Bunton. A History of the Modern Middle East. 5th ed. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, (2013): 149.

[6] Ralph Peters, "Blood borders…", 1.

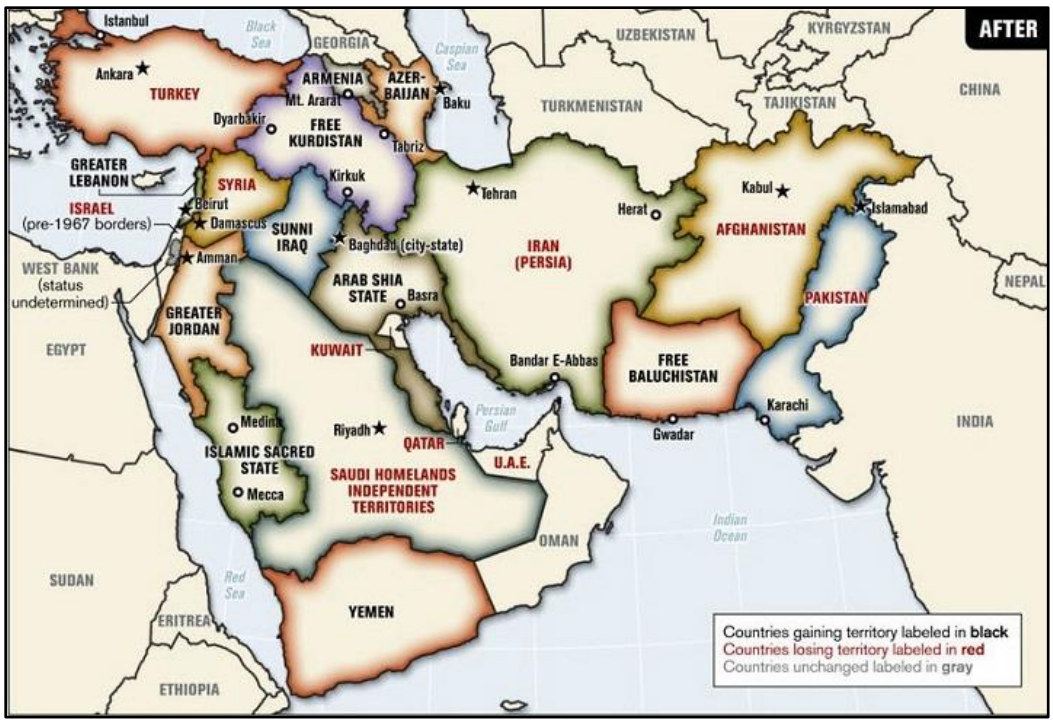

Figure 1.1 – A Redrawn Middle East

Source: Ralph Peters, *Blood Borders: How a Better Middle East Would Look*.

Many journalists, academics, and analysts would follow suit with Ralph Peters' theory and lay the blame for growing sectarianism and instability on the hundred-year old Sykes-Picot agreement[7]. They argued that Middle-Eastern borders were fundamentally "artificial", and their endurance and legitimacy were only made possible by the totalitarian regimes and strongmen that upheld them. In order to stabilize the region, the solution was to remap the Middle East along "natural borders", including sectarian and ethnic divides, in order to produce homogeneous polities[8]. The unintended consequences of the 2011 Arab Spring would seem to support this theory. As totalitarian regimes collapsed, many social cleavages suddenly became apparent, giving rise to sectarian violence which spread uncontrollably throughout the region.

[7] David Patel. "Repartitioning the Sykes-Picot Middle East? Debunking Three Myths." Middle East Brief No. 103, Crown Center for Middle East Studies, Brandeis University, (2016): 5.

[8] *Ibid.*, 5.

While literature blaming the Sykes-Picot agreement for Middle-Eastern conflicts has generated much discussion, mostly due to its provocative nature, many authors have voiced caution by contending that an exercise in cartography is unlikely to produce realistic solutions, and that new borders based on division, hate, and animosity cannot be conducive to lasting peace and stability[9]. Instead, these authors argue that ethnic and sectarian conflicts in the Middle East are the result of weak states and a generalized failure to transition into Nation States after the mandate system ended following the Second World War. Many authors also cite poor regional integration as a major contributing factor to the weakening of Nation States in the Middle East[10]. They argue that the Middle East is arguably one of the least integrated regions in the world, lacking the regional institutions normally meant to strengthen statehood, economic conditions, and security.

In the end, debating on whether to lay the blame on borders or statehood may be somewhat inconsequential. Societal instability in the Middle East can be expected to lead to a new regional order in years to come. Only the durability of this new regional configuration will matter to peace and stability, regardless of whether this new order is achieved by implementing solutions that seek to address perceived border or statehood issues. More specifically, the effectiveness of a future regional order can only be measured in how it addresses the grievances of its various sectarian and ethnic groups.

With an outlook into the future, this paper will explore several questions which need to be answered in order to assess potential future regional reconfigurations in the

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[9] Daniel Neep. "The Middle East, hallucination, and the cartographic imagination". Discovery Society, (2015). Available online at discoversociety.org/2015/01/03/focus-the-middle-east-hallucination-and-the-cartographic-imagination/

[10] For example: Bassam Tibi. *Conflict and War in the Middle East: From Interstate War to New Security*. 2nd ed. New York: St. Martin's Press, (1998): 210.

Middle East. In the first chapter, a conceptual model will be developed to evaluate future Middle-Eastern regional orders. It will contend that concepts deriving from group psychology are well-suited for this purpose, in particular the notion of a chosen trauma. A chosen trauma is a term coined by Vamik Volkan to describe a historical grievance that can be manipulated in order to mobilize large groups in support of an ideology or political aspiration[11]. According to Volkan, sectarian and ethnic tensions are a result of unresolved mourning, that is to say a chosen trauma experienced by a large group which has not fully healed, and which has the potential to trigger future situations of conflict. This concept will be heavily leveraged in chapters 2 and 3, which aim to identify the relevant chosen traumas that fuel sectarian and ethnic tensions in the Middle East. More specifically, chapter 2 will discuss the Battle of Karbala, which has had a significant impact on the Shi'ite psyche, while chapter 3 will cover a Kurdish chosen trauma, the failed rebellion of Sheikh Said. Chapters 4 and 5 will examine the most plausible future regional reconfiguration scenarios: state partition and democratization. Finally, each reconfiguration scenario will be rated in terms of its potential to address ethnic and sectarian chosen traumas.

Ultimately, this paper will demonstrate that border-oriented solutions are generally ineffective in mitigating sectarian and ethnic tensions present in the Middle East, whereas those that focus on strengthening nation states through democratic reform are better suited due to their potential to permanently address latent chosen traumas affecting minority and non-dominant groups.

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[11] Vamik Volkan. *Blood Lines: From Ethnic Pride to Ethnic Terrorism*. Boulder, Co: Westview Press, 1998: 48.

In referring to ethnic and sectarian groups, and conflict, this paper will henceforth employ Anthony Smith's generally accepted definition of ethnicity: "named human populations with shared ancestry myths, histories and cultures, having an association with a specific territory and a sense of solidarity"[12]. Smith considers sectarian affiliations and language to be components of culture. Therefore, when employing the term ethnic group, this paper is referring to sectarian groups, and to groups of individuals sharing common ancestry.

[12] Anthony Smith. *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986: 32.

> *…real-world issues are highly "psychologized" – contaminated with shared perceptions, thoughts, fantasies, and emotions (both conscious and unconscious) pertaining to past historical glories and traumas: losses, humiliations, mourning difficulties, feelings of entitlement to revenge, and resistance to accepting changed realities.*
>
> - Vamik Volkan,
> *Blood Lines: From Ethnic Pride to Ethnic Terrorism*

CHAPTER 1 – THE SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL LENS

In a stunning political move, President Anwar Sadat of Egypt travelled to Jerusalem on November 20, 1977, and stated to the Israeli Knesset his desire to settle longstanding differences between the Arabs and Israelis. Sadat's new reconciliatory tone was profoundly significant and would draw both praise, and criticism. He would become the first Muslim Nobel Peace Prize laureate for his role in the negotiations at Camp David, which culminated in a framework for peace between Egypt and Israel. To others, these same actions would be perceived as traitorous, Sadat was betraying the sacrifices of many Arab states by negotiating with a sworn enemy[13].

Sadat understood the optics of his address to the Knesset and fully anticipated the resulting polarized views, shaped by a long history of regional violence and a perpetual mourning for casualties of war. Interestingly, he would choose to tackle the issue of polarized opinion as a central theme in his speech, referring to it as a "psychological barrier" which he suggested was to blame for most problems dividing the Middle East, beyond matters of political, economic, or military interests.

> … Yet, there remained another wall. This wall constitutes a psychological barrier between us. A barrier of suspicion. A barrier of rejection. A barrier of fear of deception. A barrier of hallucinations around any action, deed or decision. A barrier of cautious and erroneous interpretations of all and

[13] Sadat would be assassinated during a military parade in 1981. His departure from Gamal Nasser's pan-Arabism and his negotiations with Israel would constitute important factors motivating his assassins.

> every event or statement. It is this psychological barrier which I described in official statements as representing 70 percent of the whole problem.[14]

As history would suggest, removing the psychological barrier between Arabs and Israelis, as described by Sadat, has proven to be an enormously complex and challenging endeavour which the Middle East continues to struggle with today. The difficulties are perhaps attributable to the fact that this barrier is notional, and that it isn't immediately accessible. Indeed, the psychological barrier only exists in the collective consciousness of the Arab and Israeli people, and certainly out of range for any conventional wrecking ball.

The psychological barrier described by Sadat is a common feature in ethnic conflicts, as they often stem from disputes over socially constructed concepts such as identity and ideology. Various theories have been employed to understanding these conflicts, and their social and psychological underpinnings. These theories, discussed in the sections below, vary from the conventional and traditional, derived from realist and liberal schools of international relations, to newer approaches that offer constructivist and social-psychological perspectives.

Traditional Approaches

Most traditional theories of conflict management and international relations that have been applied toward ethnic conflict are modeled on state and interest-based logic. These theories often neglect to consider human behaviour and psychology, which aren't always as constrained by logic and rationality, as interstate relations tend to be[15].

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[14] Spencer Tucker and Priscilla Roberts, eds. *The Encyclopedia of the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A Political, Social, and Military History: A Political, Social, and Military History*. Abc-Clio, 2008: 1327.

[15] Asaf Siniver."15 Managing and settling ethnic conflict." Routledge Handbook of Ethnic Conflict (2010): 182-183.

Notwithstanding, many authors maintain that traditional international relations theories can be equally effective in rationalizing these types of conflicts.

For instance, Posen suggests that one of the most fundamental concepts developed by realist international relations theory is entirely applicable to ethnic conflict: the security dilemma. He argues that the factors which instigate ethnic conflict are comparable to those that shape interstate rivalry. Competition between ethnic groups invariably develops into a struggle for power and resources, which are argued to be necessary in guaranteeing group security[16]. This escalation of power and resources skews the perceptions of rival ethnic groups, which eventually see each other as existential threats. Ultimately, the resulting tensions between groups invariably bubble over into violent provocations, attacks and reprisals.

Posen's application of the security dilemma to ethnic conflict is perhaps fitting in the study of the protracted regional rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and its sectarian underpinnings. However, this paper argues that the concept is less applicable to intrastate ethnic conflicts observed in modern Middle Eastern history. Indeed, ethnic violence tends to erupt suddenly within Middle Eastern states, in a reactionary manner, as opposed to being a consequence of an escalatory buildup of resources and power between groups, as suggested by the security dilemma. However, despite its limited value in determining the root causes to ethnic violence in the Middle East, the security dilemma will be revisited in Chapter 3, to examine how future scenarios of partition along ethnic divisions could potentially give rise to such a phenomenon.

The theory of basic human needs drawn from the traditional liberalist school of international relations can also be considered in explaining ethnic conflict in the Middle

[16] Posen, Barry R. "The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict." *Survival* 35, no. 1 (1993): 28.

East. Initially proposed by Burton in the 1970s, and further developed by Azar in the 1980s, the theory of basic human needs suggests that conflict arises when identity, personal development, security, and recognition needs are unfulfilled by a state. Burton contends that these four needs are universal, common to all groups, and are non-negotiable in nature[17]. Azar adds to Burton's theory by asserting that a violent and irrational response can be expected when a state fails in meeting basic human needs, as traditional conflict resolution techniques are ineffective in dealing with needs that are non-negotiable in nature. Azar links the denial of these fundamental needs to the breakdown of state authority, and the outbreak of protracted social conflicts[18].

With its focus on essential human dimensions such as identity, the theory of basic human needs can explain the occurrence of civil uprisings by groups that are oppressed or marginalized by state policies. For instance, the case of Kurdish populations living in Turkey can be analyzed through a liberalist lens, by arguing that Kemalist *Turkification* policies have denied the free expression of Kurdish identity (the Kurdish struggle for its ethnic identity will be further examined in chapter 3).

Social-Psychological Approach

Although they can be employed to effectively describe certain aspects and dynamics of ethnic conflict, traditional realist and liberal concepts such as the security dilemma and the theory of basic human needs are unable to address some of the inherently human aspects and factors contributing to ethnic violence, such as the concepts of fear, humiliation, self-esteem, and vengeance. Both realist and liberal schools of international relations tend to be state-centered, while neglecting issues that can only be

[17] John Burton. *Conflict: Human needs theory*. Springer, 1990: 296.

[18] Edward Azar. "Protracted International Conflicts: Ten Propositions." *International Interactions*, 12, no. 1 (1985): 60.

fully understood by shifting the focus instead toward social and psychological dynamics which occur within, and between ethnic groups.

Citing the inadequacies of interest-oriented and institution-based theories in explaining ethnic conflict, Ross argues that a different set of tools are required and suggests that a social-psychological approach can offer a more complete understanding[19]. In particular, he emphasizes the social-psychological phenomenon of identity, which he argues realists tend to treat as a peripheral consideration. By placing "identity issues and their cultural enactments at the center of ethnic conflict"[20], Ross suggests a parallel exists between a threat to collective identity, and the intensity and persistence of violence observed during ethnic conflicts.

Kelman adds that social-psychological perspectives are able to complement the analysis provided by realist or neorealist approaches[21]. While recognizing the role the state plays in international politics, which is often the sole focus of these schools of international relations, he asserts that a social-psychological approach "opens the 'black box' of the state as unitary actor and analyzes processes within and between the societies that underlie state action"[22].

Stein concurs with the social-psychological approach, and suggests that the phenomenon of image formation of the "Other" is key in ethnic conflict management, and so "the root cause of ethnic conflicts is not in the security dilemma or the breakdown of state authority, but rather in the development and reinforcement of 'enemy images', or

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[19] Marc Ross. *Cultural Contestation in Ethnic Conflict*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007: 2.

[20] *Ibid.*, 2.

[21] Herbert Kelman. "12 A social-psychological approach to conflict analysis and resolution." *Handbook of conflict analysis and resolution* (2008): 170.

[22] *Ibid.*, 171.

the 'us versus them' mentality[23]". These mental images of the "Self" and the "Other", which serve to shape social identity, constitute the basis for a social-psychological approach to the study of ethnic conflict. More specifically, it is the development and cultural reinforcement of enemy images representing neighbouring ethnic groups which leads to violence and protracted conflict.

Many constructivists view ethnic identity, resulting from mental images of "in-groups" and "out-groups", as being entirely socially constructed[24], essentially the product of social customs and invented traditions which are commonly referred to as a myth-symbol complex[25]. A myth-symbol complex binds members of an ethnic group together through a shared culture and a common interpretation of history, which identifies heroes, enemies, and glorifies symbols of the group's identity. According to Kaufman, these social myths and symbols ultimately come to represent the survival of an ethnic group, which is why group members are compelled to fight and even sacrifice themselves for them:

> The core of the ethnic identity is the 'myth-symbol complex' – the combination of myths, memories, values, and symbols that defines not only who is a member of the group but what it means to be a member. The existence, status, and security of the group thus come to be seen to depend on the status of group symbols, which is why people are willing to fight and die for them – and why they are willing to follow leaders who manipulate those symbols for dubious or selfish purposes.[26]

This paper argues that the myth-symbol complex is fundamental in understanding ethnic conflict in the Middle East, and that the prominence of regional ethnic and

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[23] Janice Stein. "Image, identity, and the Resolution of Violent Conflict.", quoted in Asaf Siniver."15 Managing and settling….", 184.

[24] Stuart Kaufman. "Ethnicity as a generator of conflict." *Routledge handbook of ethnic conflict*, (2010): 92.

[25] The term myth-symbol complex was originally coined by Anthony Smith in the following publication: Anthony Smith. *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986: 15.

[26] Stuart Kaufman. *Modern hatreds: The symbolic politics of ethnic war*. Cornell University Press, 2001: 25.

sectarian identity is entirely attributable to the significant role played by myths and symbols. Accordingly, a socio-psychological approach will be used to determine what myths and symbols, bound by historical narratives, have contributed to the ethnic tensions and violence currently observed in the Middle East.

Central to the myth-symbol complex are narratives that are able to mobilize a group, and incite it to violence. Ross refers to these narratives as psychocultural dramas, which he defines as "competing, and apparently irresolvable, claims that engage the central elements of each group's historical experience and their identity and invoke suspicions and fears of the opponent"[27]. An analysis of these psychocultural drama narratives can reveal the issues that are at the core of many ethnic conflicts, and can thus help formulate effective solutions. That being the objective, this paper will apply the chosen trauma model, which is similar but more developed than the concept of psychocultural drama, in order to apply a social-psychological lens to ethnic conflict in the Middle East.

The Chosen Trauma

Dr. Vamik Volkan, a psychiatrist specializing in ethnic violence, was among the mental health practitioners that had accepted President Anwar el-Sadat's invitation, following his speech to the Israeli Knesset, to work side-by-side Egyptian and Israeli diplomats to better understand large-group psychology, and to study behavior which could have political implications. This experience and the insight he would gain on the Arab-Israeli conflict would inspire him to study and specialize in the psychology of large groups, so as to understand the irrational factors that contribute to violent conflict.

[27] Marc Ross. *Cultural Contestation in…,* 25.

According to Volkan, a large group can suffer major traumatic experiences, which become embedded in the fabric of its cultural identity. These experiences may include historic events which may have victimized the group's ancestors, such as harrowing defeats in battle, losses of social status, and ethnic cleansing. The term chosen trauma is used to describe the shared mental representation of these traumatic experiences, which once affected a group's ancestors[28]. They are adopted and shared by members of a large group, and can elicit intense emotions of victimization. Perhaps most relevant to the study of conflict is Volkan's assertion that collective emotions can sometimes justify violence as a means of defense against the intolerable thoughts and memories associated with chosen traumas[29].

Volkan explains that chosen traumas are kept alive and are perpetuated within a group, transmitted from one generation to the next. At its source, the chosen trauma can be traced back to a calamity affecting group members and inflicted by an enemy group. These individuals are traumatized, in the sense that they are left with mental images which they are unable to tame, or render harmless. More specifically, members of a group will be unable to overcome the following psychological disorders:

- A sense of victimization and feeling dehumanized.
- A sense of humiliation due to being helpless.
- A sense of survival guilt: staying alive while family members, friends, and others die.
- Difficulty being assertive without facing humiliation.
- An increase in externalizations / projections.
- Exaggeration of bad prejudice.
- Hunger for libidinal objects and a search to internalize them.
- An increase in narcissistic investment in large-group identity.
- Envy towards the victimizer and defensive identification with the oppressor.

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[28] Vamik Volkan. *Blood Lines: From Ethnic Pride…,* 48.

[29] Vamik Volkan. *Psychoanalysis, international relations, and diplomacy: A sourcebook on large-group psychology*. Karnac Books, 2014: 35.

- A sense of unending mourning due to significant losses.[30]

Ultimately, the individuals affected by these psychological difficulties unconsciously pass on their mental images of traumatic experiences to their children through stories, cultural rituals, or symbolic objects. For instance, a watch belonging to a lost family member and passed on from a parent to a child may be considered a way to unwittingly transmit an unresolved trauma associated with the loss. By taking on these mental images of trauma, family descendants inherit a subconscious task to resolve the trauma, such as to regain self-esteem, to complete the mourning related to a loss, to take revenge, or to never forget[31]. The group trauma is perpetuated in this manner among the members of a group and their descendants. Since each subsequent generation is generally unable to fulfil the tasks they have inherited, the shared traumatic mental images will continue to link all members of the group, reinforcing their common identity and their collective inability to mourn the initial historic misfortune. Eventually, the shared mental images of the initial incident become a chosen trauma, in that the trauma is chosen by the collective as a significant group identity marker.

Volkan further explains that the feelings associated with chosen traumas may lay dormant within a group for long periods, sometimes for centuries. Eventually, a charismatic group leader may choose to awaken these collective feelings in order to mobilize the group, by referencing and manipulating the chosen trauma. This generally results in a "time collapse", a phenomenon that Volkan uses to describe how people tend to merge the emotions felt regarding a past trauma with those related to a current situation. Although the mental image may represent events which occurred several

[30] *Ibid.*, 23.
[31] *Ibid.*, 23.

centuries in the past, the sense of loss felt by group members becomes very recent. By reactivating the troubling dormant mental representations contained within a chosen trauma, the leader is able to distort group perceptions, and link the enemies involved in a current conflict with those from a distant historical past[32].

When reactivated, mental images of the trauma have the effect of dehumanizing the enemy. This produces feelings of entitlement to revenge, which may drive members of a large group to kill a threatening neighbor without remorse, rather than endure the anxieties associated to the unresolved mourning of historical traumas. Volkan suggests that such groups regress under the shared stress fueled by the chosen trauma – they fall back on primitive and violent behavior[33]. Haddad argues that invoked mental images which involve religious symbolism can intensify and exaggerate a group's reaction and propensity towards violence[34]. When the chosen traumas are considered embodiments of divine truths, they acquire heightened meaning, and therefore stand less chance to be diffused or deescalated by group leaders.

Volkan uses the analogy of an "ethnic tent" to better illustrate the psychology of large groups. He explains that members of a large group have two layers of protection, which come to symbolize their individual and collective identities. The first layer constitutes the clothing worn by everyone, unique to each individual and representing their own personal identity. The second layer however, is the canvas of a tent which covers all members belonging to a group, protecting them from outside dangers and representing their shared common identity. The canvas is decorated with identity markers

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[32] Vamik Volkan. *Blood Lines: From Ethnic Pride…,* 46.
[33] *Ibid*., 115.
[34] Fanar Haddad. *Sectarianism in Iraq: Antagonistic visions of unity*. Oxford University Press, 2014: 22.

stitched into the fabric, which reflect the group's history and culture. These markers also include symbols which represent chosen traumas, and chosen glories. Chosen glories are similar to traumas, but refer instead to historical events that bring about feelings of triumph and success. The tent pole comes to represent the group's leader, responsible for keeping the tent erect and to shoulder the weight of the canvas by meeting the needs of the group.

Under normal circumstances, the inhabitants of the ethnic tent are not preoccupied by the tent's canvas, the large group identity. However, when the canvas shakes, or when it is torn by members of a neighboring tent, they will rally around the leader and mobilize to repair the outer layer protecting them from others. The more occupants become preoccupied with stabilizing the tent, the more they are reminded of their collective identity through the markings stitched into the canvas. In turn, this can provoke desires to avenge ancestors by committing violence against the neighboring group that has attacked them.

Conclusion and Next Steps

While some aspects of ethnic conflict can be understood from the perspective of traditional international relations, social-psychological theories can help in developing a more profound understanding for its characteristically irrational, intense and violent nature. Indeed, applying a social-psychological lens to ethnic conflict can bring critical, but perhaps less examined human considerations into focus, such as social identity, the formation of enemy images, and the role played by human emotions.

An effective social-psychological model proposed by Volkan, the chosen trauma can help explain why and how historic catastrophes tend to persist in the collective

memories of an ethnic group. The notion that a traumatic event can be passed on from one generation to the next, through historic narratives, cultural rituals, myths, and symbols, can explain the seemingly endless nature of certain ethnic conflicts.

The Middle East is abound with historical accounts and mythical tales that can be qualified as chosen traumas. Many have captured world attention, such as the competing chosen traumas of the Palestinian Nakba and the Jewish Holocaust. Both these events represent catastrophes which continue to induce tremendous existential fears and feelings of victimhood among the victims' descendants. As per Volkan's assertions, the fact that these traumatic events remain unresolved can explain why they often referenced to justify acts of extreme and senseless violence. There are also many examples of chosen traumas that are perhaps lesser known, but that have nevertheless contributed to endless ethnic conflict. For instance, one can argue that the 1982 Hama massacre orchestrated by the Hafez al-Assad regime against the Muslim Brotherhood has remained in the shared collective memories of Sunni Muslims, and has influenced the degree of violence observed in post-Arab Spring Syria.

In the next two chapters, this paper will consider the cases of the Arab Shi'a in Iraq, and the Kurdish inhabitants of Turkey. The historic Battle of Karbala will be examined in chapter 2 as a chosen trauma which has shaped Shi'ite identity and can be tied to violence between Shi'ite and Sunni populations. Furthermore, chapter 3 will consider the impact of the failed rebellion of Sheikh Said on Kurdish relations with the Turkish state. Both these groups have been associated with claims for greater autonomy and ethnic recognition. It is therefore proposed that the conflicts in which these groups are involved make for good use cases in determining the effectiveness of state partition

and democratization solutions, more specifically in their ability to permanently address the underlying chosen traumas.

Every day is Ashura and every land is Karbala.

- Imam al-Sadiq, Sixth Imam of the Shi'a

CHAPTER 2 – THE SHI'A AND THE BATTLE OF KARBALA

There are few if any examples of events in Islamic history having played as central a role in shaping Shi'ite identity as the martyrdom of Husayn at Karbala. Tales of the massacre and Shi'ite attachment to the memory of Husayn combine to deepen the permanent schism within the Islamic community. For over thirteen centuries, the Battle of Karbala has remained engrained in the collective Shi'a psyche as a chosen trauma par excellence, venerated by means of powerful religious symbols, traditions, and cultural rituals.

In recent history, the Battle of Karbala has been invoked on numerous occasions by political and clerical leaders in order to mobilize Shi'ite populations against both state governments and neighboring Sunni groups. This chapter will examine the symbolism behind this chosen trauma and discuss what it represents to the Shi'a. Moreover, it will consider how it has been reactivated to ignite the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the failed 1991 Iraqi uprising, and post-2003 sectarianism in Iraq.

Historical Background

Prophet Muhammad had no sons, and did not name a successor before his death in 632 CE. A dispute would ensue among his early followers on who was the rightful heir to lead the Islamic community. The majority believed the successor should be chosen from the elders composing Muhammad's inner-circle, as they were seen as having earned the trust of Muslims and were most knowledgeable of Islam. The community's choice would be Abu-Bakr, the first man to be converted to Islam, outside Muhammad's immediate family, and the father to one of the Prophet's wives. As the first successor to

Muhammad, Abu-Bakr would become known as the *khalifat rasul Allah*, meaning the successor of the messenger of God, more commonly referred to in English as Caliph.

A small minority of Muslims would reject Abu-Bakr's nomination and insist that the right to rule the disciples of Islam remain within the Prophet's family, as a right of blood. To these followers, Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law Ali ibn Abu Talib was the rightful leader, and would be proclaimed the first Shi'ite Imam. This small faction would in due course grow to form the Shi'ite branch, as it is known today[35].

In 657 CE, the caliphate would be offered to Ali ibn Abu Talib, the only Shi'ite Imam to ever be nominated as such. His caliphate was short lived however, as he would be murdered in 661 CE. His successor as Caliph, Mu'awiyah ibn Abi-Sufyan, would draw much criticism from the Shi'a for his secularizing and materialistic tendencies. Moreover, he would be perceived by many to be centered on his dynasty, and locking in the caliphate for his lineage. Those perceptions were validated in the eyes of the Shi'a when Yazid, Mu'awiyah's son, succeeded to the caliphate in 680 CE.

Weary of Yazid's rule, Shi'ite partisans of the late Ali would call upon his son, Husayn, to lead a rebellion and claim the caliphate for himself[36]. Reluctantly, Husayn would accept to challenge Yazid's reign and set off on a journey from Medina to the city of Kufa, located in modern day Iraq, to meet with the rebellious Shi'a calling for his leadership and support. However, rumors of the rebellion would quickly draw the

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[35] Twelve Shi'a leaders, or Imams, would come to rule the Shi'ite branch. According to the majority Shi'ite position, the twelfth and last Imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi, would enter a period of occultation in 874 CE. The Shi'a believe that al-Mahdi's disappearance was an act of concealment performed by God, and that he would be returned shortly before the Day of Judgement. For further information see: William Cleveland and Martin Bunton. "A History of the Modern…", 30.

[36] Arthur Goldschmidt and Lawrence Davidson. *A Concise History of the Middle East*. 10th ed. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2013: 56.

attention of Yazid, who would immediately dispatch an army to intercept Husayn before he could reach Kufa.

The forces would intercept and surround Husayn and his companions in the desert of Karbala. Despite calling for his help, the Shi'ite Kufans would not deploy to Karbala in order help Husayn fight Yazid, as they were fearful of the consequences. On Ashura, the tenth day of the Muslim month of Muharram, Husayn's tiny band of 70 companions would fight as bravely as it could, but stood no chance against Yazid's army of 10,000 soldiers. Following the massacre, Husayn's severed head would be taken to Damascus and laid at the feet of Yazid.

The Significance of the Battle of Karbala Chosen Trauma

Although it occurred in primeval times, the Battle of Karbala continues to represent a compelling influence in the modern Shi'ite psyche. From a social-psychological perspective, the narrative of the battle portrays a "Self" versus "Other" dichotomy, reinforcing Shi'ite identity and its divergence from Sunni Islam. The Battle of Karbala serves as an important ethnic identity marker, woven into the canvas of the Shi'ite ethnic tent, and which serves to constantly remind them of a historical injustice committed against Prophet Muhammad's household. Husayn and his companions are understood to represent the Shi'ite people and the ways of Muhammad, whereas the forces of Caliph Yazid, in the most dangerous interpretation of the narrative, are likened to Sunni Muslims.

As a Shi'ite chosen trauma, the Battle of Karbala elicits many emotions stemming from mental representations of the event. These emotions can be tied to several psychological disorders listed in chapter 1, which Volkan claims can result from an

inability to cope with a traumatic event. Indeed, the Karbala chosen trauma can be linked to a collective Shi'a sense of victimization, humiliation, survival guilt, and unending mourning. Arguably the most compelling is the sense of guilt associated with the inaction of the Kufan Shi'a.

The abandonment of Husayn during his time of need is perceived as an unforgivable offence. In fact, it is from this perspective that Shi'a often view themselves as being plagued by the Kufan's inaction centuries ago. To many Shi'a, what happened to Husayn at Karbala is directly linked to why they have often been subjected to oppression, throughout their history. In accordance with the narrative of Karbala, this oppression is equated to Husayn's hopeless but righteous struggle against a much more powerful foe: "In every age there is an oppressed Husayn, a man who fights on the side of God, and a tyrannical Yazid, who fights against God"[37]. As will be discussed in the next section, this sense of perpetual guilt and deserved victimhood can help to explain the historically passive tendencies of many Shi'ite populations in the Middle East[38].

The Battle of Karbala continues to live in the collective memory of the Shi'a, and is transmitted from one generation to the next through many forms of symbolic cultural rituals. Most notably, the battle is remembered yearly through elaborate commemorative ceremonies which take place on Ashura of the Muslim month of Muharram, the day of Husayn's martyrdom. During the Day of Ashura, feelings of victimhood and guilt are prominently put on display in reenactments of the historic battle and through parade processions which feature mourners performing rituals of self-flagellation. The public

[37] Haggay Ram. "Mythology of Rage: Representations of the 'Self' and the 'Other' in Revolutionary Iran." History and Memory 8, no. 1 (1996): 70.

[38] This passivity is evident in Arab states where the Shi'ites represent a majority yet hold little political power, as in Bahrain and Yemen prior to 2011.

passion plays of Ashura confirm the profound meaning and symbolism of the Karbala chosen trauma, as they perpetuate a collective expression of mass-guilt for having abandoned Husayn more than thirteen centuries ago.

Reactivation of the Karbala Chosen Trauma: The 1979 Islamic Revolution

The 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran has often been regarded as the ultimate passion play of the Battle of Karbala[39]. A complete understanding of the dynamics which led to the uprising against the Pahlavi regime requires an appreciation for the significant role the Battle of Karbala would play in mobilizing Iranian society. This section will demonstrate that clerical figures would reactivate the Karbala chosen trauma in order to rally for support and mobilize Iranian society during the Islamic Revolution. Furthermore, it will examine how the Battle of Karbala narrative would continue to play a role in justifying Iranian foreign policy and military actions, long after the revolution.

While a complete examination of the issues which incited the 1979 Islamic Revolution is certainly beyond the scope of this paper, it should be stated that the main factor which contributed to Iranian dissent was Shah Reza Pahlavi's "White Revolution" reform program, which was blamed for placing significant strains on Iran's social and economic fabric[40]. While he was criticized for his secularist views, and his imposition of Western values and institutional models, here it is argued that the outcome of Shah Pahlavi's policies was the instigator to revolution, not the fact that he promoted a Western way of living. However, the Karbala chosen trauma would be invoked to portray Pahlavi, and the West, as a homogenized "Other" that should be held responsible for

[39] Michael Fischer. Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution. Vol. 3. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1980: 183.

[40] Peter Mansfield and Nicolas Pelham. *A History of the Middle East*. 4th ed. London, Eng: Penguin Books, 2013: 369.

antagonizing the Iranian Shi'ite "Self" by distancing it from its Islamic roots, and plunging it into social decadence and obscurity.

As alluded to previously, the Shi'a were renowned for their political passivity prior to the Islamic Revolution, and were not seen as a culture to actively oppose the established order. According to Ram, the Karbala chosen trauma had forged a mental representation of the Shi'ite "Self" that was defeated, powerless, and helplessly unable to improve its predicament, let alone lead an effective battle against the "Other"[41]. For centuries, the Ashura had symbolized a vanquished identity – those performing acts of self-flagellation were internalizing the image of a beaten Husayn, who had sacrificed himself in the name of his Islamic beliefs and identity. The mental image of a conquered Husayn, remembered through ritual, would convince the Shi'a that oppression was inherent to their destiny as a people, and that challenging their predicament was an act of futility.

> Husayn's heroic conduct notwithstanding, his ultimate defeat continually exemplified to his partisans the futility of immediate and concrete action to overcome their predicament. Disillusioned and, as a result of Husayn's failure, invariably acted upon by the (Sunni) authorities, the Shi'ite Self became submerged in an all-encompassing passivity[42]…

On the eve of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Ruhullah Khomeini would offer the Iranian Shi'ite community a new interpretation of the Battle of Karbala[43]. Khomeini would urge the Shi'a not to lament Husayn, but rather to emulate his heroic actions by abandoning their passivity, and to shape their destinies by fighting the tyrannical and

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[41] Haggay Ram. "Mythology of Rage…", 70.

[42] *Ibid*., 71.

[43] This new interpretation was in fact inspired by religious scholar Salihi Najaf-Abadi. In his book entitled "Shahid-e Javid", meaning the immortal martyr, Najaf-Abadi would transform the character of the Battle of Karbala and emphasize Husayn's heroism, rather than his defeat. For a more detailed account, see Haggay Ram. "Mythology of Rage…", 73.

oppressive Yazid of their own time[44]. By following in the path taken by Husayn centuries ago, the Shi'ite "Self" would be able to finally seek retribution against the oppressive "Other". In other words, Khomeini was providing the Shi'a with the means to resolve their mourning, to complete the subconscious tasks of regaining the Shi'ite self-esteem and seeking vengeance for Husayn's death. In completing these tasks that have been transmitted from one generation to the next for centuries, Khomeini was signaling a change to the Shi'ite social identity, as it has always considered the Karbala chosen trauma as a defining identity marker. Through the new interpretation of the Battle of Karbala, he would suggest that the Shi'ite were duty-bound to follow in the footsteps of Husayn and fight oppressive forces, thereby distancing themselves from their long-established political passivity.

> Protest against the pressure exerted upon our oppressed people every day… You have more forces at your disposal that the Lord of Martyrs did, who resisted and struggled with his limited forces until he was killed…If he had sat in some corner in Medina and had nothing to do with anyone, everyone would have respected him and come to kiss his hand. And if you sit silently by, you too will be respected, but it will be the kind of respect that is given a dead saint. A dead saint is respected by everyone, but a living saint or Imam has his head cut off[45].

In his quest to establish Islamic clerical authority in Iran, Khomeini would frame the Islamic Revolution as the modern-day Battle of Karbala. In doing so, he would successfully mobilize the Iranian Shi'a against their monarch by producing a "time collapse", which is consistent with Volkan's assertion that charismatic leaders are prone to manipulating and politicizing chosen traumas in order to meet political and ideological ends. Khomeini's discourse would aim to create the "time collapse" by merging the

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[44] Emmanuel Sivan. "Sunni radicalism in the Middle East and the Iranian Revolution." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 21, no. 01 (1989): 16-17.

[45] James Gelvin. *The Modern Middle East: A History*. 3rd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011: 301.

events surrounding the Islamic Revolution, and its actors, with those of the Karbala narrative. For instance, he would make direct associations between Shah Pahlavi and Yazid, even referring to him as the reincarnation of Yazid[46].

Ultimately, Khomeini's strategy was successful: during Muharram 1978, he would turn the traditional mourning processions of Ashura into a massive political march of over two million Shi'ites. This would demonstrate the collective will of the Shi'a to follow in the path of Husayn, to martyrdom if necessary, in their struggle against the modern-day Yazid. This time, history would not repeat itself and the oppressed "Self" would overcome the "Other" – Shah Pahlavi would flee Iran. Husayn was finally victorious over the forces of Yazid.

Following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the ruling ulama would continue invoking the Karbala chosen trauma in order to challenge any internal or external pressures threatening the authority and permanence of the clerical regime within Iran. The hostile "Other", the metaphorical forces of Yazid, would be constructed to include a wide grouping of states, organizations, agencies, ethnic groups, and individuals – in short, any entity which was perceived as having the potential to undermine Islamic identity and the Iranian "Self"[47]. To a great extent, and perhaps as a second order effect of the Islamic Revolution, the Karbala chosen trauma would serve to establish a profound revulsion of westernization, perceived as being a fundamental threat to the household of Prophet Muhammad, and to the Islamic way.

During the 1980 – 1988 Iran-Iraq War, the Iranian regime would endeavour to maintain the revolutionary zeal of the 1979 Islamic Revolution by reactivating the

[46] It is perhaps worth noting that Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was a Shi'ite Muslim himself.
[47] Haggay Ram. "Mythology of Rage…", 76.

Karbala chosen trauma, in full force. References to the martyrdom of Husayn would be incorporated into almost every aspect of anti-Iraqi mobilization[48]. Just as Khomeini had previously compared Shah Pahlavi to Yazid, the Iranian regime would style the Iraqi ruler Saddam Hussein as "Saddam-Yazid"[49]. According to Ram, the endless references to the Battle of Karbala within official Iranian discourse would result in the blending of chorological time and mythical time, to the point where "the twentieth-century Iran-Iraq war emerged as *the* seventh-century battle of Karbala"[50]. From its decision to name most war campaigns "Karbala", to referring to its recruits as *rahiyan-e Karbala*, meaning "those about to journey to Karbala", to urging combatants to emulate Husayn in seeking martyrdom, the Iranian regime was committed in leveraging the Karbala chosen trauma to its full extent in order justify the war time effort and the great losses it expected to incur.

Impact of the Karbala chosen trauma on sectarian tensions in Iraq

The Arab Shi'a, which make up about 10 percent of the Arab world, are frequently referred to as the "forgotten Mulsims" due to their relegated and often marginalized role in the Middle East. However, following the Islamic Revolution many Shi'a were captivated by Ayatollah Khomeini's inspiring personality, and his people's triumph over the Pahlavi regime. Many Arab Shi'ites would subscribe to the new meaning behind the Karbala chosen trauma, as proposed by Khomeini, to shed their political passivity and substituting it for a sense of duty to rebel against oppression.

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[48] *Ibid.*, 78.

[49] Khatereh Sheibani. *The Poetics of Iranian Cinema: Aesthetics, Modernity and Film After the Revolution*. Vol. 33. IB Tauris, 2011: 168.

[50] Haggay Ram. "Mythology of Rage…", 78.

Very little literature exists documenting instances when the Karbala chosen trauma had been employed to mobilize Arab Shi'ite populations. However, this paper argues that sufficient evidence exists to suggest that this chosen trauma, and its associated symbolism, has in many ways exacerbated Sunni-Shi'ite tensions in Iraq and throughout the Middle East since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. This section will demonstrate that the call to rebel against oppression and to assert Shi'ite identity, as conveyed by the post-Islamic Revolution interpretation of the Karbala chosen trauma, would play an important role in Sunni-Shi'ite relations in the period since the 1991 Gulf War.

The 1979 Islamic Revolution would constitute a significant challenge to the ideologies of the Ba'ath Party and its efforts to promote pan-Arabism in the Middle East. At the time, the standing of pan-Arabism was already in decline, largely due to the humiliating and crushing Arab defeat to Israel in the 1967 Six-Day War. The Islamic Revolution, and its increasingly popular Islamist ideology would further eclipse pan-Arabism goals and ideals in the Middle East. While Islam was certainly part of the pan-Arabism movement, it was not the focal point of its secular ideology which saw religion being separated from matters of the state. Nationalist particularism, specific to each Arab state, would also be threatened by the Islamic Revolution, as Arab states became fearful that their Shi'ite populations were being swayed by Iranian Islamist rhetoric. Authoritarian regimes were compelled to prevent any Shi'ite uprisings which may challenge their rule[51].

The predominantly Sunni Saddam regime in Iraq felt particularly vulnerable to the popular Islamist movement in Iran, and to Khomeini's discourse. Following his rise to power, Khomeini would frequently express his desire to export the Islamic Revolution

[51] Fanar Haddad. "*Sectarianism in Iraq…"*, 13.

outside of Iran, which he insisted was the only way to bring justice to Muslims worldwide. Saddam Hussein, himself a Sunni, would counter Iranian rhetoric by contending that Islam had evolved to a point where it could no longer serve Arabs, in their modern ways:

> Although we may be inspired by religion, we do not deal with life by following a religious path. Today, after 1,400 years, religion has taken many new paths, new meanings, new conduct, new schools of thought. We do not believe in dealing with life through religion because it would not serve the Arab nation.[52]

Despite efforts to quell Shi'ite popular movements, linkages to Iran would multiply and grow across the Arab world, including within the important Shi'ite population of southern Iraq. Many Shi'ite populations would indeed take a stand against their governments and denounce lack of rights and political representation, often finding Iran supporting their grievances[53]. As a result, Shi'ites were increasingly viewed by Sunni groups as being inextricably tied to the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Apprehensive of a potential Shi'ite insurgency, Saddam would issue Decision 666 on May 26 1980, just a few months prior to the Iran-Iraq war[54]. This order would authorize the deportation of any Iraqis of "foreign origin" suspected of any disloyal behaviour, which would essentially come to mean anyone who's family history could be traced back to Persian origins. Not surprisingly, the subsequent deportation campaign would acquire a strong sectarian character, and would be seen as "questioning Shi'a

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[52] George Lenczowski, Peter Chelkowski, and Robert Pranger. *Ideology and Power in the Middle East: Studies in Honor of George Lenczowski*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1988: 208.

[53] Jill Ricotta. "The Arab Shi'a Nexus: Understanding Iran's Influence in the Arab World." *The Washington Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (2016): 143.

[54] *Ibid.*, 143.

identity as Iraqis and Arabs, explicitly associating them with Iran, and targeting them as threats to the state"[55].

Adding to the discriminatory policies against the Shi'a, Iraq would restrict Ashura rituals throughout the country, a ban that would be maintained until the Saddam regime was ousted in 2003. It is proposed here that this measure clearly speaks to the government's concern that the Ashura ceremonies could incite a revolutionary movement, as had taken place in Iran already. While the Saddam regime's strategy to repress Shi'ite identity may have effectively prevented the Shi'a from coordinating an uprising, Haddad points out that forbidding Shi'ites from commemorating the Ashura had the effect of heightening sectarian tensions in Iraq. Indeed, it ultimately resulted in the Shi'ites further asserting their identity in response to what can only be perceived as a rise in persecution[56].

In 1991, as Iraqi forces staggered out of Kuwait after having been defeated in the Gulf War by American forces, Saddam's oppressive policies towards the Shi'ites (and also toward the ethnic Kurds, as discussed in chapter 3) would finally come to a head. Conditions were ripe for a popular uprising – people were disillusioned with the losses they had suffered in Kuwait, only a few years after the end of the extremely brutal conflict with Iran. By that point, the deportations, the banning of the Ashura ceremonies, and sectarian atrocities[57] had deepened societal cleavages between the Sunnis and the Shi'ites. In the years following the Islamic Revolution, the marginalization of the Shi'a in

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[55] *Ibid.*, 144.

[56] Fanar Haddad. "Sectarian Relations in Arab Iraq: Competing Mythologies of People, History and State." (2010): 21.

[57] A good example of sectarian atrocities committed against Shi'ites was the 1982 Dujail massacre, a state reprisal for an assassination attempt against Saddam Hussein. Approximately 150 Shi'ite civilians were killed, as having been suspected of participating in the assassination attempt. Further information on the massacre can be found online at: https://www.hrw.org/report/2006/11/19/judging-dujail/first-trial-iraqi-high-tribunal.

Iraq had accentuated Shi'ite identity and the perceived otherness of what was perceived as a Sunni authoritarian regime[58].

Hearing the calls by President H.W. Bush for Iraqis to take matters into their own hands, the Shi'a would revolt against Saddam's forces in March 1991. The rebellion would unfold spontaneously and was very much chaotic in its execution. The apparent lack of any formal leadership coordinating the movement would be cited as one of the main causes for its ultimate failure. The regime's counterattack was immediate and unrelenting, crushing the insurgency within a month of its initial outbreak. Lasting a week, the insurgency in the city of Karbala would be one of the longest and most intense battles fought during the uprising. An interesting episode which further affirms the salience of the Karbala chosen trauma is said to have occurred when Hussein Kamel, Saddam's half brother and Republican Guard commander, arrived in Karbala. Kamel is alleged to have ridiculed the revered shrine of Husayn ibn Ali by declaring "I am Hussein, and you are Hussein – let's see who is better!", before opening fire at the holy site.

This paper argues that the 1991 Shi'ite uprising in Iraq would serve as a reinforcing episode to the Karbala chosen trauma. A parallel could be drawn between the massacre of Husayn at Karbala, and the repression of Shi'ite identity in Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war, leading up to the 1991 uprising. Indeed, much like Husayn, having been denied the Islamic caliphate by Yazid, the Shi'ites would not be allowed to express their political grievances or to question discriminatory policies which marginalized them, for fear of deportation. Although the 1991 uprising was unsuccessful, it would reinforce the sense of injustice and victimhood already present in the Shi'ite psyche, ultimately fueling

[58] Fanar Haddad. "Sectarian Relations in…", 16.

the sectarian rage Iraq would experience following the 2003 invasion of Iraq. It would also serve to assert Shi'ite identity in defiance of an oppressive regime, as prescribed by Khomeini during the Islamic Revolution.

The fusion of memories associated to the 1991 uprising with those of the Karbala chosen trauma is apparent in a poem which recites the words of a deceased martyr having fought during the uprising, speaking to a member of the Iraqi parliament:

> I will speak and blame is an executioner surrounding us
> And thanks but spare me your 'well dones'
> We made a pact and marched and swore to God
> And whoever walks the path of Hussein will have no regrets
> We taught a lesson on 15 Sha'aban [1st March 1991]
> And we taught the ones that refused to learn
> We met the bullets with the excitement of a groom
> When love has overwhelmed him as his cousin waits
> We maintained and leapt over death - a wolf's leap
> Our faces bright not a masked one amongst us
> And we suffered a condition: we die standing up
> And when Death cries we smile
> The fallen would let the charge cross over with a roar
> [Like] An archway to cross for whoever wants to
> We ran, ran shouting 'ya Ali', the goal was known:
> We know nothing of thrones and know nothing of parties
> Never by God will we forget Hussein
> He is our crown and with him we beautify ourselves
> We gathered our anger and our chivalry oh Abbas
> And with anger the masses gathered
> We boil in winter and turn into summer
> And the blood that boils is only cooled with blood[59]

The significant impact of the repression of Shi'ite identity during the Saddam-era would be made evident on Ashura in 2004, the first commemoration of the Battle of Karbala since the rituals were banned decades previously. On that day, more than three million Shi'ites would gather for the processions[60]. According to Haddad, Shi'ite

[59] *Ibid.*, 181.

[60] Ali Gokpinar. "Post-2003 Iraq: Chosen Traumas, Competing Victimhood and the Logic of Violence." (2012): 12.

symbolism "was an act of defiance and a means of asserting a previously constrained yet legitimate identity"[61].

Conclusion

It is possible to draw two important conclusions on how the Battle of Karbala has shaped Shi'ite identity, throughout the branch's history. First, it has been shown that this chosen trauma has created an important sensitivity among the Shi'a to any forms of oppression, or perceived marginalization, by either the state or a socially dominant group. Indeed, the narrative of the martyrdom of Husayn at the hands of a much more powerful and oppressive enemy is significant in that it represents a historical injustice that would remain unresolved in the Shi'ite psyche, for centuries. These feelings of injustice are compounded by a deep sense of guilt, and deserved-victimhood, associated with the Kufan's abandonment of their declared leader. The Ashura rituals of mourning and self-flagellation preserve these shared feelings and is an important component of the myth-symbol complex surrounding the Battle of Karbala. As discussed in this chapter, it is important to understand this aspect of the Karbala chosen trauma, as it establishes that the Shi'a have a developed a deeply entrenched cultural sensitivity to social injustice, and to marginalization by more dominant groups.

The second conclusion can be drawn from the reactivation of the Karbala chosen trauma by Ayatollah Khomeini in order to ignite the 1979 Islamic Revolution: Khomeini would alter Shi'a identity by offering a new interpretation of the Battle of Karbala. By encouraging Shi'ites to shed their political passivity, and face oppression like Husayn had done in the 7th century, Khomeini would offer his followers the means to resolve the sense of guilt associated with the chosen trauma. As discussed, the 1979 Islamic

[61] Fanar Haddad. "Sectarian Relations in…", 109.

Revolution would equally inspire Arab Shi'ite populations to assert their identity, and to claim social rights and justice. Ultimately, this would develop an influential revolutionary dimension to the Shi'ite identity. This newfound sense of duty to resist oppression would lead to a heightening of sectarian tensions, particularly in states where the Shi'ites are politically weak despite representing a significant portion of the population.

Both these conclusions, which can only be deduced by examining the Shi'ites through a social-psychological lens, are important to consider for any changes to the regional configuration of the Middle East, as will be discussed in chapters 4 and 5.

People who do not have pure Turkish blood in their veins and are living in this country only have one right: the right of slavery and service!

- Maumud Esad Bozkurt, Turkish minister of Justice
September 19, 1930

CHAPTER 3 – THE KURDS AND THE SHEIKH SAID REBELLION

The Kurdish people form the world's largest stateless nation. Despite a population estimated at 25 million people, plans for a Kurdish state would be omitted in the partitioning of the Ottoman Empire following the First World War. Instead, the Kurds would be divided among four states, with the bulk of the population partitioned to Turkey[62]. As a result, the Kurdish people constitute non-dominant ethnic minorities in the Middle East.

Already divided by state borders, the Kurds would face throughout their history additional threats to their existence as an ethnic group. Most notably, repressive assimilation policies implemented in Turkey would come to represent a quest by the state to extinguish the Kurdish culture, and language. This chapter will consider the failed Sheikh Said rebellion of 1925 against secularism in Turkey, which would incite the state's policies of assimilation, and its relentless assault on Kurdish ethnic identity. It is argued that memories of the failed rebellion and its aftermath would significantly influence the Kurdish worldview, and forge the aggressive character of Kurdish politics.

Historical Background

Unlike the Arabs and Armenians, who would rebel by leading separatist movements from within the Ottoman Empire during the First World War, the Kurds

[62] Sezai Ozcelik. "Theories, Practices, and Research in Conflict Resolution and Low-Intensity Conflicts: The Kurdish Conflict in Turkey." *Journal of Conflict Studies* 26, no. 2 (2006): 134.

would maintain their loyalty towards the established Turkish Order[63]. In fact, the Kurds would continue supporting and fighting alongside the Turks during the subsequent Turkish War of Independence, which aimed to expel occupying forces seeking to dismantle what remained of the Empire.

The Kurds continued to recognize the Turkish Order as the heart of the Islamic Caliphate, and they would fight to prevent the westernization of Anatolia under Christian control, as had been planned by European powers under the Treaty of Sèvres. Victorious, the Turks would sign the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, which officially recognized the independent and sovereign nation-state of Turkey. Mustafa Kemal, the chief commander of the army, would become President and surnamed Atatürk, meaning "Father of the Turks", due to his role in founding the new Turkish state. To their dismay, and despite promises made by Turkey's leadership, Kurdish autonomy would not be recognized in the Treaty of Lausanne. Instead, the agreement saw Kurdish populated regions being divided between Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria.

An ambitious reformer and a fervent admirer of European institutions, Atatürk would resolve to mold the new Turkish state in the image of the West. Most notably, he was determined to pursue state secularism, which he would promote as a central theme of his reform policies. In his quest to forge a homogenous national Turkish identity, a transformative pursuit which would become known as Turkification, Atatürk would replace religious symbols with secular ones, such as a common Turkish language, a state flag, and a national anthem.

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[63] Rasim Donmez. "Nationalism in Turkey: Political Violence and Identity." *Ethnopolitics* 6, no. 1 (2007): 48.

Perhaps most significantly, Atatürk would abolish the Islamic caliphate, effectively sweeping aside centuries of Islamic history and cultural tradition[64]. His reforms would include closing religious schools, eliminating the ministry of religious endowments, replacing the Muslim lunar calendar by the Gregorian calendar, and substitute Sharia law with secular civil and penal code based on Swiss, Italian and German laws. Furthermore, he would prohibit religious worship at holy sites, and pass legislation to enforce the call to prayer in Turkish instead of Arabic.

Turkification left no room for cultural pluralism. Ethnic and religious minorities would be forced to adopt the secular Turkish national identity, by any means necessary. This would alienate the Kurds, which had fought for the preservation of the Islamic caliphate. Further aggravating the situation, new Turkish policies would deny the very existence of Kurdish identity, progressively leading to worsening relations between the state and its Kurdish subjects. Demands for autonomy in the Kurdish populated areas in the Southeast part of Turkey were categorically rejected, despite previous promises made to that effect by Atatürk himself during the War of Independence[65].

The uncompromising and secularizing Kemalist policies would be perceived as a form of harsh discrimination against the Kurds, and would eventually result in the outbreak of a series of Kurdish armed rebellions. The first such rebellion would be orchestrated in 1925 by a religious figure, Sheikh Said, with the aim of establishing an independent Kurdish state ruled by Islamic principles. Ultimately, the Sheikh Said rebellion would fail to achieve any effect against the state, as the movement would break out prematurely before sufficient numbers could be mobilized to face Turkish forces.

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[64] *Ibid*., 48.
[65] *Ibid*., 50.

The uprising was violently suppressed by massive state forces and aerial bombardments, causing 15,000 casualties and destroying 18,000 Kurdish homes. Sheikh Said and his forty-six associates would be promptly executed after their capture. The aftermath of the rebellion was relentless in its brutality. Months after the rebellion was crushed, Atatürk's regime was continuing to charge and to execute hundreds of suspected supporters.

The most significant retaliatory measures taken in response to the Sheikh Said rebellion were those which directly targeted Kurdish identity. Perhaps the most substantial action taken was the declaration of the *Sark Islahat Plani*, meaning "reform plan for the East"[66]. This law would prohibit the populations living in eastern Kurdish cities from speaking any other language than Turkish. Furthermore, a policy of forcible resettlement would be put in place to move hundreds of Kurdish families into western parts of Turkey, in order to force their assimilation into Turkish society. Education reform would also be employed as an instrument of assimilation, as sarcastically stated by Aras: "The state's new fundamental task was to discipline and civilize the savage, rebellious, tribal and religiously backward masses through education"[67]. Atatürk's policies would go so far as to restrict anyone from identifying themselves as Kurdish, and asking for people to instead use the derogatory designation "Mountain Turk" when referencing the Kurds. These actions would provoke other rebellions, all of them violently suppressed by the Turkish state. Following each rebellion, State forces would

[66] Ramazan Aras. "Political Violence, Fear and Pain: The Formation of Kurdishness in Turkey."ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2010: 88.

[67] *Ibid*.,108.

conduct *Temizlik Operasyonu* in the Kurdish regions, meaning "cleaning operations", consisting of executions, arrests, destruction of villages, forced settlements and exiles[68].

The Sheikh Said Rebellion as a Kurdish Chosen Trauma

In the aftermath of the Sheikh Said rebellion, the Kurdish community in Turkey would struggle with the psychological impact resulting from the brutal suppression of their ethnic identity. As a chosen trauma, memories of the rebellion's quick defeat and the subsequent reforms targeting Kurdish identity would leave lasting impressions on the Kurdish worldview, not only in Turkey but equally in neighboring states where they represent ethnic minorities. This worldview would ultimately fuel Kurdish nationalist movements, decades after the Sheikh Said rebellion.

Donmez argues that the violence the Kurds were subjected to in the aftermath of the Sheikh Said rebellion would play an important role in constructing the Kurdish "Self", the Kurd's social identity within the Turkish Republic[69]. Attempts to repress their identity would leave behind scarring mental images that would live on in collective Kurdish memories, culturally perpetuated from one generation to the next. Having their identity suppressed through violence and alienating state policies resulted in mental representations of betrayal, suffering, and victimhood that gradually became woven into the canvas of their ethnic tent, as distinct Kurdish identity markers. In a comparable manner to how the Shi'a perceive their constant oppression to be a consequence of the Karbala chosen trauma, the Kurds "psychologically reach back to the Sheikh Said

[68] *Ibid.*, 91.
[69] Rasim Donmez. "Nationalism in Turkey…", 52.

Rebellion… every suffering since then is associated with this event in 1925 and its mental representation"[70].

Interestingly, the inability to assume their own ethnic identity would, in and of itself, influence who the Kurds are today as an ethnic group. As Aras points out, the Kurdish people would react to the existential threat by developing a shared sense of victimhood, reinforcing their bond and sense of community: "these destructive experiences fortified community relations, strengthened unity and the sense of belonging to a suffering people united around a shared pain and mourning"[71]. Aras expands this point of view by explaining that "Kurdishness" had endured as an identity through survivor stories recounted in "different narrative genres and through diverse forms of popular culture", which in due course created a "strong sense of belonging to a larger Kurdish community"[72]. Indeed, the repression of Kurdish identity would be documented in Kurdish books and oral history accounts including popular songs and folk stories of heroism, suffering, martyrdom and resistance[73]. It would seem that despite the repressive Kemalist policies of Turkification, the Kurds would develop a distinct national identity linked to their survival as an ethnic group.

The Sheikh Said chosen trauma would equally lead to the construction of collective Kurdish mental representations of the enemy. By threatening to extinguish the Kurdish identity, Atatürk's policies, and by extension the state, would be perceived to symbolize a repressive "Other", constantly seeking to destroy the Kurdish ethnic tent. The representation of the state as the chosen enemy would permeate Kurdish culture, and

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[70] Sezai Ozcelik. "Theories, Practices, and Research…", 145.
[71] Ramazan Aras. "Political Violence, Fear and Pain…", 104.
[72] *Ibid.*, 106.
[73] *Ibid.*, 104.

be extended to Kurdish minorities living in Iraq, Syria, and Iran, further demonstrating the applicability of this chosen trauma to all Kurdish inhabitants of the Middle East. The Sheikh Said chosen trauma simply framed the reality with which Kurdish populations were confronted, as minority groups forced to foreclose on their identity.

Reactivation of the Sheikh Said Chosen Trauma: Kurdish Nationalist Movements

The post-rebellion era in Turkey between 1938 and 1960 is often described as a "period of silence" [74]. The State's brutal response to the rebellions and its unrelenting efforts to suppress Kurdish ethnic identity would carry much weight on the Kurdish community, creating profound fatigue and pushing it to adopt a state of passivity[75]. Under these circumstances, Kurdish political movements were noticeably absent. However, the shared experiences of violence and socio-political suffering would sharpen the sense of belonging to an oppressed nation and produce a discourse of innocence leading to political motivation for sustainable forms of resistance.

The Sheikh Said chosen trauma would be reactivated decades after the uprising was suppressed. Although new generations had not lived through the suffering experienced in the aftermath of the rebellion, the suppression of ethnic identity was ever-present in their culture, and would spawn feelings of entitlement and a sense of duty to avenge their ancestors against a perceived historical injustice. The reactivation of the chosen trauma would create among young Kurds a sense of belonging, and would encourage them to participate in political resistance movements.

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[74] Hamit Bozarslan. *Violence in the Middle East: From Political Struggle to Self-Sacrifice*. Markus Wiener Publishers, 2004: 32.

[75] *Ibid.*, 32.

In the 1960s, Turkey's move towards a pluralistic democratic political system would trigger the revival of Kurdish nationalism[76]. Suddenly, it was possible for the Kurds to express their ethnicity, and would signal a new era of relations with the Turkish state. With the mobilization of Kurdish political movements, feelings of victimhood and nationalism would surge, having been held back by years of assimilative Kemalist policies. The floodgates were open for the re-politicization of Kurdish identity, as well as for those seeking revenge.

The reactivation of the Sheikh Said chosen trauma and its associated memories would have an important effect on the character of Kurdish politics. Many new Kurdish political movements would transition very quickly from pacific, left-leaning cultural nationalist parties, to violent armed organizations. Indeed, the memories of oppression and suppressed identity would invariably shift most Kurdish nationalist movements towards radicalization, and violence.

The Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, was such an organization, inclined to employ violent means in order to officially reinstate Kurdish identity. Founded by Abdullah Öcalan in 1978, the PKK aimed to establish an independent, united and Socialist Kurdish state which included the Kurdish populated areas in Iran, Iraq and Syria[77]. The emergence of the PKK, and its popularity, would serve to focalize past unresolved traumas, resulting in a societal resurgence of intense feelings of persecution and anger toward the Turkish State[78]. According to Donmez, Öcalan embodied Kurdish nationalism, as "the founding father of the Kurds, with a role similar to that of Mustafa

[76] Rasim Donmez. "Nationalism in Turkey…", 52.
[77] *Ibid.*, 53.
[78] *Ibid.*, 54.

Kemal Atatürk, founder of the Turkish Republic"[79]. In his discourse, Öcalan would seek to reactivate the Sheikh Said chosen trauma by recalling historic memories and events that hadn't yet been mourned by the Kurds, thus rallying the group to demand restitution from the designated "Other", the Turkish State:

> Unpleasant Kurdish memories, stemming from clashes with the state, were remembered by younger generations who had not experienced the uprisings of the 1920s, 1930s or 1970s. Collective consciousness was strengthened by the politicization of popular culture through media run by the PKK. This popularization paved the way for emergence in the Kurdish public sphere. Kurdish social identity based on ethno-nationalism diffused the traumatized role identity that made the Turkish state the cardinal "other".[80]

In 1980, a military coup would provide Öcalan and the PKK an opportunity to reactivate the Kurdish chosen trauma in full force. Following the coup, the Turkish state would bolster its harsh and oppressive policies in Kurdish regions, reminiscent of those instated following the Sheikh Said rebellion in the 1930s[81]. Latent Kurdish nationalist feelings would quickly surface and increase the allure and popularity of the PKK. In the years that would follow the coup, the PKK would transform into a radical movement, declaring an armed war against the state.

Throughout its longstanding conflict with the state, the PKK would rely on the sense of oppression engrained within the Kurdish ethnic identity, in order to recruit new members. By referencing the group's victimhood, caused by decades-long oppression, the PKK would "empower discourses of resistance and power of the Kurdish political movements in Kurdish societies, and thereby facilitated their efforts to recruit new

[79] *Ibid.*, 54.
[80] *Ibid.*, 54.
[81] *Ibid.*, 52.

members"[82]. The PKK's discourse on the historic marginalization of the Kurdish people would offer new recruits an opportunity to seek retribution for what had taken place decades earlier, and to become martyrs in the righteous fight for their ethnic identity. According to Aras, the PKK message would resonate the most with those who were most affected by the historic chosen trauma of Sheikh Said: "members were drawn almost exclusively from the lowest social classes, the uprooted, half-educated village and small-town youth who knew well what it felt like to be oppressed and who wanted action, not ideological sophistication"[83]. The Kurdish youth would be able to finally complete the subconscious tasks they had inherited to resolve the intolerable feelings of oppression originating from ancestral suffering.

Conclusion

The failed Sheikh Said rebellion and its aftermath would play an important role in shaping Kurdish identity. The Atatürk regime would stop at nothing to force the assimilation of the Kurds, including forced resettlement of hundreds of families and the banning of the Kurdish language. The regime would even go as far as denying the very existence of the Kurds by restricting the use of the word "Kurdish". While they would be forced into a "period of silence" for several decades, the unresolved memories of suffering at the hands of Atatürk's Turkification policies would be passed on as part of the Kurdish myth-symbol complex, from one generation to the next. Narratives of the Sheikh Said rebellion and other insurgencies that followed would perpetuate through generations of Kurds, fostering a collective sense of victimhood, and reinforcing their distrust of the state.

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[82] Ramazan Aras. "Political Violence, Fear and Pain…", 129.
[83] *Ibid.*, 120.

The main conclusion that can be drawn from the Sheikh Said chosen trauma is that the quest for autonomy among Kurdish populations in the Middle East has deep-seated roots in distrust toward the state. Atatürk and his assimilative policies would come to represent the ethnic "Other", a sworn enemy of the Kurdish identity, and a significant threat to its very existence. Emotions of victimhood and distrust would ultimately be reawakened by Kurdish nationalist movements, several decades after the Sheikh Said rebellion. Memories of the threat to Kurdish existence and the intense emotions associated to Kurdish suffering would be leveraged to rally and mobilize Kurdish youth toward the political goals and ideals of the PKK, and other radical political parties.

The enduring distrust toward the Turkish and other Middle Eastern states where the Kurds live as ethnic minorities will be an important social-psychological factor to consider in future reconfiguration scenarios.

CHAPTER 4 – STATE PARTITION

In his article entitled "Blood Borders: How a better Middle East would look", Lieutenant-Colonel Ralph Peters suggests that redrawing Middle Eastern borders along ethnic, sectarian, and tribal lines would decrease tensions and ethnic conflicts in the region[84]. Moreover, Peters suggests that new borders would effectively redress the wrongs associated with the European partitioning of the Ottoman Empire, which he argues left many groups cheated out of their rightful resources and land.

Political partition can be defined as a strategy to divide a state's territory into separate sovereign and homogeneous entities, with an aim of resolving ethnic conflict. While creating homogeneous states would certainly create a physical separation between the various belligerent groups engaged in ethnic violence, this chapter will examine whether such solutions are capable of permanently addressing the chosen traumas affecting minority and non-dominant groups in the Middle East.

As presented in the introduction, the position defended in this paper is that border-oriented solutions can only defer conflict, as these reconfigurations are generally unable to permanently address social-psychological factors, such as ethnic group chosen traumas.

Arguments for Partition

According to O'Leary, arguments which advocate for partition fall into five different categories: historicist, last resort, net benefit, better tomorrow, and realist rigor[85]. While the standpoint of this paper is that partition is largely ineffective in resolving ethnic conflict, this section will play devil's advocate and examine each

[84] Ralph Peters. "Blood borders….", 1.

[85] Brendan O'Leary. "Debating partition: Evaluating the standard justifications." *The Routledge handbook of ethnic conflict* (2011): 138.

partition argument to determine if partition is justified, despite their disregard for social-psychological factors.

Historicist Argument

Many advocates of partition argue that history always tends to unfold in a predictable, given direction[86]. Their argument states, based on historicist logic, that once conflicts have gone beyond a certain threshold, they will invariably end in partition, or in the worst case in ethnic cleansing. According to O'Leary, the historicist argument is particularly persuasive in the eyes of policymakers[87]. Indeed, they may be compelled to propose partitioning solutions to speed up a process which may seem unescapable, in order to dampen the impact of ethnic conflict on affected populations.

Although it is difficult to define a clear threshold point for deciding on partition, policymakers are often inclined to act at the first sign of ethnic segregation, which is perceived as a sign of an imminent humanitarian disaster: segregation can be carried out "as envisioned by partition, or left to the murderous methods of the ethnic cleansers"[88].

Last Resort Argument

As opposed to the historicist argument which sees partition as the only possible outcome of protracted ethnic conflicts, the last resort argument suggests that alternative solutions should be attempted first. However, in an emergency, or in a rapidly developing situation, the last resort may have to be chosen without fully considering all other options on the table. This argument is often compared to the process of medical triage, in the sense that doctors will often opt to err on the side of caution when faced with uncertainty: they may decide on amputating a limb to guarantee saving a patient during an emergency.

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[86] *Ibid.*, 138.
[87] *Ibid.*, 139.
[88] John Mearsheimer, and Robert Pape. "The Answer." *The New Republic* 203 (1993): 24.

Partitionists often reference the security dilemma to explain why partition quickly surfaces as a solution to ethnic conflict, despite representing a strategy of last resort. For instance, Kaufman argues that ethnic cooperation becomes impossible in a security dilemma, as the situation quickly escalates to war as a means of restoring mutual security[89]. He proposes that partition is the only viable solution in such circumstances.

Net Benefit Argument

The net benefit argument suggests that partition should not be regarded as an instrument of last resort, but rather as a preventative strategy. The argument implies therefore that partition should be implemented when it can be shown to offer, on balance, a better outlook for peace. The case can be made for partition in ethnically divided societies which may be capable of extreme acts of violence, including ethnic cleansing. As noted by O'Leary however, the net benefit argument "tends to license too many partitions: after all, of which groups could it be said that they are incapable of genocide?"[90].

Better Tomorrow and Realist Rigor

Although O'Leary presents the better tomorrow argument as reasoning for partition, this paper argues that it is in fact an outcome which the previous three arguments claim to achieve. The historicist, last resort, and net benefit arguments all contend that new sovereign states emerging from partition will benefit from improved democratization, development and better relations[91]. O'Leary compares the better tomorrow outcome to divorce: despite the agony of the process, it will habitually lead to

[89] Kaufmann, Chaim. "Intervention in Ethnic and Ideological Civil Wars: Why One can be done and the Other can't." *Security Studies* 6, no. 1 (1996): 67.

[90] Brendan O'Leary. "Debating partition…", 140.

[91] *Ibid*., 140.

improved situations for those involved as their "interests will not interfere so intimately with one another's identity, pride and emotions"[92].

Furthermore, O'Leary also offers the realist rigor argument, which this paper suggests is in fact a criteria for success in the implementation of partition, as opposed to justification for such a strategy. The realist rigor essentially states that the effectiveness of partition in ending ethnic conflict will largely depend on the quality of the borders: good fences make good neighbors.

Interestingly, Peters makes reference to all three partitionist arguments to make his case in his article *Blood Borders*. First, he adopts the historicist argument by suggesting that boundaries will inevitably change in the Middle East, as implied by history:

> As for those who refuse to "think the unthinkable," declaring that boundaries must not change and that's that, it pays to remember that boundaries have never stopped changing through the centuries. But given time — and the inevitable attendant bloodshed — new and natural borders will emerge. Babylon has fallen more than once.[93]

Peters also promotes the net benefit argument by suggesting that while a redrawing of borders may not resolve all conflicts, it will lend to a better and more peaceful region: "for all the injustices the borders re-imagined here leave unaddressed, without such major boundary revisions, we shall never see a more peaceful Middle East"[94]. Finally, Peters invokes the "last resort" argument by repeatedly referring to the worsening situation and the requirement to act quickly – in other words, to start amputating before it is too late: "From the world's oversupply of terrorists to its paucity of energy supplies, the current deformations of the Middle East promise a worsening, not

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[92] *Ibid*., 140.
[93] Ralph Peters. "Blood borders….", 1.
[94] *Ibid.,* 1.

an improving, situation"[95]. Moreover, Peters essentially suggests throughout his article that realist rigor was not adequately applied when the Ottoman Empire was partitioned, the ultimate cause for most conflicts in the Middle East.

Partition Through a Social-Psychological Lens

The historicist, last resort, and net benefit arguments for partition, as outlined by O'Leary, all imply that separating opposing groups into defendable enclaves is a necessary condition for the resolution of violent and protracted ethnic conflict.

Notwithstanding their ability to suspend ethnic conflict, this paper argues that none of these arguments consider the fundamental social-psychological issue of enemy image formation resulting from time-honoured ethnic chosen traumas. Indeed, while new borders can fulfil immediate grievances for autonomy, or prevent imminent acts of oppression and marginalization, the underlying source for conflict will remain unaddressed. It is from this perspective that the significance of social-psychological considerations can in fact outweigh the factors which are used as justification in the arguments for partition, and that are mostly based on realist logic and rationale.

A shared border between two enemy ethnic groups will not prevent the reactivation of chosen traumas, and the resurgence of ancient feelings of rage, victimhood, and fear. While the mental images associated with the traumas may subside for some time, the potential will always exist for them to be reactivated by group leaders seeking to achieve political or ideological goals. This was the case for both the Shi'ites and the Kurds, as both groups would mobilize after years of passivity to protect their ethnic tents against a perceived common threat.

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[95] *Ibid.,* 1.

However unrealistic it would be to think that Turkey would relinquish its Kurdish-occupied lands, which represent a third of its territorial claim, new borders will fail to resolve the Kurdish social-psychological traumas discussed in this paper. The profound distrust felt towards the Turkish state, as a defining Kurdish identity marker, will not be addressed by new borders. In fact, new boundaries may simply convert the current Kurdish intrastate conflicts into interstate war. As Horowitz points out, drawing borders may lead to a more explosive situation since sovereign states have a greater ability to procure arms, which is generally an important limiting factor for most intrastate insurgencies[96]. Following this logic, the distrust between the Turkish state and a new Kurdish polity may give rise to a security dilemma, which sees both sides involved in an escalation of military capability, leading to an inevitable war. The possibility for new borders to ignite interstate conflict is a direct challenge to the last resort argument, as it fails to consider the potentially much greater impact associated with interstate conflict.

A similar argument can be equally made for other Kurdish minority populations in Iraq, Syria and Iran. Although borders may help the Kurds reaffirm their ethnic identity and protect them from future acts of oppression, they do not resolve past traumas, hence the potential for violent conflict persists. Narratives of past oppression can be reintroduced to mobilize the group against any perceived aggression by neighbouring states which continue to represent the enemy in the collective mental representations of Kurdish chosen traumas.

Border-oriented solutions are also limited in their ability to address Shi'ite social-psychological grievances. Peters suggests that Iraq should be split into three parts, with

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[96] Donald Horowitz. "The Cracked Foundations of the Right to Secede." *Journal of Democracy* 14, no. 2 (2003): 10.

the southern end forming the basis of an Arab Shi'ite state[97]. As Horowitz has pointed out, one of the major flaws in partitionist logic, including Peters', is the incorrect assumption that partition will result in homogenous states, and thereby eliminating any ethnic friction[98]. As illustrated in figure 4.1, Sunni and Shi'a populations co-exist in much of Iraq, and so it would be impossible to achieve total ethnic segregation. Nevertheless, the net benefit argument in this situation would suggest that the cost-benefit ratio is achieved, due to the overall advantages a border can procure. However, notwithstanding the fact that national borders would allow each ethnic group in Iraq to govern itself, the social-psychological issues discussed in this paper will persist, and may motivate acts of violence against ethnic minorities residing on the "wrong side" of the new border.

[97] Ralph Peters. "Blood borders….", 1.
[98] Donald Horowitz. "The Cracked Foundations…", 5.

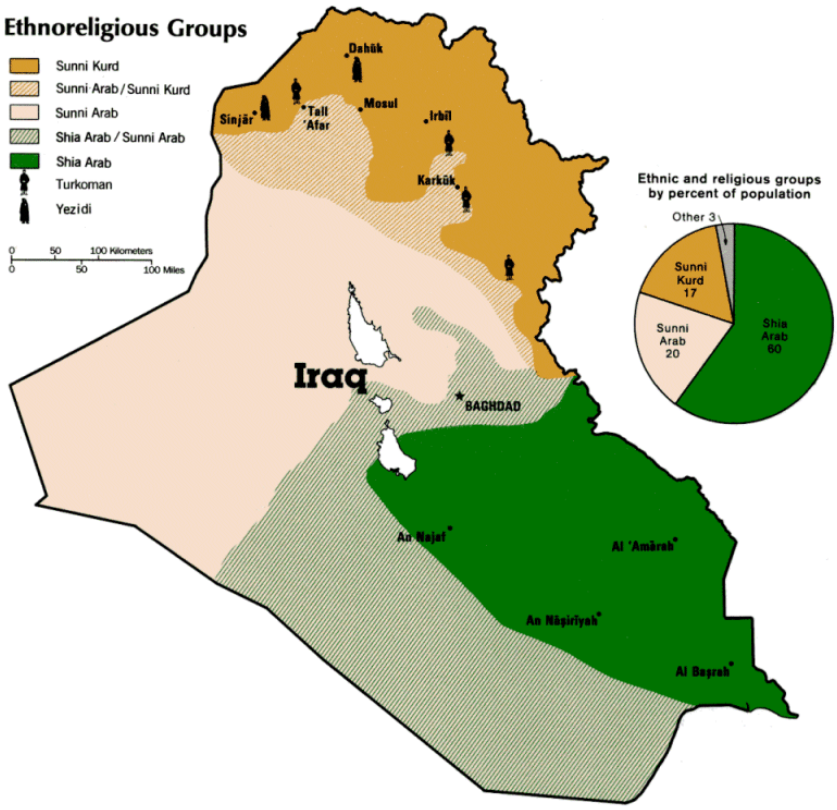

Figure 4.1 – Iraqi Sectarian Map

Source: Lost Islamic History, *The Roots of Iraq's Sectarian Division*[99]

Moreover, allowing each ethnic group to govern its own enclave may potentially legitimize, in the eyes of the population, acts of discrimination and violence towards minorities[100]. Indeed, the dominant group could be compelled to act on what it may perceive to be an easy opportunity to resolve a historic trauma by marginalizing a neighbouring group, represented by the minority. Worse, these acts of discrimination may develop into chosen traumas for these minorities, leading to future tensions and violence.

Another argument against partition is that the creation of smaller states may prove economically unsustainable. This is certainly the case in Iraq, where most of the

[99] Available online at http://lostislamichistory.com/the-roots-of-iraqs-sectarian-division/

[100] Eiki Berg and Guy Ben-Porat. "Introduction: Partition Vs. Power-Sharing?: Introduction." *Nations and Nationalism* 14, no. 1 (2008): 32.

country's wealth is accounted for in the southern oilfields. The economic consequences of partition may intrinsically produce ethnic tensions within the new Iraqi states, which may themselves develop into social-psychological traumas of inequality, and catastrophic loss at the hands of an enemy group. As explained by Volkan, this situation can fuel entitlement ideologies within an ethnic group, which are linked to "difficulty mourning losses, people, land or prestige at the hands of an enemy, in the name of large-group identity"[101].

Volkan goes further in this argument, by suggesting that physical borders become highly psychologised in large-groups, which cause people to become adversely preoccupied with their protection[102]. Rather than dealing with the underlying psychological issues which divide them, ethnic groups will instead focus on physical borders and the protection they procure. For instance, Volkan cites the border issue between the USA and Mexico, and contends that the border is referenced to real-world issues such as illegal immigration, and used to justify greater physical security[103]. On the other hand, the associated psychological connotations and meaning associated with illegal immigration are generally ignored. In times of crisis, Volkan suggests that physical and psychological borders have the effect of "exaggerating major differences, elevating minor differences to significant proportions… [and] reactivating historical grievances…"[104].

[101] Vamik Volkan. *Blood Lines: From Ethnic Pride…,* 117.
[102] *Ibid.*, 105.
[103] *Ibid.*, 106.
[104] *Ibid.*, 106.

Conclusion

While state partition may seem to be a viable option in mitigating ethnic conflict, it tends to neglect the underlying social-psychological causes. The arguments for partition examined in this chapter all assume a border will put a historic end to the animosity between ethnic groups. However, this chapter has argued that partition is an incomplete solution, as it fails to address the ethnic chosen traumas that drive people to commit acts of violence and supports them in dehumanizing enemy groups. Despite providing an ethnic group with the all the protections associated with sovereignty, partition does not reduce the fears and hatred toward a perceived historical enemy. In the worse case, partition can actually lead to interstate conflict, as the emotions associated with chosen traumas can be reactivated to create interstate rivalry, producing a security dilemma.

Considering the psychological traumas affecting ethnic groups in the Middle East, such as those discussed in chapters 2 and 3, it is suggested here that borders represent a temporary stop-gap solution. A social-psychological strategy is better suited to resolve the ethnic chosen traumas of the Shi'ites, Kurds, and other groups in the region that have suffered haunting episodes of oppression, suppression of identity, and marginalization.

CHAPTER 5 – DEMOCRATIZATION

Many authors suggest that democratization can provide a framework for institutional dialogue between opposing groups engaged in ethnic conflict. According to Gurses, democratization "can curb the escalation of the security dilemma by reducing the uncertainty of a group's future and providing both formal and informal guarantees for the protection of ethnic identities"[105]. As democracies are based on processes of bargaining and consensus building, democratic states are much more likely to settle internal conflicts peacefully.

It is important to note however that not all forms of democracy are suitable for implementation in heterogeneous and deeply divided societies. Under certain circumstances, democracies based on majority rule or first-past-the-post electoral systems may in fact yield governments that have set preferences for socially dominant ethnic groups, no different than what can be expected under authoritarian regimes. These forms of democracy are inadequate in addressing ethnic conflicts in divided societies, and fundamentally overlook the underlying social-psychological factors.

This chapter will seek to determine the characteristics of a democratic political system that may provide for stability in the Middle East, and able to permanently address ethnic chosen traumas of non-dominant ethnic groups. It will first examine the types of interaction which normally occur in a divided society, between dominant and non-dominant groups, in order to identity factors which have led to the reactivation of chosen traumas discussed in previous chapters. It will then consider forms of democracy which directly address these same factors.

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[105] Mehmet Gurses. "Partition, Democracy, and Turkey's Kurdish Minority." *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 16, no. 3-4 (2010): 340.

Strategies of Interaction in Multiethnic Societies

Within a nation's boundaries, Eide suggests that there are four distinct approaches in responding to ethnic diversity, which he categorises as assimilation, integration, separation, and exclusion[106]. In a paper on the concept of acculturation, Berry expands on Eide's categories by proposing that these strategies are in fact a function of a group's desire for maintaining its identity and its inclination for developing relationships with other groups[107]. Furthermore, he suggests that these approaches can vary depending on the relative dominance of a given ethnic group in a society.

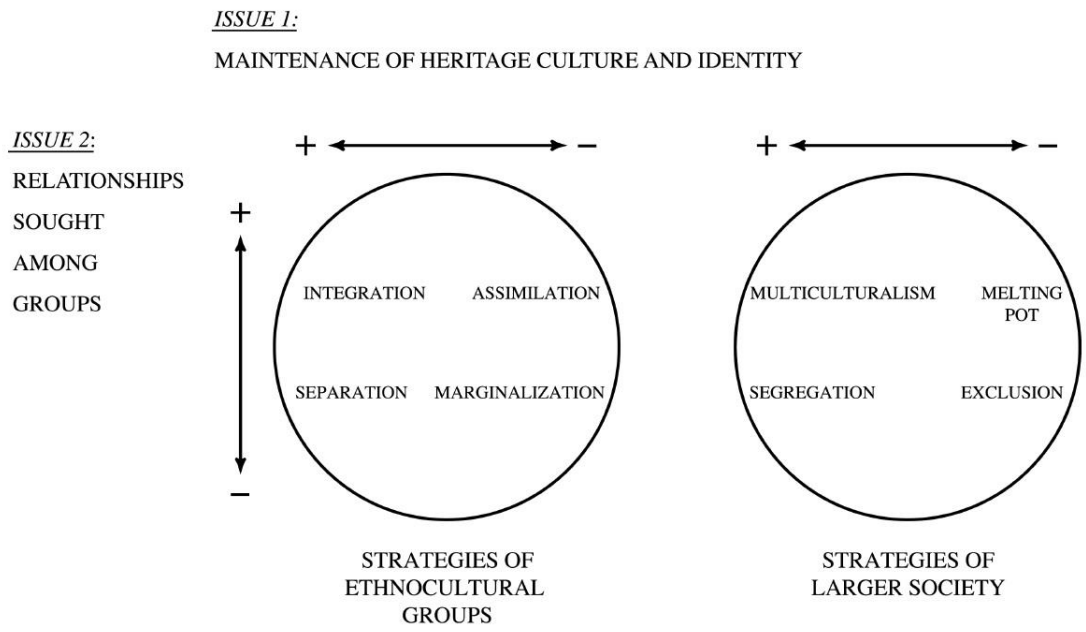

Figure 5.1 – Acculturation Strategies

Source: Berry, *Integration and Multiculturalism: Ways Towards Social Solidarity*[108]

[106] Asbjørn Eide. "The role of the United Nations working group on minorities.", quoted in Sandra Barkhof. "25 Playing the ethnic card." *Routledge Handbook of Ethnic Conflict* (2010): 303.

[107] John Berry. "Acculturation: Living successfully in two cultures." *International journal of intercultural relations* 29, no. 6 (2005): 704.

[108] John Berry. "Integration and multiculturalism: Ways towards social solidarity." *Papers on Social Representations* 20, no. 2 (2011): 5.

According to Berry, individuals within non-dominant groups can assume strategies depicted on the left side of figure 5.1. More specifically, they can choose assimilation if they are willing to cast their ethnic identity and if they are seeking to interact with members of other groups. In contrast, separation occurs when individuals look inward toward their ethnic group, turning their back on others. When there is a desire to maintain one's ethnic identity while becoming a part of a larger social network, individuals seek integration. Finally, marginalization results from individuals that lose the will to maintain their ethnic identity, while demonstrating little interest in interacting with others[109].

It is important to note that these choices are not always voluntary – dominant groups play an important role in influencing social interactions with and between minority groups. Indeed, a dominant group may discriminate against an ethnic minority, which may discourage its interactions. Otherwise, a dominant group can force minorities to shed elements of their cultural heritage, which may affect a group's will to maintain its ethnic identity. In sum, when the approaches on the left side of figure 5.1 are imposed by a dominating group, they result in those depicted on the right side. For instance, marginalization which is forced by a dominant group leads to a society characterized by exclusion, whereas forced integration produces multiculturalism.

Partly due to its focus on social identity, many parallels can be drawn between Berry's acculturation model and the social-psychological analysis of Shi'a and Kurd chosen traumas from previous chapters. For instance, Atatürk's coercive *Turkification* policies, such as the banning of the Kurdish language, would force assimilation on Turkey's Kurdish minority in the aim of achieving a common national identity – or to use

[109] John Berry. "Acculturation: Living…", 705.

Berry's terminology, the melting pot. In the case of the Iraqi state and its relationship with its Shi'ite population, it has been shown that the state employed a strategy of forced marginalization, by excluding Shi'ites from leadership roles in government, by carrying out a campaign of Shi'ite deportations, and by banning religious rituals. Assimilation and marginalization would ultimately produce feelings of victimhood reminiscent of past ethnic traumas, and which are easily leveraged by leaders to mobilize groups toward violent uprisings and conflict.

It is possible to draw two important conclusions from Berry's model, and the analysis of Shi'ite and Kurd ethnic traumas from chapters 2 and 3. These conclusions underscore key deficiencies in past state governance structures which can be blamed for ethnic tensions, and conflict: (1) a state reflecting a dominant ethnic group identity is a recipe for conflict, and (2) an ideal political system would aim to force the integration of ethnic minorities to achieve multiculturalism. Both these conclusions, and their associated issues, can help identify the characteristics of a future democratic political system capable of addressing the ethnic grievances and chosen traumas existing in deeply divided Middle Eastern states.

Conclusion #1: A State Leaning Towards a Group Will Produce Ethnic Tensions

In both the cases of Atatürk's Turkey, and Saddam's Iraq, the state forced an overarching national identity which was patterned after a dominant group's ethnic identity. In Iraq, this would lead Shi'ites to perceive their oppression as being caused by Iraqi Sunnis, as opposed to the state, which would ultimately fuel post-Saddam sectarian tensions. This was largely due to the state's alignment with Sunni ideals, and its policies of marginalization directly targeting Shi'ite populations. In a paper on sectarian relations

in Iraq, Haddad blames sectarian conflict on the state's inability to transcend social divisions by presenting a national identity which incorporates its ethnic and sectarian groups[110]. Haddad argues that under ideal conditions, state nationalism should aim to integrate as wide a cross-section of society as possible, as illustrated in figure 5.2. By aligning itself in this manner, state nationalism becomes mostly concerned with inclusion, by incorporating symbolism shared amongst the various ethnic groups.

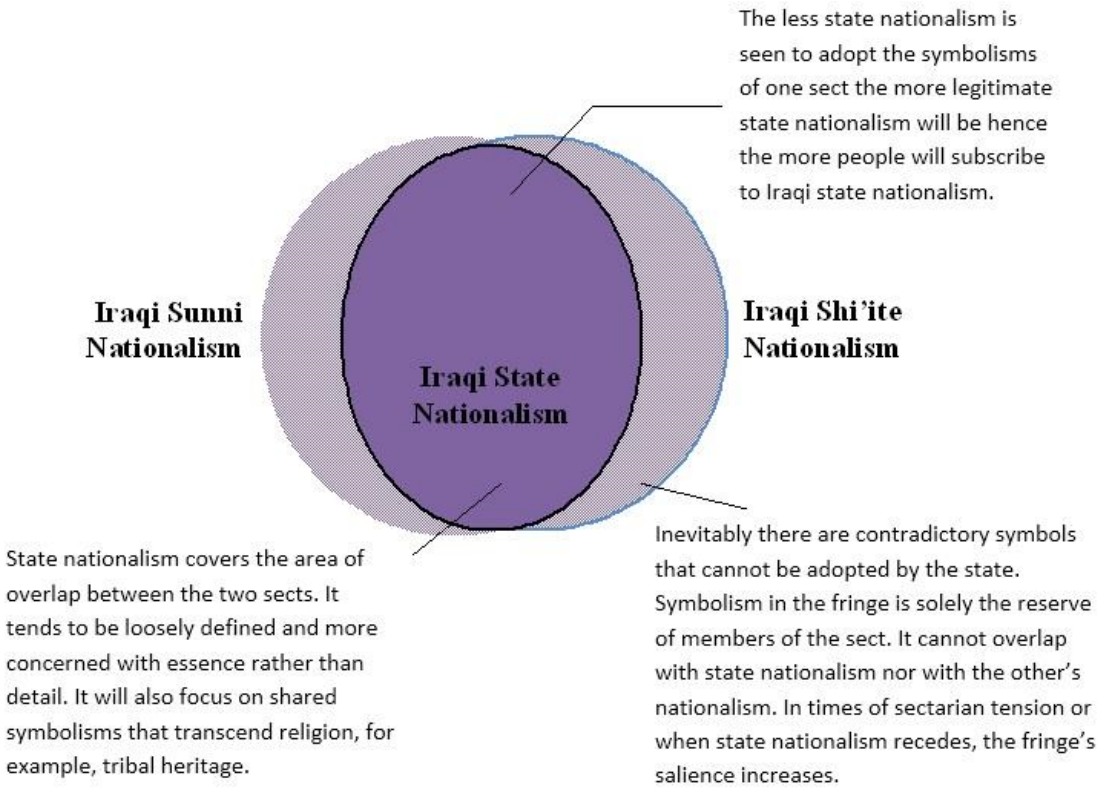

Figure 5.2 – Iraqi Nationalism in Perfect Equilibrium

Source: Haddad, *Sectarian Relations in Arab Iraq*[111]

However, Iraqi nationalism was perceived as "Sunni-leaning", which results in the expansion of the Shi'ite fringe identity, and a contraction of shared nationalism, as depicted in figure 5.3. In his paper, Haddad argues that this is in great part due to the

[110] Fanar Haddad. "Sectarian Relations in…", 42.
[111] *Ibid.*, 46.

promotion of pan-Arabism by the Ba'ath Party, which has always been perceived as an ideology inherently linked to Sunni Arab history[112].

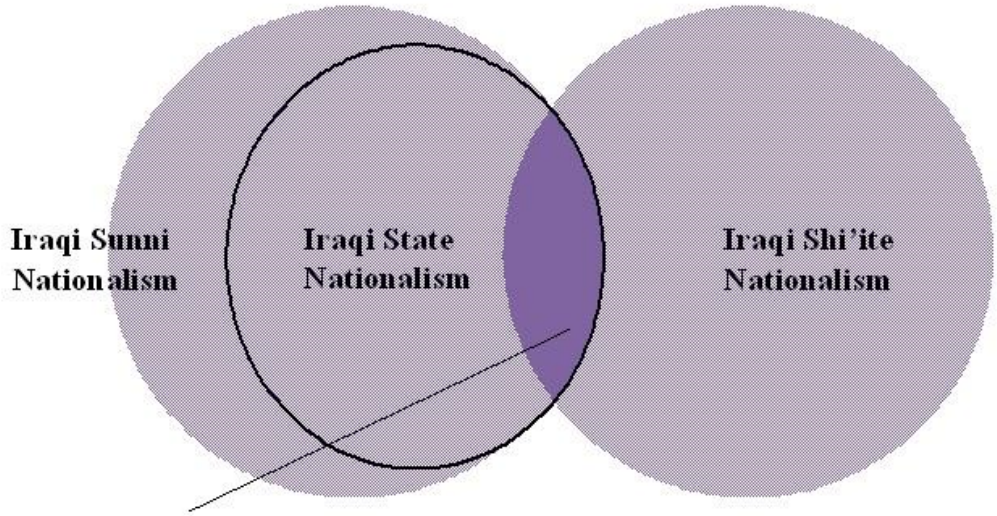

Figure 5.3 – Sunni-Leaning Iraqi State Nationalism

Source: Haddad, *Sectarian Relations in Arab Iraq*[113]

Conclusion #2: Sates Should Aim for Multiculturalism in Divided Societies

According to Berry's model, there are two strategies which a society can employ in accommodating non-dominant groups that express a desire to maintain ethnic identity: multiculturalism or segregation.

Segregation strategies may be possible to implement within states where ethnic groups are territorially separated. In such cases, states could consider forms of federalism to devolve certain functions to ethnically homogeneous geographical regions, thereby limiting political interactions with other groups that could develop into conflict.

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[112] *Ibid.*, 46.
[113] *Ibid.*, 48.

However, it is argued here that this form of governance can only be effective if the most salient political issues can be trusted to a central government, such as religion, the economy, and the distribution of resources. This is clearly not possible in deeply divided states, particularly those in the Middle East. As per the analysis presented in previous chapters, it is based on these central issues that non-dominant group leaders have reactivated chosen traumas to mobilize society towards political and ideological ends.

The implementation of multiculturalism strategies is necessary in societies where ethnic groups place great value in their distinctive identities, while being forced to interact with other groups, either socially or politically. This approach is noticeably absent from the history of Middle Eastern states consumed by ethnic tensions and conflicts.

Towards a Democratic Model for Deeply-Divided Societies

Acknowledging the importance of the aforementioned conclusions in mitigating ethnic conflict within deeply-divided societies, the question becomes how to implement a form of democracy which promotes the commonalities of ethnic groups, and multiculturalism.

As previously mentioned, it can be argued that many forms of democracy are at odds with ethnic integration and multiculturalism. Indeed, traditional majoritarian democracies generally benefit the most populous ethnic groups, since they base political representation on majority rule or first-past-the-post voting systems. While such systems may be suitable in homogenous societies, they carry the risk of creating a "tyranny of the majority" in plural states, whereby minorities and their interests could be entirely excluded. In other words, majoritarian democracies in ethnically divided states are likely

to promote a national identity based on the dominant ethnic group. This can result in policies that can be perceived as biased or even as tactics of assimilation, since elected officials will tend to promote the interests of their own group over those of minorities. Interestingly, a parallel can be drawn here between government representation within majoritarian democracies in divided societies, and that of authoritarian regimes.

To overcome the dangers of a "majority tyranny", many authors point to the advantages of power sharing models of democracy in plural societies, and their inherent qualities in remediating intergroup conflict[114]. While traditional forms of majoritarian democracies reject the notion of distributing political power on the basis of ethnicity, power sharing models advocate that this approach is in fact necessary in divided societies.

Power sharing leads to the political preservation of societal identities and distinctive regional peculiarities. Rather than attempting to consolidate public loyalties, power sharing arrangements fundamentally recognize the fragmentation of public opinion along ethnic divides. Furthermore, O'Leary argues that such models of democracy result in a positive sum game, due to the cooperation it forces between different ethnic groups[115]. Indeed, power sharing arrangements give all ethnic groups access to decision-making powers, and forces them to constructively work together in furthering government issues, thereby preventing any one group from exercising excessive authority. Consequently, they can foster a much fairer democratic representation of all

[114] Salamey, Imad. "Failing consociationalism in Lebanon and integrative options." *International Journal of Peace Studies* (2009): 85.

[115] Brendan O'Leary. "Debating partition: Evaluating the standard justifications." *The Routledge handbook of ethnic conflict* (2011): 141.

groups within a society, while diluting ethnic cleavages that are prone to escalate into conflict due to perceptions of exclusion.

Hoddie and Hartzell describe four provisions which they argue are key to designing effective power sharing democracies[116]. First, they suggest central power sharing must be implemented to distribute the power held by core government institutions among each ethnic group. Second, they advocate for territorial power sharing arrangements such as federalism, to reinforce the perception of security among groups at conflict, by empowering them with informal control of their respective regions. Third, military power sharing provisions are implemented to guarantee that "coercive agencies of the state can be fairly formed"[117]. Finally, economic power sharing ensures that resources are controlled and distributed fairly.

While many different models of power sharing democracies implement all four provisions proposed by Hoddie and Hartzell, this paper will examine the consociational model, largely regarded as a benchmark in power sharing literature.

Consociational democracy theory, as developed by Arend Lijphart, promotes the distribution of the political power controlled by governing institutions among the groups that make up the state[118]. It is based on four tenets which serve to ensure that no group can dominate government control. First, executive power must be distributed within the government to form a grand coalition representing the state's ethnic groups. This forces cooperation between rival groups, which may otherwise refuse to work with each other.

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[116] Matthew Hoddie and Caroline Hartzell. "Power sharing in peace settlements: Initiating the transition from civil war.", quoted in Burak Özpek. "Democracy or partition: Future scenarios for the Kurds of Iraq." *Insight Turkey* 14, no. 3 (2012): 129.

[117] Burak Özpek. "Democracy or partition…", 130.

[118] Arend Lijphart. *Democracy in plural societies: A comparative exploration*. Yale University Press, 1977: 1.

Next, consociationalism provides autonomy to cultural segments of society, empowering groups to conduct their own affairs on certain issues. Third, the principle of proportionality is applied to ensure government positions and state resources are fairly apportioned. Finally, a minority veto must be implemented to empower non-dominant groups to reject proposals which may threaten their interests or identity.

Critics of consociationalism argue that power distribution based on ethnic identity is detrimental to society since it reinforces the social cleavages that are to blame for many conflicts[119]. Power sharing is also blamed for political stalemates which occur when ethnic groups are fundamentally in disagreement on key issues. Moreover, Rosiny argues that changes in social demography, caused by birth and emigration, can potentially upset the proportional distribution between communities[120]. The situation in Iraq following its democratic reform and inaugural elections in 2005 is often cited as an example of how consociational power arrangements can potentially worsen sectarian and ethnic relationships.

> …political practices in Iraq have led to severe consequences: further polarisation of the society, the breakdown of the Iraqi army after the fall of Mosul to the Islamic State, and the rise of Sunni militant organizations like the Islamic State that has been challenging the peace and stability in the region.[121]

Although Iraq has attempted democratization based on consociationalism, Abu Ltaif argues that the ethnic challenges which have arisen in Iraq are a consequence of the government's failure to implement two of Lijphart's four necessary provisions: a grand

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[119] Stephan Rosiny. "A Quarter Century of 'Transitory Power-Sharing'. Lebanon's Unfulfilled Ta'if Agreement of 1989 Revisited." *Civil Wars* 17, no. 4 (2015): 487.

[120] *Ibid.*, 487.

[121] Abu Ltaif. "The Limitations of the Consociational Arrangements in Iraq." *Ethnopolitics* 38 (2015): 2.

coalition government accommodating representatives from different communal groups, and the mutual veto to protect minorities when they believe their interests are threatened. He attributes this to the race among ethnic groups for political representation, in the power vacuum created in 2003[122]. With each group competing to increase its influence in the new political system, this race would be fueled by the awakening of dormant ethnic tensions of Shi'ites and Kurds towards the formerly dominant Sunnis. The sense of entitlement to revenge would motivate the Shi'ite rise to power. Ultimately the Shi'ites would significantly benefit from the new order by acquiring most of the central government power, directly contravening Lijphart's consociational principle of establishing a grand coalition government. On the other hand, the Sunni population would be left with few incentives in political participation. Furthermore, Abu Ltaif argues that the Iraqi constitution does not account for the mutual veto, as decisions are based achieving a quorum in the Council of Representatives, which is overwhelmingly Shi'ite due to the lacking coalition representation[123].

Power Sharing Through a Social-Psychological Lens

Notwithstanding the criticism toward consociationalism, and power sharing arrangements in general, it is argued that democratic reforms based on these models hold much potential in directly addressing and permanently resolving many of the social-psychological issues and ethnic chosen traumas discussed in this paper. This can be demonstrated by examining the core tenants of consociationalism, as proposed by Lijphart.

[122] *Ibid*., 5.
[123] *Ibid*., 8.

First, the formation of a grand coalition central government can satisfy the concerns of minority groups that relate to the distrust, and feelings of exclusion from state decision-making. Consociationalism guarantees every ethnic group an active role in central government executive processes, on a permanent basis. Perhaps more importantly, it prevents the state from leaning toward a particular national identity which reflects a dominant and electorally majoritarian ethnic group. Imposing a mixed coalition government that must work together to further national issues ultimately ensures that the interests of minority groups are never overlooked.

The guarantees of a grand coalition government directly address many of the social-psychological fears discussed in this paper. Indeed, under Atatürk in Turkey and Saddam in Iraq, the state was perceived as being fundamentally biased toward one ethnic identity. As discussed previously, this situation can also be blamed for the ethnic challenges in the post-Saddam democratic Iraq: to Sunnis, the state now represents the "Other", whereas Shi'ites are able to finally resolve their mourning for past trauma by seeking retribution for their historical oppression and marginalization. Eliminating the possibility that the government may favor one group over another alleviates fears of forced assimilation and the suppression of identity. These emotions can invoke memories of past traumas, which very much haunted the Kurds, and was the source of inspiration for the radicalization of nationalist parties. It can be argued that a grand coalition government limits the development of an "us versus them mentality", and the reinforcement of "enemy images", which generally occurs when the state is associated with a mythical sworn enemy.

The mutual veto also addresses fears and mistrust that minorities can have toward both the state and socially dominant groups. Cederman, Hug and Wenger compare this veto to a potential weapon which can defend the interests of a non-dominant group, and can give it an added sense of security[124]. Implementing such a veto can directly address fears tied to the Karbala chosen trauma. Indeed, possessing a political veto effectively minimizes the chances for a minority group to feel oppressed by an overwhelmingly powerful "Other". The veto itself compensates for the numerical inferiority of a group and levels the playing field, so to speak.

Proportionality can also address feelings of marginalization and oppression which may alienate a minority ethnic group. Ensuring that resources, finances, and electoral processes are apportioned in a manner to reflect societal proportions results in an increased degree of confidence toward the government and its institutions. As discussed in chapter 3, the cultural distrust of the Kurds toward the state is a catalyst to the radicalization of nationalist movements. By systemically considering smaller but populous ethnic groups in every aspect of its decision-making, a state can re-establish lost trust, thus taking away any suspicions which can often be manipulated to reactivate chosen traumas.

Finally, segmental autonomy further protects minority ethnic identity groups by delegating powers on matters which only concern their own interests. This can effectively eliminate any perception that a dominant group can influence ethnically sensitive matters of culture, language, or religion, which generally pertain exclusively to a minority group. As discussed in previous chapters, these types of decisions by members of an outside group are perhaps the greatest trigger to the reactivation of chosen traumas and group

[124] Cederman, Lars-Erik, and Simon Hug. "Solutions for a better world?", 2006: 10.

mobilization. Atatürk's policies of Turkification and the banning of the Kurdish language are prime examples.

Conclusion

Perhaps contrary to popular belief, "out of the box" democracies do not necessarily address the underlying causes of ethnic conflict in the Middle East. Democracies based on majoritarian or first-past-the-post voting systems may actually be indistinguishable from authoritarian regimes in their ability to protect minorities and promote multiculturalism. As this chapter has suggested, the principles of democratic rule must be carefully tailored to a state's demographics, in order to address the social-psychological grievances of non-dominant ethnic minorities.

Democracies based on principles of power sharing, such as consociationalism, can help prevent ethnic conflict by directly addressing minority fears and distrust, stemming from past experiences of oppression, marginalization, and assimilation. While the memories of historical traumas may remain embedded in a group's collective consciousness, power sharing democracies are able to ensure the associated emotions are kept at bay, thus preventing the reactivation of a chosen trauma. Moreover, the principles upon which such governments are structured serve to prevent any associations between the state, and the mental representation of a historical evil "Other", contained within a group's myth-symbol complex.

CONCLUSIONS

Lieutenant-Colonel Ralph Peters was certainly correct in his assertion that Middle Eastern borders drawn in the aftermath of the First World War were ill-conceived. There is no doubt that European powers neglected to appreciate the significance of their new map, which grossly disregarded the disposition of ethnic groups in the region. But is accurate to blame hundred-year-old borders for ethnic conflicts consuming the Middle East today?

This paper has argued that the underlying cause for ethnic conflict in the Middle East isn't related to borders. Rather, it is a direct consequence of state actions which have caused the reawakening of traumatic historic experiences that continue to haunt non-dominant ethnic groups. In order to appreciate this conclusion, it is necessary to view ethnic conflict through a social-psychological lens, which is able to bring human factors into focus, and that are generally overlooked by traditional international relations theories.

The social-psychological approach undertaken in this paper considered historical events which have shaped the ethnic identities of the Shi'ites and the Kurds. It has been argued that an understanding of these ethnic chosen traumas is of paramount importance to any effort aiming to prevent ethnic tensions and violence. For instance, it would be difficult to understand the sectarian tensions in Iraq without an appreciation for how the Karbala chosen trauma has developed within the Shi'ites a cultural sensitivity to any perceived forms of oppression, and a propensity for revolutionary action. In the case of the Kurds, an awareness of the Sheikh Said rebellion chosen trauma and the associated

memories of the state repression which followed are necessary to understanding radical nationalist Kurdish political movements within Turkey.

In order to prevent ethnic conflict in the future, it is also important to understand the psychological mechanisms which allow chosen traumas to survive in the shared collective memory of large groups. Memories of trauma are passed on from one generation to the next through rituals, written and oral accounts, and a variety of cultural myths and symbols. The psychological concept of a "time collapse" is particularly useful in understanding how mental images of historical enemies and traumas which occurred several centuries in the past can be merged with present day actors and events. This is a powerful phenomenon which a leader can leverage to reactivate ancient feelings of rage and desire for vengeance, in order to mobilize an ethnic group toward a current day political or ideological goal.

This paper has concluded that new borders and state partition are ineffective in addressing the underlying social-psychological causes to ethnic conflict. Indeed, an ethnic group's newfound autonomy will not resolve the emotions associated with the mental representations of historic traumas. Following partition, the conflict situation may actually worsen if chosen traumas are reactivated to trigger an interstate security dilemma. Rather, democracies based on principles of power sharing, such as consociationalism, are effective in addressing emotions which stem from past experiences of oppression, marginalization, and assimilation. Consociationalist principles such as the stand up of a grand coalition government and the implementation of a mutual veto can serve to mend how many ethnic groups view the state. These types of power

sharing arrangements prevent the state from neglecting the interests of minorities, while promoting strategies of social integration and multiculturalism.

Areas for Further Research

The social-psychological lens is particularly useful in identifying incidents which can develop into chosen traumas and may potentially instigate future ethnic violence. For instance, the 2011 Syrian refugee crisis has undoubtedly become a chosen trauma for the Syrians. The associated memories and emotions of the increasingly sectarian civil war will be difficult for Syrians to resolve, and may one day be reactivated in the context of an ethnic conflict. It would be relevant to the field of security studies to examine what actions are necessary to avert humanitarian disasters and civil conflicts from developing into permanent chosen traumas.

Another area recommended for further research is to measure how effective other forms of power sharing democracies are in addressing social-psychological grievances. This paper has focused on consociationalism as a model of choice for achieving fair distribution of power and resources within deeply-divided societies. Another notable power sharing model is centripetalism, which focuses instead on building democratic institutions which incentivise political moderation on ethnically-dividing issues, such as religion. It would relevant to verify if the conclusions in this paper continue to remain valid under a centripetalist form of democracy.

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