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VOICES FROM POST-SADDAM IRAQ

Living with Terrorism, Insurgency, and New Forms of Tyranny

Victoria Fontan

Foreword by Louis Kriesberg

PRAEGER SECURITY INTERNATIONAL
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For Hermine-Baghdad and Jean-Philippe Lafont
All right, but apart from the sanitation, the medicine, education, wine, public order, irrigation, roads, a fresh water system, and public health, what have the Romans ever done for us?

—from Monty Python’s Life of Brian
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Victoria Fontan has written a gripping account of a fundamental human emotion, humiliation, which contributed terribly to one of the most tragic developments in recent history. Skillfully blending together information gathered from interviews with a wide variety of Iraqis and Americans, perceptive observations in various settings, and relevant literature, she formulates insightful interpretations. Among several patterns of conduct, she graphically reports on the role of humiliation in the disasters of U.S. government policy after the invasion of Iraq, examining how people humiliate other people and analyzing the consequences of being humiliated.

Although often a powerful factor in violent social conflicts, humiliation has received too little attention. People everywhere experience feelings of humiliation, but with varying intensity, under different circumstances, and with diverse reactions. Humiliation played an important role in the recurrent Franco-German wars and Adolf Hitler’s coming to power in Germany; it has greatly contributed to prolonging Israeli-Palestinian antagonism at both the interpersonal and the intersocietal levels, and it was felt by at least some Americans after the September 11, 2001, attacks.

Fontan lays bare in revealing detail the particular features of humiliation in Iraqi-American relations following the invasion of Iraq. She reports how American conduct in Iraq sometimes was unwittingly humiliating to Iraqis and in other circumstances was knowingly and willfully humiliating. She analyzes the importance and peculiarities of honor and humiliation in Iraqi society and in similar “shame” societies in which
humiliation is the worst form of social disgrace, bringing about a kind of social death.

Interestingly, during World War II, the U.S. Army issued instructions to American servicemen in Iraq alerting them about the Iraqi honor system. Despite knowledge of the dynamics of honor and shame in Iraqi society among some people at the strategic and operational levels, American tactical conduct and policies were often thoughtlessly humiliating to various groups of Iraqi society. In Abu Ghraib and elsewhere, however, knowledge of what would be particularly humiliating was used to break down detainees. The consequences of the careless and purposeful acts of humiliation undoubtedly helped fuel attacks against U.S. and Coalition forces and fostered the emergence of militia armies.

Human gender and the elaboration of ways to manage gender relations also are universal social phenomena that profoundly affect the recourse to violence. Victoria Fontan clearly reveals the importance that gender considerations had in the war in Iraq. She demonstrates the many significant ways gender issues were unwittingly the basis for conflict escalation and also how purposefully and carelessly they were exploited in waging the war in Iraq. Iraqis often perceived American military tactics as violating the honor of Iraqi women and humiliating the family members who must protect that honor.

On the American side, too, the need to protect women was a justification for the policies that were being pursued and was used to mobilize support for the war. At times, however, women were exploited to limit the fixing of responsibility for failures and to protect higher-ranking men. For example, when some of the photos from Abu Ghraib began to be displayed, the smiling Lynndie England became the focus of widespread attention, lessening attention to how the detainees came to be treated as they were. Later, when an official investigation was made, Brigadier General Janis Karpinski was the highest-ranking officer to receive sanctions for the conditions at Abu Ghraib. She was accused of not adequately instructing her soldiers on the Geneva Conventions and being lax as a commanding officer; she was also found to be “extremely emotional” in giving her testimony during the inquiry.

Victoria Fontan provides a unique and comprehensive view of the war in Iraq, which is essential to understanding why it failed badly in so many regards. She considers the Iraq War from the perspectives of many of the parties in the conflict; she attended to their words in interviews, in speeches, and in other sources. She concludes that the U.S. administration’s framing of its response to the attacks of September 11, 2001, as a global war against terrorism and its location of the invasion of Iraq
within the same context were fundamentally flawed. Many terrorism ana-
ysts agree that terrorism is a method of fighting used by many different
groups in diverse places. The U.S. responses to the September 11 attacks
should focus on the particular people and organizations carrying out
those and related attacks, taking into account their actual goals. Wag-
ing a war on terrorism may have seemed useful for mobilizing public
support, but it led to counterproductive overreactions. The enemy was
characterized as evil and was to be totally destroyed; furthermore, that
“enemy’s” threat to the United States was much exaggerated. Leaders in
the United States fell victim to believing their own arguments for waging
such a war.

Victoria Fontan stresses correctly, I believe, that the 2008 de-escalation
in the violence in Iraq was not so much the result of the U.S. military
suppression of enemies as the overreaching of al-Qaeda in Iraq. The
killing of Muslims by al-Qaeda in Iraq, led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi,
was condemned by Osama bin Laden’s associate Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri
as counterproductive. This was demonstrated when many Sunni militia
turned against al-Qaeda in Iraq and cooperated with the Coalition forces.
Al-Qaeda self-destructed by relying on violence and alienating the people
whose allegiance it was trying to win.

The information and the insights in this book have profound impli-
cations for Americans and Westerners and also for Iraqis and Arabs.
Explaining why the U.S.-led war in Iraq went so badly is important.
Different explanations are argued not only to fix responsibility but also
to draw lessons for future conduct. Could the war in Iraq have been
successful if it were waged better? That depends upon what other way it
may have been conducted and with what objectives. If the goal was to
eliminate Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, a military invasion was not
necessary because the UN sanctions and inspections regime had already
achieved that goal. If the goal was to demonstrate the United States’
ability to act unilaterally and militarily impose a regime to its liking,
probably no reasonable military operation would have sufficed. If the
goal was to create a liberal democracy friendly to the United States,
again, a successful strategy based on a military invasion is difficult to
envision.

This book also has cautionary lessons for Iraqis and others in Iraq and
elsewhere committed to relying on violence to achieve coercive dom-
inination. Such conduct is usually counterproductive and self-destructive.
Al-Qaeda leaders and members also believed their own propaganda and
did not listen to potential allies. They provoked American anger and
fury, which supported devastating responses.
As Fontan writes, humiliation awareness would help avoid exacerbating conflicts. Her work suggests that inflicting humiliation can be avoided by listening carefully to what other people are saying. Americans need to listen to all kinds of Iraqis, showing them respect and not demonizing any of them.

Victoria Fontan’s *Voices from Post-Saddam Iraq* is a perceptive and important book resulting from work of great courage. Honestly and forthrightly written, I believe that readers of this vivid and brilliant book will gain not only a better appreciation of the complexities and unanticipated consequences of doing violence but also insights into how conflicts can be conducted so as to reduce their destructiveness. Understanding how certain courses of action against an adversary are self-damaging can help us find more constructive paths.

*Louis Kriesberg*
IN MEMORIAM

DONALD C. KLEIN (1923–2007)

Don Klein was one of the founding fathers of humiliation theory. To me, he was one of the very few academics who have transcended their egos to participate in academic debates only for the sake of advancing research. He spoke of awe and wonderment at every stage and situation of human life, not only when admiring a beautiful sunset but in all situations. As I listened to the voice of Maria Callas while cruising through the streets of Baghdad, I always tried to remember his wise words, which led me to appreciate the human experiences of many faceless individuals involved in the Iraq conflict, both Iraqis and U.S. service members. It is through Don’s attitude of awe and wonderment, while striving for academic humility, that I managed to grasp the amazing resilience of all people who kindly spoke to me. Don passed away before I could show him even a page of my manuscript. It is a great loss to all of us in the human dignity and humiliation studies network.

MARLA RUZICKA (1976–2005)

I heard of Marla’s death when I was about to move to Iraq in the spring of 2005. A tireless networker, Marla was known to every foreigner in Iraq as the young woman who had decided to count every civilian casualty of the Iraq conflict in order to bring them financial compensation. Her presence in a room was always a ray of sunshine. For some, she was an idealist. She nonetheless pressed ahead with her
mission, regardless of criticism. In 2003, she founded the nongovern-
mental organization Campaign for Innocent Victims in Conflict
(CIVIC), which was awarded substantial U.S. congressional funding
shortly before her death. One April morning, she was at the wrong place
at the wrong time. She died on the Baghdad Airport road as a result of a
car bomb directed against a National Democratic Institute convoy who
was working on the electoral cycle analyzed in this book. Her death
shocked and saddened me deeply. Her idealism, which challenged the
euphemism of collateral damage in emphasizing that each displaced,
maimed, and killed victim counts, is what motivated me to write this
book from a grassroots perspective. According to a friend, her last words
were “I am alive.” She always will be for all the people she helped.
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Many people have helped me collect and process the information contained in this book; they will recognize themselves as they read it. Above all, I would like to thank the Iraqi people and the American soldiers who shared their life stories with me, and without whose generous contributions this book would never have been possible.

I also thank the UN Cartographic Section for granting me the permission to use its map of Iraq.
UN Cartographic Section, Iraq, no. 3935 Rev. 4, January 2004.
INTRODUCTION

Humiliation is a story as ancient as human history and as fresh as tomorrow’s headlines.

—Evelin Lindner, Making Enemies: Humiliation and International Conflict

The end of the cold war brought an unprecedented sense of achievement to a self-proclaimed civilized world. In the eyes of some, if liberal democracy and capitalism had won the battle over communism, it seemed only fair to take it further, to develop it into an even more refined product that could then be exported to the entire world by way of development and globalization. Since then, improvement has imposed itself as paramount to our modern societies. Whether it is in our homes, with our physical appearance, or in relation to political systems, it seems that everything in our lives can and must be changed for a better, sanitized, more fashionable version of its former self.

Amid a growing north-south divide, liberal democracy has imposed itself as the greatest makeover guru of all time. Throw money at a country, pick an appealing color theme, televise its metamorphosis, and you will find it rejuvenated as a functional member of a new world. This new world, as opposed to an “Old Europe” plagued by some countries’ persistent obstructionism, will “support democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture” to end “tyranny in our world.”

However laudable this goal may be, the reality of post-Saddam Iraq has proved rather different. What if Iraq did not need that kind of help
after all? As early as April 2003, a young Iraqi Shiite made the following remark: “The greatest humiliation of all was to see foreigners topple Saddam, not because we loved him, but because we could not do it ourselves.” Although, with hindsight, this observation might resonate with an increasing number of observers, the association of democratization with humiliation has yet to be examined thoroughly.

While it is undeniable that one tyranny has been eradicated, others—perceived or real—have been put in place, rendering life so difficult for Iraqi civilians that, as of June 2007, 4.2 million Iraqis were estimated to be surviving as internally displaced or refugees in neighboring states. Several immediate explanations can be put forward to explain such drastic figures: an impending civil war, lack of economic development, fear of terrorism, and so on. While exploring all these factors, this book attempts to provide a deeper explanation as to why they came into existence.

This explanation will be sought within a very subjective realm, that of humiliation. The reason for this is that humiliation in relation to Iraq is a theme that proves recurrent since 2003. In fact, humiliation has proved a constant theme in the media coverage of the conflict as well as during interviews that I carried out in both Iraq and the United States. It has also been defining the audio or video narrative of all terrorist and insurgent groups that are breaking Iraqi civil peace. It has been central to gender relations between Iraqis and Coalition forces, has prevailed in the Iraqi constitution-writing process, and has crippled the antiwar campaign within the United States. Last, humiliation has also been at the core of the infamous Abu Ghraib scandal, not only in relation to the treatment of Iraqi prisoners but also in the public shaming of the few “bad apples” who became, to the public, the sole responsible parties for ruining the image of a benevolent U.S. administration both at home and abroad.

To put it bluntly, everywhere one looks in relation to Iraq, one finds humiliation. Therefore, for the average observer who seeks to understand what led to the existing Iraqi chaos, an awareness of what constitutes humiliation and its relevance to the current situation is unavoidable. The purpose of this book is twofold. First, it provides a reading of the Iraq War through the lens of humiliation. Second, it seeks to view humiliation as a common denominator that can serve as an early warning sign to prevent the escalation of sociopolitical violence in post-conflict settings, namely, humiliation awareness. While obvious expressions of humiliation will be explored, in the form of occupation-related scandals and anecdotes, others, more pervasive and latent, will also be analyzed.
Before going further, important facts and ideas need to be highlighted. First, this book is by no means an apology for terrorism or violence of any shape or form. As this is primarily an academic exercise, there will be no condemnation or condoning of any party to the current Iraqi conflict. By no means does this work seek to justify the violent actions of some against others, for perceived occupiers, occupied, liberators, or liberated in post-Saddam Iraq. In order not to antagonize the reader, appropriate language has been selected with caution. However, in order not to complicate the narrative of this book when Iraq is being mentioned, the use of the phrase “post-Saddam Iraq” refers to the period following arrival of Coalition troops in Baghdad in April 2003 and the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime, or the end of major combat operations as referred to by U.S. President George Bush in his famous “Mission Accomplished” speech on May 1, 2003. When the use of “post-Saddam Iraq” is not possible for stylistic reasons, it will be referred to as the period following the invasion of Iraq by Coalition troops or the occupation of Iraq. The reason for this is that, according to the American Society of International Law, Iraq is occupied territory. This choice is the only stylistic, though factual, license taken in this book. Therefore, while a conceptualization of what constitutes humiliation needs to be established to highlight its relevance in the fueling of Iraqi-based violence, humiliation awareness does not exonerate any party to the current conflict from its responsibilities, nor does it validate dehumanization of the “other” on either side of that conflict.

Second, while many readers may be already aware to some extent of what constitutes humiliation and the role it can play in the escalation of violence, others may not necessarily understand how bringing democracy, freedom, and economic development to a former dictatorship constitutes humiliation. In the four years that preceded the elaboration of this book, numerous public lectures, conversations, and correspondence with a U.S.-based public have led me to realize that humiliation awareness is not as evident to many as it may be in European countries, for instance.

Third, as no effort is ever devoid of subjectivity, an ambivalent advantage as well as caveat to this work is my personal experience in post-Saddam Iraq, as a journalist, academic, consultant for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and mere visitor.

With more than a dozen visits to Iraq since April 2003, I have had the advantage of observing and assessing the Iraqi situation both inside and outside what is often referred to as the “Emerald City,” officially the International Zone. For the first four years, I worked in Baghdad as a
freelancer for a London-based newspaper, in which I published articles mostly on Iraqi women’s issues. I then worked as a visiting professor of politics at Salaheddin University in northern Iraq, where I have come to be in close contact with the Barzani clan, one of the two ruling tribal families of Iraqi Kurdistan. I then worked as a democracy and governance analyst for USAID in Baghdad, where a colleague and I assessed the entire electoral cycle of post-Saddam Iraq as well as the constitution-drafting process and several outreach programs. Last, I traveled to Baghdad on private visits to friends and family, where I was sheltered by a leading press agency. In addition to these Iraqi experiences, I lived and worked in a liberal arts college in upstate New York for one year, where I experienced the sensitivities and uneasiness that firsthand research behind “enemy lines” can trigger among a population that has to be at war, that is not given an accurate account of the war they have to support, and within which the true existence of an antiwar movement is simply unrealistic. During that year, I traveled to several parts of the country that bore a connection to the Iraq crisis, including the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, DC, home to the U.S. service members wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan, and Cresap Town, Maryland, infamous for being home to the 372nd Military Police, whose recruits were found guilty of torturing Iraqi prisoners in the Abu Ghraib detention facility.

As a USAID consultant, I met with the Iraqi Women’s Caucus in the U.S. Congress, where once again any mention of humiliation and gender imbalance in post-Saddam Iraq was met with utter astonishment and incomprehension on the part of three U.S. congressional representatives. Of importance to this particular visit was the lack of information that those well-meaning representatives seemed to be suffering from. While they had visited Baghdad’s Emerald City as part of official delegations, they sponged any bit of “outside” information that my colleague and I could provide them on that faraway place that represented the Red Zone (i.e., the rest of Baghdad and Iraq). How could these high-ranking people, who had voted in favor of the invasion of Iraq and subsequent budgetary extensions to fund it, not be aware of the reality of life in post-Saddam Iraq? While they explained the work that they carried out to the best of their ability and with unquestionable benevolence, they candidly expressed that they had never seen how Iraqi people, women and men alike, might feel humiliated by the benevolent actions of their mighty nation to promote gender empowerment and democratization. This, in turn, compelled me to carry on with this work.
As time was of the essence to initiate research in a rapidly changing postconflict environment, I took advantage of my journalism work to carry out academically oriented research on the escalation of violence in the now-infamous town of Fallujah, in Anbar Province. While this work could appear to be more journalistic than academic, the fragmented evidence, testimonies, and perceptions gathered at the time could never have been academically analyzed had I patiently waited for a research grant to be awarded for more substantial and structured fieldwork. Several reasons can be put forward to explain this, the most obvious one being that the political situation in Iraq has deteriorated rapidly since April 2003. True, media sources can be relied on to understand the reasons for such deterioration. However, my experience of journalism in Iraq, analyzed in parts of this book, has cast a shadow over my hitherto unreserved trust in firsthand media sources. To put it bluntly, I have seen too many journalists lying around hotel swimming pools, drinking, fabricating evidence, and even filing “Baghdad” datelines from locations outside Iraq. Add to this the fact that, daily, important pieces to the Iraqi puzzle are lost in the translation of fixers or interpreters, a new breed of individuals who decide who to interview and how to translate the information, and anyone will understand how I can never take what I read at face value ever again. While I also had the privilege of working with outstanding professionals, many in the old guard of learned experts are unfortunately being replaced by young professionals who will need years of field experience to collect the necessary skills required to be a true journalist.

Another reason for the urgency of allying academia to journalism is the worsening of the security situation in all parts of Iraq, which renders the collection of evidence increasingly dangerous with time. Furthermore, it was clear from very early on that contacts could be volatile. For instance, all the relationships carefully woven in Fallujah from April to June 2003 are no longer active. Sadly, all but one of my contacts in Fallujah are dead. This depressing reality is unfortunately common for anyone undertaking any sort of academic research in Iraq at the time being, and probably will remain so for years to come. My faithful contact within the Fallujah police, the welcoming family of the Jolan district that sheltered me, the hotel waiter who brought me breakfast every morning—many Iraqis have shared their stories and daily hardships with me: all have either died, left the country, severed ties with me for fear of reprisals, or even tried to sell me to a mujahideen group. They did not do this out of sheer malevolence but because they either had to survive financially or simply had lost all esteem for once-trusted foreigners. This reality has
rendered academic research on the place of humiliation in the Iraqi conflict extremely difficult to undertake, hence the anecdotal nature of much evidence gathered in this book. I did try to distribute questionnaires for a preliminary quantitative research on humiliation, but all the factors previously mentioned hindered this initiative.

Thus, this book does not pretend to be what it cannot, a systematic, scientifically based, and strictly academic account of the years that followed the fall of Saddam Hussein in Iraq. It simply seeks to provide a piece of the puzzle that post-Saddam Iraq represents, in terms of humiliation.

Why does this material come out only now, years after the invasion, when much of its evidence was gathered very early on in the conflict? A first article on conflict escalation in Fallujah was published in Terrorism and Political Violence in 2006.\(^8\) While it was originally written in January 2004, the lengthy process of peer review meant that it took more than two years for the article to be made publicly available. While I was counting on its feedback to write this book, the article is only starting to gain momentum. I organized a lecture tour of the U.S. East Coast in the spring of 2004, but the news of an insurgency in the form of a neighborhood watch group did not appeal to many who were still being served with mainstream media rhetoric on die-hard Saddam loyalists and disgruntled terrorists every day. Moreover, the fact that this alternate take on the Iraq War was given by a French woman did not help in disseminating a research-based argument, as it was merely seen as a Eurocentric opinion. Still, over the years that followed the fall of Saddam Hussein, I have tried to the best of my ability to add my stone to the Iraqi debate.

Despite all this, I believe that, at a time of domestic soul-searching and increasing questioning of the U.S. presence in Iraq, humiliation awareness can provide lessons to alleviate the existing chaos created by a liberation turned into a deadly occupation, as well as avoid repeating the same mistakes elsewhere on the “war on terror” front. If any lesson can be learned on the impact of humiliation on the deterioration of security in Iraq, then there may be a chance of defeating the current globalization of terrorism and its impact on tomorrow’s world. It can also bring clues as to how intervene in the current deteriorating situation in Afghanistan. While humiliation awareness in Iraq is only a telling case study, understanding it can make contributions to other postconflict situations.

It is a sad irony that I found all the quotes to initiate each chapter of this book in a 1943 U.S. Army instruction manual for U.S. soldiers serving in Iraq during World War II.\(^9\) Without being named, humiliation awareness is present all throughout this manual, which highlights the
fact that some of the outlooks I give in this book are not new. If each story that I tell is unique, the overall message conveyed in this book was already known to the U.S. Army more than fifty years ago.

Why was it not taken into account in the preparation phase of the Iraq War? Why were so many lives, on both the Iraqi and Coalition sides, needlessly lost when it was known somewhere in the U.S. military that honor is paramount to Iraqi culture, and that it had to be respected at all costs? More than four years ago, my heart sank when I heard the desperate story of the U.S. Army War College’s Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute attempting to retrieve from its library all it could from the U.S. occupation of Guadalajara, Mexico, at the beginning of the twentieth century. Somehow, someone in their staff had come to realize that peace was lost in Iraq, and that the U.S. Army would need to find best practices in their history of occupation. As the occupation of Guadalajara was deemed a success, the college’s acting head told me that they had resorted to consulting any archive that they could find on how to wage a peaceful occupation, on how to win occupied hearts and minds. Mexico is obviously not Iraq, and it was only in 2007 that the University of Chicago Press reprinted the 1943 instructions to U.S. service members in World War II Iraq.

As an illustration of all the concepts that were known to the U.S. Army before it invaded Iraq, fragments of humiliation in relation to post-Saddam Iraq are analyzed in an attempt to conceptualize the different steps that led the land of the two rivers to become what it is today: a country plagued by an imminent civil war. This book serves as a chronicle of the death of a country foretold by many observers, thinkers, and actors alike, who time and again warned that each corrective step taken by the U.S. administration to ameliorate the situation on the ground would be even more disastrous than the preceding one.

As the road to hell is paved with good intentions, of importance in the first chapter is the acknowledgment of the existence of a small window of opportunity from April to early June 2003, when Iraq could have been a success story, had a liberating Coalition not become a careless occupier in the eyes of a rapidly increasing number of Iraqis at the time. This chapter’s aim is to analyze the de facto divide-and-conquer policy that the U.S. administration carried out in the immediate aftermath of the country’s invasion in an effort to ensure its short-term presence in a country whose civil peace was taken for granted.

The second chapter examines the initiation of counterinsurgency policies in a context of increasingly polarized chaos between occupiers and occupied, which in turn paved the way for a more organized insurgency to establish itself. Of importance to this chapter is an analysis of how
two forms of insurgency, one local and one globalized, came to exist in post-Saddam Iraq. This chapter and its conceptualization of conflict escalation lead to the unfolding of the Abu Ghraib scandal in March 2004.

As the showcase for a popular awareness of humiliation in relation to the occupation of Iraq, the events of Abu Ghraib as described in the third chapter shed light on the long-term impact of humiliation on Iraqi society, as well as on the escalation that ensued its revelation.

The fourth chapter highlights the place of gender in the collective perception of humiliation in post-Saddam Iraq. Humiliation is analyzed in terms of it being gendered, in terms of it being created as well as instrumentalized along a gender divide. Often overlooked and dismissed as secondary to more important political issues by occupation authorities as well the Western media, gender and women’s issues have had a tremendous impact on the collective crystallization of humiliation perceived by the Iraqi public—this, once again, a result of the public’s intricate connection to the Iraqi honor system, itself preponderant in every step of Iraqi society’s life. While, for instance, the wave of abductions of Iraqi women in the immediate aftermath of the invasion was treated as a secondary issue by Western media editors and Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) officials, it had an extremely negative impact on Iraqi public opinion. It will be discussed that the issue of abductions of Iraqi women constitutes one of the initial causes of Iraqi resentment against Coalition troops, a resentment that helped shift the image of Coalition troops from liberators to occupiers.

The fifth chapter studies the electoral cycles and constitution-drafting process of post-Saddam Iraq, which have resulted in a self-inflicted and magnified collective political humiliation of one part of the population. This process, which led to a consecration of a de facto territorial and popular partition of Iraq, will be considered the prelude to a subsequent ethnic cleansing in parts of the country. Throughout the book, the role of communication in the crystallization of a collective sense of humiliation among all parties to the Iraqi conflict—in Iraq, in the United States, and within the realm of global terrorism—is analyzed. Issues related to public access to information, political narratives, metaphors, and group polarization are also assessed.

After an extensive study of humiliation applied to post-Saddam Iraq, the last chapter looks toward the future and how humiliation-awareness can help achieve sustainable peace in Iraq. It explains how and why the Sunni population eventually joined the ranks of the Coalition against al-Qaeda in Iraq, so restoring a balance of power between them and their Shiite counterparts, and how that might or might not save Iraq from an
all-out civil war. From being part of the problem to becoming part of the solution, a new role for the United States in Iraq is detailed.

This book seeks to provide an alternative answer to people who still, in the words of U.S. academic Larry Diamond, wonder how the victory in Iraq became so tragically squandered.¹¹
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American success or failure in Iraq may well depend on whether the Iraqis like American soldiers or not. It may not be quite that simple. But then again it could.

—U.S. Army, Instructions for American Servicemen in Iraq during World War II

The swiftness of the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq was superseded by an even faster end to the honeymoon period between liberators and liberated. While it took only twenty-one days to remove Saddam Hussein from power, a mere fourteen days were necessary for part of the population of Fallujah to engage in hostilities against their perceived occupiers. Far from being interpreted as symptomatic of a retaliatory escalation against occupiers, this upsurge of violence was understood as a last attempt by die-hard Saddam loyalists to fight Coalition troops. While ad hoc tit-for-tat attacks against Coalition troops began to take place throughout the summer of 2003, an even deadlier force began to take root in post-Saddam Iraq, al-Qaeda. Four years later, civil peace has yet to be established in post-Saddam Iraq, where displaced people now live in ethnically partitioned areas, never knowing whether they will live to see the end of any given day. The period between the arrival of U.S. troops in Baghdad and the emergence of Iraqi hostility against Coalition troops must be scrutinized to approximate an understanding of the grassroots support that different belligerent groups have used to wage a
merciless conflict against a perceived Western aggressor. While it was not a certainty that a feverishly thankful Iraqi population would welcome Coalition troops, nor was it established that, by December 2003, a large part of the population, Shiite and Sunni alike, would become hostile to the U.S. presence in Iraq. Should this possibility have been raised before the invasion, it would not have been taken seriously, as it was established that the ethnic map of Iraq dictated that if there were pockets of resistance, these would most likely be located in Sunni Muslim–populated areas of the country. According to this preestablished trouble-free script, Fallujah, now known for being the first location to openly challenge Coalition troops in April 2003, seemed to be the perfect powder keg.

The dilemma this chapter will examine is whether it had to be that way. Did mutual hostility have to escalate so soon after the invasion? Could a crisis have been averted in Fallujah? More important, what triggered the chain of events that inspired massive popular support for an insurgency against Coalition troops? To answer these questions, we will analyze a theme that became recurrent in the insurgency narrative since Coalition troops entered Fallujah, the narrative of humiliation. This chapter will illustrate how a collective perception of humiliation became central to the events that led to the escalation of violence in Fallujah. It will also analyze what constitutes humiliation in post-Saddam Iraq, and how humiliation came to be perceived as a growing challenge by an increasing percentage of the Iraqi population.

WORLDS APART

A female soldier managing a checkpoint on a random street; a tank called “Alcoholics Anonymous” whose occupants throw candy at local children; the broken statue of a despotic leader finally deposed; the restoration of press freedom; the maintaining of law and order for the safety of a civilian population; a U.S. serviceman candidly handing out a picture of an American teenage idol to young girls because his girls at home are mad about that sort of thing; a soldier being kind and respectful to his Iraqi translator by allowing her to eat with him and his crew inside his tank instead of leaving her to stand in the blasting sun while he eats; a looter being caught in the act, arrested and neutralized, facedown, in the middle of an open street.

To many readers, there may not seem to be anything wrong with these situations, which I witnessed between April and June 2003. A foreign dictator was removed from power to the benefit of a population whose freedom has finally been restored after years of oppression and whose life can return to normality with the help of a few soldiers maintaining
law and order. As for the lootings in the streets of their capital and major cities, “Stuff happens... it’s untidy, and freedom’s untidy, and free people are free to make mistakes and commit crimes and do bad things,” in the words of former U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. Because one of the main reasons for the war was to free the Iraqi people, Iraqis are “also free to live their lives and do wonderful things. And that’s what’s going to happen here.” Of importance to this scenario is the absolute confidence that exudes from it. To the architects of the 2003 Iraq War, it was simply inconceivable that the conflict with Saddam Hussein’s regime would not produce a happy ending, that Iraqis would not enjoy their newly found freedom and be forever grateful toward their liberators. This, however, happened without contemplating humiliation as probably the most important variable in the post-invasion Iraqi equation. What if a perceived sense of humiliation pushed Iraqis toward exerting their freedom for the worse?

**WHAT IS HUMILIATION?**

The study of humiliation stems from the realization by some researchers and observers to international conflict that it is a recurrent theme among most violent situations, from latent hostility to open warfare. While the theory of humiliation remains to be refined, the psychologist Evelin Lindner was the first person to dedicate her professional life to the subject and to gather academics of all disciplines around her to explore whether it could become an academic specialty. From the analysis of the role of humiliation in the Treaty of Versailles, which ended World War I while most certainly paving the way for the rise of Adolf Hitler in an impoverished and humiliated postwar Germany, to the analysis of the war that Osama bin Laden declared to the West in his 1996 “Ladenese Epistle,” humiliation is omnipresent.

Humiliation can be characterized by the feeling of being put down, demeaned, by another person or a situation. It should be made clear that the study of humiliation does not condone or justify violence. Humiliation results from the feeling of one person or group of having had its status lowered by another person or group. Lindner illustrates this in analyzing the humiliating impact of the Belgian rule in Rwanda, which favored one ethnic group over another for the sake of effective colonial rule. This process, years later, led to the 1994 genocide of the Tutsi minority, who held the former rule, by the Hutu majority, which considered itself the oppressed, alongside with thousands of Hutu sympathizers. Paramount to an understanding of humiliation is its subjective nature, hence the difficulty in reaching a universal definition of it. While one
might feel humiliated in a given situation; another person might not be when confronted with the exact same set of circumstances. The example of a female soldier managing a checkpoint seems appropriate to illustrate this subjectivity, as this might be viewed as normal in some places and as offensive in others. What is humiliating in the center of Fallujah, in Iraq, might be viewed as completely casual, absolutely normal, and even expected in the middle of New York City. Moreover, a situation might be humiliating in itself, though someone might choose not to be or feel humiliated. A soldier handing out the picture of a world-famous female singer might not be humiliating to a child but might be to her parents. Taking all this into consideration, Lindner characterizes humiliation as the sum of three important elements that must be combined for humiliation to be experienced and recognized as such: the perpetrator’s act, the victim’s feelings resulting from that act, and the social process within which this act may be referred to as humiliating. A matrix of humiliation can therefore be established, whereby an interaction and acknowledgment of victim, perpetrator, and social norms can produce humiliation. Not only does humiliation originate from an interaction between victim and perpetrator but also its existence has to be recognized by the social codes of conduct within which the humiliation is carried out or that belong to the party subjected to this act—hence Lindner’s reference to humiliation as a social process. Of importance to this matrix of humiliation is the sharing, or not, of social norms between the victim and the perpetrator. It is therefore important to highlight the humiliation vacuum caused by a situation in which the potential victim does not share the same social norms as the potential perpetrator. Take the example of Afghanistan, where the act of showing the sole of one’s shoe to another person is deemed offensive. Should an Afghan have shown the sole of his shoe to a foreign soldier with the intention of inflicting on him or her some form of public humiliation, the absence of cultural awareness on the part of the soldier would likely have saved him or her from the feeling of being humiliated. There is, therefore, an individual and a cultural dimension to any act of humiliating and of being humiliated. Of importance to the rest of this work will be the analysis of the intersection of different social norms and the consequences of potential collisions in relation to the generation of humiliation.

HUMILIATION VERSUS SHAME

Taking into account this individual-collective combination, and to address humiliation in an Iraqi context, humiliation must be differentiated from shame. It is possible for a person to be publicly humiliated but
not personally shamed or to be publicly shamed but not personally humiliated. In an attempt to clarify how humiliation does not necessarily bring shame, the psychologist Don Klein once explained to me how an individual hitting another in the face in a gratuitous display of violence might trigger a sense of humiliation in the feelings of the assaulted person but not necessarily shame. After all, why should one feel ashamed at being brutally attacked by a socially inept person? In this particular case, the aggressor is the one who, according to social codes of conduct, ought to feel ashamed at his or her behavior. Whether the assaulted deserved punishment or not, the assailant ought to have shown countenance when facing the situation that triggered this regrettable public outburst. Conversely, shame can also be experienced at the level of the individual; it can be internalized intensely, but only the collective recognition of the event that produced this shame can trigger humiliation. Fear of humiliation might very well trigger a feeling of guilt emanating from a fear of shame. Let us take the example of a little girl who decides to steal a long-coveted object from a shop. The sense of determining right from wrong that her parents taught her might trigger a feeling of intense guilt in relation to her act of stealing, not only because she did wrong but also because her morally reprehensible act might be publicly exposed and shame might be brought upon her. This personal feeling of intense guilt might result in her getting rid of the potentially shaming object, and this surrender of incriminating evidence of her evilness instantaneously relieves her of her guilt. In this case, shame is directly linked to fear of public recognition of one’s wrongdoing, the fear of being caught, thereby triggering a feeling of self-humiliation prompted by a fear of public shaming. The victim and the social process are both perpetrators of this act of humiliation, the victim for knowingly taking part in a potentially socially dangerous activity and society’s moral codes of conduct for having proscribed the act of stealing. As stated earlier in relation to the subjectivity of humiliation and the triangle of victim, perpetrator, and social process, shame can be a vector of humiliation. At this stage, a differentiation between guilt and shame might be useful to further understand humiliation and its perpetration, ramifications, and consequences.

GUILT AND SHAME SOCIETIES

According to Harvard scholar Avishai Margalit, the distinction between shame and humiliation must take into account two types of societies, guilt and shame. In guilt societies, people internalize societal norms, and they are therefore supposed to feel guilty when they disobey
them. This of course is not always the case, hence the recourse to public shaming when moral codes deemed important by the collective are transgressed. We can apply this concept of guilt society to the humiliation matrix exposed earlier. It suggests the strongest axis of guilt in relation to humiliation is the axis between the victim and the perpetrator, as the victim can be the perpetrator in the form of the superego. While social norms inflict a feeling of guilt on the victim, the perpetrator also does; thus, the victim is the sole repository of guilt. Central to this guilt-humiliation matrix is the fear of public shaming. Thus, in the case of the little girl who stole, she does not need anyone to shame her, as she does it to herself. The intense fear of public shaming brought by the recognition of her evil act leads her to feel enough guilt to dispose of her plagued trophy. Should public shaming occur, and let us assume for the sake of argument that our little girl is now older than eighteen, she might choose to move away from that environment of public shame to start a new life somewhere else. Because guilt societies do not rely on social networks for survival, our little girl will not have to carry the same sense of public shaming for the rest of her life.

In shame societies, however, the externalization of norms leads people to seek to maintain their honor and family reputation in the eyes of others within the social network at all costs, because the social network is the only place of survival. Noncompliance with the norms qualifies as insubordination to the sanctity of society, whose hierarchy and norms are sometimes blurred with religious commandments. Noncompliance is sanctioned through external humiliation in the form of rumors, gossip, and, in the worst cases, ostracism. Humiliation in a shame society constitutes the worst form of disgrace, leading to social death, which is worse than death itself, as shame societies are so tightly knit around a community base that survival as an individual is almost impossible outside that family network. Hence the recourse to honor killing in that type of society, an action whose practice is deemed essential to restore honor that has been tarnished and/or taken hostage, all for the sake of moving on with the evil act. Margalit asserts, “Humiliation in a shame society can only take the form of demotion.” Humiliation being the worst form of social disgrace, it has the involuntary effect of bringing about social death. In a society that is organized alongside a pyramidal structure of socioeconomic support, social death can literally mean starvation.

Let us take the example of a man I interviewed in a Baghdad hotel in March 2006. Under Saddam Hussein’s regime, this man, whom I will call Mohammed Fallujah, was a highly decorated helicopter pilot. He was considered a pillar of society and had devotedly served Saddam Hussein
countless times, including in the infamous Anfal campaign against the Kurds in 1988. Having lost his position after Saddam’s fall, he found a job in a French security firm in Baghdad. His excellent work and loyalty toward his new boss granted him a special status inside the team. Younger team members respected him because he was middle aged, had been an air force officer, and came from a very honorable family. As the months went by, the daily realities of post-Saddam Iraq became harsher. As a former helicopter pilot, Mohammed was sought by Shiite paramilitaries to be executed for his key role in the Iran-Iraq War, which meant that he could rarely venture outside the hotel where he was working. Because his village near Fallujah had been taken over by al-Qaeda, his family was exiled to Fallujah, which was considered safer, and left to live in very difficult conditions. These issues were coupled with those brought by daily life in Baghdad, with its lot of car bombs, ethnic cleansing, sniper fire, and mortar attacks. One day, Mohammed Fallujah snapped. He stole a black BMW from his boss, sold it for $10,000 to the Islamic Army of Iraq, an insurgent group, and left the country to go work in Egypt. His nephews, working for the same security firm, were highly distressed by the shame he had brought to the entire family. They were adamant that he would never be welcome in his own home again, and he was condemned to exile. Mohammed worked as a construction worker in Egypt until his visa ran out, and then he returned to Iraq to work as an electrician in Sulaymaniyah, then as a truck driver, and now as a taxi driver. He can barely make ends meet for his daily survival and has lost all means to have a decent life with his family. His social death means that he is condemned to a life of socioeconomic misery until he dies, and along with him his children and probably his grandchildren. The loss of socioeconomic prestige incurred by his shameful actions meant he could no longer benefit from the help of his extended family to make ends meet, and as a result he had to take on what are considered menial occupations to ensure his day-to-day survival. In a society as socially hierarchical as Iraq, a former army officer simply cannot be seen sweeping the streets to make ends meet. As Nadhom M., a former brigadier general, explains, “I’d rather die than be seen doing manual labor. This would mean that my family does not support me anymore, that I have done something wrong, and what would the neighbors think?”

In Iraq, menial labor can be a symptom of social death. Thus, even though Mohammed Fallujah was exiled and cut off from his network, his children will never be trusted and will be only tolerated by a society that now considers them rogue elements, bad seed. They will, for instance, never marry well and might even be given an epithet, such as “son of thief,” that will stick with them for generations to come. One might ask
why Mohammed is still alive and has resumed relations with his family. The reason for this is that he stole from a *kefīr*, an infidel or non-Muslim, a foreigner who does not belong to the Iraqi honor system. Had he stolen from an Iraqi, he most certainly would have died at the hands of his own family as a way to restore family honor, to cut off a dead limb to resume a normal life within Iraqi society.

This example illustrates how, in a shame society, individual honor is reflected in the eyes of peers, who have a hold over one’s socioeconomic future, while in guilt societies it is located in the superego (e.g., our little girl’s case). The strongest axis of shame to be found in relation to humiliation is therefore the axis between social norms and the perpetrator. While social norms and the perpetrator inflict a feeling of shame on the victim, they place the victim as the main repository of shame, whose honor, and that of the network associated to it (i.e., the extended family), can be regained only by the elimination of the perpetrator or the victim, thus producing the deletion of any act of humiliation of the small network or extended family from society’s collective memory. The zero-sum cancellation of this humiliation debt is vital to the conceptualization of humiliation in shame societies. To put it bluntly, it is sometimes considered the victim’s fault for being in the position of being humiliated, hence the imperative removal either of the victim for restoration of collective honor or of the perpetrator when appropriate. This notion of appropriateness often bears ground in gender dynamics. In Iraq, it is much more appropriate to eliminate the victim when she is a woman than when he is a man. In the case of Abu Ghraib detainees, for instance, a woman is more likely to be killed by her family upon release than is a man. One reason for this is that she is deemed responsible for having being arrested and could have been raped in prison, and because no one wants to take chances, it is best to eliminate her. I have yet to find a similar incident involving a male detainee. In fact, many men that I interviewed often openly stated that they had been sexually abused while detained by Coalition troops and had regained their honor by taking part in insurgency operations. This will be analyzed at length in future chapters.

**THE CONCEPT OF ASABIYYA**

As explained previously, humiliation in a shame society is translated as the loss of collective honor. The tarnishing of that honor can be felt by the entire social network at different stages of the social pyramidal structure, illustrated in Iraq by the concept of *asabiyya* or family spirit. According to S. al-Khayyat, an author who explores issues pertaining
to honor and shame in modern Iraq, *asabiyya* is in direct relation to Bedouin tribal values that have dominated Iraqi mentality throughout the four centuries that preceded the end of the Ottoman domination of Mesopotamia during World War I. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, territories that constitute modern-day Iraq were gradually assimilated into the Ottoman Empire as three provinces, those of Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra. According to the Ottoman style of ruling, those provinces came under the direct rule of an elite of *mamluk* pashas whose domination was maintained through a system of political alliances with powerful Arab tribal chieftaincies in Baghdad and Basra, as well as Kurdish princes themselves loyal to the Jalili overlords of Mosul. Under the domination of those chieftaincies and principalities came tribes and clans whose social order was maintained by a Bedouin tribal value system of patriarchal domination, the driving force of which revolved around honor. Those pyramidal sociopolitical alliances reinforced the predominance of *asabiyya* to areas of dwelling, literally “loyalty toward a living area,” as opposed to a loyalty invested in a centrally organized state or even in the tribe. Modern-day Iraq is composed of approximately 150 tribes, themselves composed of the alliance of approximately 2,000 clans, closely related to geographical locations. In an attempt to understand the Iraqi pyramidal system of social organization, one can assert that loyalty is primarily felt toward the immediate family, the extended family, the district or village from where one’s family originates, the clan to which the family belongs, and, last, the tribe. While the significance of family ties is crucial, the importance of district or village ties is equally relevant. As al-Khayyat puts it, “a boy from the city ‘will feel *asabiyya* in relation to his district instead of his tribe.’”

It is for this reason that Saddam Hussein gave most key positions in his governments to family and individuals that came from around the town of Tikrit. Situated on the bank of the Tigris, a hundred miles from Baghdad, Tikrit played a central role in the life of Saddam Hussein. In fact, its inhabitants were his only trusted allies. An illustration of this can be found in the prominence of the village of al-Dhour, in the vicinity of Tikrit, where Saddam found refuge after his failed assassination attempt of Iraq’s Prime Minister Abdul Karim Qassim in 1959, where he reemerged in 1997 in a pompous visit after seven years of absence from public life since the Gulf War, and his last place of refuge before being captured in December 2003.

Of importance is the significance of district *asabiyya* to a context of occupation. In Iraq, where an isolated incident involving members of different families, districts, clans, or tribes may have direct consequences at every one of these levels, the importance of buying reparations as
early as possible in the chain of *asabiyya* is vital to the survival of as many as possible in an unfolding conflict. Because reparation will be sought sooner or later, it is best to put an end to the tit-for-tat chain of retaliation before an entire city, for instance, sets itself against another entire city or group of people. As will be explained later in relation to Fallujah, immediate reparations after the outrage suffered by a family might have prevented the conflict from escalating to the level of the city of Fallujah, bound to restore its collective honor as a result of a very local incident.

**WHAT IS HUMILIATION IN AN IRAQI CONTEXT?**

Let us examine the many ways in which members of the social pyramid may feel humiliated. As Iraq is defined as a shame society, it is understood that the imposition of shame stems from a loss of honor. In Arabic, there are three different ways to refer to honor: *sharaf*, *ihtiram*, and *ird*.

These terms are not interchangeable and refer to very specific states of honor.

The first one, *sharaf*, represents a high rank or nobility that can be obtained at birth or through benevolent or heroic actions. In the case of Saddam Hussein, born into a modest family and raised by a single mother, *sharaf* was obviously obtained through actions, benevolent or not, before his humble origins were carefully erased from public discourse as years went by, this through the “discovery” of far-fetched ties to Prophet Muhammad. Under Saddam Hussein’s rule, *sharaf* was closely linked to the status that one had as a member of the Baath Party. The higher was the rank and the greater the allegiance to Saddam Hussein, the higher was the sense of *sharaf*. This appropriated sense of honor concerned thousands of Baath Party officials and high-ranking civil servants.

Another expression of honor is *ihtiram*, which refers to the monopoly of physical force that an individual might wield over others. In a highly patriarchal society such as Iraq, *ihtiram* falls only within the realm of masculinity, and is therefore appropriated to a minority of men who dominate others through the monopoly of force gained by their sociopolitical status. Under Saddam Hussein’s regime, *ihtiram* was held by those carrying out state repression such as the Mukhabarat (Saddam’s secret police) and high-ranking members of the armed forces and the police. While most Iraqis possess weapons in their homes, *ihtiram* should not be confused with weapon ownership. The degree of physical force that it is supposed to symbolize is meant to instill fear into the population in general. Numerous are the authors who have accounted for the sheer
fear that Saddam Hussein and his secret police used to generate in people’s minds. Referring to the Saddam regime and its legendary brutality, the U.S. journalist John Lee Anderson recalls: “The only real evidence I had of its crimes was what I had read in books and newspaper accounts and human rights reports, but there was also the eloquently deadly pall of silence I had found inside Iraq, where no one ever dared say anything against Saddam. Such silence, I understood, could come only from an extraordinary degree of fear.”26 Such silence and the fear that caused it were the astounding manifestation of the degree to which Saddam’s regime itself possessed *ihtiram*.

A third representation of honor can be found in *ird*, which is the only type of honor that every man in Iraq possesses and that represents the preservation of a woman’s purity. Women are the most dangerous people in Iraq. They are considered a prime vector of shame. In a typically Freudian fashion, women are thought to be creatures whose sexuality is simply uncontrollable. Therefore, when a man desires a woman, this desire is thought to have been caused only by the woman. This means that women are doubly feared. Not only can women bewitch men into committing adultery; their irresponsible actions can also cast shame onto the entire family and social network. Because of this, they must be closely watched at all times, along with their purity, their *ird*. The preservation of this *ird* is closely linked to the family structure and therefore tends to be attended to by immediate family members, such as a father, a brother, or a first cousin, in case of transgression, suspected or real. In a case of adultery, for instance, the woman, vector of shame for her immediate family, is most likely to be killed or punished by a sibling or parent.27 This is honor killing, the culling of the sexually deviant female relative to cleanse the family honor.

**RELATIVES OR STRANGERS? OCCIDENTALISM AT THE ONSET OF NEW IRAQ**

Because Iraq is a shame society, to whose structural functioning the safeguard of honor is vital, these different types of honor make it very difficult for cultural outsiders not to commit blunders and sometimes-irreparable mistakes when first circulating in it. Whether it is regarding gender relations, social status, or power interactions, a guilt society member, or *Homo culpabilis*, will undoubtedly be lost when first parachuted in front of a shame society member, or *Homo dedecorus*.28 Before analyzing specific mistakes, however, it is crucial to cast aside any hint of clash of civilizations. An illustration of the blatant cultural differences that exist between shame and guilt societies is in no way, shape, or form
referring to a clash of civilizations. The reason for this is that Iraq, although a shame society, has been opened to occidental culture for many years, in more than one way.

As a matter of fact, the secular nature of Baath Party ideology meant that, following Nasserite tradition in 1960s Egypt, where Saddam Hussein spent years of exile from 1959 to 1963, men and women both used to belong to the public sphere of Iraqi social life. In his blatantly partial praise of Saddam Hussein’s regime, the author Fouad Matar recounts how Iraq’s president always emphasized in his writings and public addresses the equal place that men and women should have in Baathist Iraq. He was, for instance, the first person to bring his wife, Sajidah, to the Baghdad Turf Club, where all high-ranking male Baath Party members could engage in sports and elaborate lounging.29 In a country where most restaurants park women in rooms deceptively called “family rooms,” usually somewhere very hot in between a smoky kitchen and foul-smelling lavatories, this move was nothing short of a cultural revolution.30 Moreover, on the issue of inherently deviant female sexuality, and on the necessity for women to cover their heads to avoid being attacked by “temporarily insane” men, he was reported to have asserted that it was first and foremost the duty of men to control themselves, thus debunking another fundamental of Iraqi culture to the benefit of secular values prominent in Western countries.31

Another casual example of cultural differences not necessarily being a clash of civilizations is a conversation I had with my driver, Mohammed, and my translator, Haida, in a restaurant in al-Mansur, a residential district of Baghdad, in May 2003.32 The conversation topic was inevitably the foreign occupation of their country and the many cultural blunders committed by overstretched and sometimes inadequately trained troops who started to be more and more on the defensive in their daily interactions with Iraqis. Recalling a specific incident when our car came face-to-face with a tank named “Crusader 2” earlier that day, Mohammed was furious and tried to explain what bad taste such a name was when taking into account the impact that the Crusades have had on Arab lives and collective memory.33 None of us at the time knew that Crusader is the name of a British-made World War II era tank. To Mohammed, the name Crusader could only mean one thing: the Christian Crusades against Islam. The thousand-year-old trauma, transferred across generations, that the Crusades have left in Mohammed’s psyche seemed intense. He used strong terms such as massacre, invasion, slavery, humiliation, subjugation, and many more.34 As he seemingly relived all nine Crusades in the Middle East in an intense ten-minute monologue, he ended with an expected, “I hate the West!” At this point, his colleague
Haida ironically pointed out that he was wearing jeans, eating a hot dog drowned in ketchup, and answering a cell phone whose ring was nothing less than the Confederate anthem “Dixie.” Haida also pointed out that Mohammed’s dream was to one day go and live in the United States, to which Mohammed incredulously replied: “So what?” Despite illustrating the obvious openness that many Iraqis still had toward Western culture and its way of life in 2003, this tragicomic situation is of crucial importance for several reasons. First, it illustrates a blatant clash of perceptions in terms of history and politics that two different social environments might have when using the same name. To U.S. soldiers, who were convinced of their involvement in a good versus evil combat, this name could have been used to boost their morale and validate their involvement in a “just war.” To a self-conscious Muslim, this name could mean nothing but a blatant insult. Two worlds had involuntarily stumbled on one noun. Second, it illustrates the latent trauma that the Crusades left on Arab collective memory and the callousness with which these were used by soldiers not aware of the impact their display might have on a host population they were supposed to have saved from an evil ruler. However, when it is not being invoked involuntarily, this collective memory does not translate into daily resentment. While the trauma exists, the fact that Mohammed hopes to some day migrate to the United States shows that both cultural environments know each other as distant cousins that are still part of the same global family. Cultural exchanges between these two cousins are to be considered when trying to understand their relationships.

For instance, part of Saddam’s Baath Party ideology was to take the best from the West and to transpose it to Iraqi culture, in a rationale some scholars refer to as Occidentalism, the stereotyped Eastern views on the West.35 The vast architectural renovations that Baghdad underwent in the 1970s and 1980s illustrate this. In an effort to modernize Baghdad, Saddam tore down entire neighborhoods to build sterile apartment blocks in a semi-Oriental contemporary style that was referred to as Islamic style.36 While it is undeniable that sharing culture is much deeper than sharing food, clothes, and music, this type of sharing, however trivial it can appear, is at times a last-ditch effort against outright rejection. This observation leads to a third matter of importance: that at the time of this writing, more than five years into the occupation of Iraq, restaurants are still being bombed, burned, and forcibly closed for serving Western food such as pizza, hot dogs, or Pepsi.37 In the part of Iraq that used to be controlled by al-Qaeda before the Sunni Awakening initiative, analyzed in Chapter 6, men were being shot for having Western haircuts, women were rarely seen in public, and when they did
venture outside their homes, they did so wearing the traditional *abayia*, a black cloak, or at least a simple headscarf. This drastic change illustrates the fact that in the four years that have followed the invasion of Iraq, some spoiling elements within Iraqi society have sought to transform cousins into strangers. An understanding of humiliation attempts to partly explain the reasons for the establishment of spoilers within the post-Saddam Iraqi equation. While spoilers are currently seeking to estrange *Homo dedecorus* from *Homo culpabilis*, it is important to understand that a drastic division has yet to be achieved, and if it is achieved, that it does not have to be irreversible. The mechanisms that are facilitating this current rift will be identified subsequently.

**ON SPOILERS AND NEW IRAQ**

While it takes only two to tango, many more parties can bring Iraq into an abyss in very little time. In light of past political developments, it is safe to assume that Iraq is currently occupied by at least three foreign entities: the United States, which is the main troop contributor to the current Multi-National Force–Iraq; Iran, a powerful neighbor supporting both Shiite militias and Sunni foreign fighters; and al-Qaeda in Iraq, an original group of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi whose rise will be explained at length in subsequent chapters. In light of this, Iraq barely stands a chance to rebuild itself, let alone survive in a state of political status quo.

These three entities, among many others, can be referred to as spoilers, that is, actors who, knowingly or not, actively derail the process of peace building. This particular definition of spoilers can be considered problematic, as it departs from most literature on the subject. Usually, spoilers are referred to as such in terms of group activity that aggressively seeks to derail a process of conflict settlement. This orthodox definition, however, seems to be too narrow in a current Iraqi context. First, spoiling can take several forms that are not necessarily violent, such as political pressure or lobbying. Second, spoiling can also occur by omission. This work contends that humiliation also constitutes an act of spoiling, and that although it may be unintentional, it can often result in the derailment of a peace process and further escalation of conflict between parties. It is clear that the intention of building peace does not exonerate any actor from taking into account all parameters that could derail a process. My contention here is that humiliation, a crucial parameter, was not taken seriously in the years that followed the invasion of Iraq, let alone in the months preceding the invasion itself. In this context, the simple argument that one was not aware should not
absolve that actor from wrongdoing. In the same way that some literature speaks increasingly of state terrorism, state spoiling also exists, by omission or not. Third, most literature on spoiling does not take into account the escalation risk that exists in all peace processes. Far too often, peace is taken for granted, and the role of conflict prevention in a peace process is not understood to be as crucial as the role of negotiations, the establishment of compensations to injured parties, and political, social, or economic reconstruction measures. In fact, the mere exclusion of one group can spoil the long-term establishment of peace. The case of Iraq is not free of those shortcomings. The role that humiliation plays in fostering exclusion at many levels of the Iraqi social construct merely accentuated the rifts that exist between *Homo culpabilis* and *Homo dedecorus*. That rift, however, was not evident in the first weeks that followed the invasion of Iraq.

**MISCALCULATIONS**

The period that followed the invasion did provide a window of opportunity for peace to be able to grow and sustain itself in the long term. To begin with, a significant majority of the Iraqi population supported the ousting of Saddam Hussein. This support was not necessarily found along a polarized Sunni-Shiite sectarian divide. While it was impossible to carry out opinion polls before the invasion of the country to determine the percentage of the population that favored a regime change, the sheer number of newspapers that mushroomed in Baghdad a few weeks after the fall of Saddam Hussein suggests that the freedom Iraq was granted was well received. Also, sectarian divisions in Iraq were not as strong as occupation authorities had assumed in the spring and summer of 2003. It should not be forgotten that Saddam’s opponents were also numerous within the Sunni community, and that, as a sheer reflection of Iraqi demographics, Saddam Hussein’s ruling Baath Party counted more Shiite than Sunni membership. While isolated incidents involving Iraqis against Coalition troops were almost automatically attributed to desperate Saddam loyalists or remnants, a conversation I had in December 2003 with a Fallujah resident in charge of centralizing all grassroots movements against the Coalition in his town proves this assertion naive at best. Interviewed three days after the capture of Saddam Hussein, this man asserted that many more people he knew would take advantage of Saddam’s capture to join the resistance. Asked why, he replied that many had been afraid that if they took part in the insurgency, they would be helping Saddam’s return to power, and that because he had been captured, they could now feel free to engage in armed resistance for
the sovereignty of their country from both foreign powers and a dictator-
ship. I obtained the same response from the brother of Abdul Razak
al-Lamy, a Shiite cleric who was rolled over by an American tank in
early December 2003, just as his car ran out of gas on the side of a road
upon his return from the infamous Abu Ghraib prison. Abdul had been
trying to obtain the release of some neighbors who were held captive
there, the exact same occupation that he had under Saddam’s rule, as
his brother Ali ironically pointed out. It was in this man’s house that I
learned that Saddam Hussein had been captured. While his family was
clearly delighted by the news, Ali said: “I am glad that they got Saddam,
but I also want them out for our country to be free at last.”41 In Decem-
ber 2003, many Iraqis, Shiite and Sunnis alike, seemed to converge in
condemning the occupation of their country.

In the spring of 2003, while the Coalition sought to establish its oc-
cupation of Iraq on the basis that its departure would trigger a civil
war, most Iraqis I met deemed such a catastrophic scenario laughable.
While some invoked the fact that many tribes in Iraq were of mixed reli-
gious composition, hence the seeming ridiculousness of even mentioning
a potential Sunni-Shiite civil war, others candidly asserted that the only
positive legacy of Saddam’s regime was a very strong sense of Iraqi na-
tionalism. I was made to realize that, after all, both Sunnis and Shiites
took part in the war against Iran from 1980 to 1988. Divisions there
were, but not along ethnic lines, at least for Sunnis and Shiites. While an
obvious division remained as to the status of the Kurdish people of Iraq,
who were promised a state of autonomy in exchange for their uncon-
ditional support for the U.S.-led invasion, another less obvious division
was between Iraqis who had stayed and those who had fled and lived
in comfortable exile for years. This tension also rose in light of growing
concerns about the Western occupation of Iraq. On May 24, 2003, the
Shiite cleric Mohammed Bakr al-Hakim made a triumphant return to
Karbala from Iran, where he had lived in exile for twenty-three years.
Followers attending his Friday sermon did so with much disdain, how-
ever. One man approached the group I was part of and asserted that even
though al-Hakim had suffered at the hands of Saddam, he did not repre-
sent the people who stayed behind and endured the dictatorship in their
daily lives. This feeling was reiterated in many conversations regarding
exiles, who were believed either to have betrayed Iraq for not staying in
their country of origin or to have colluded with Western powers to take
part in what was increasingly considered an occupation. A very interest-
ing point was made by al-Hakim on that day. He was thankful for the
regime change, but he pleaded for the United States to leave Iraq alone
and not become an occupier.42 This point did not bring him salvation,
as he was killed in a car bomb in Najaf a few weeks later. It is in this context that the Coalition’s role in Iraq shifted from that of a liberator to that of an occupier.

Could it have been different? Was the Coalition bound to fail from the day it stepped foot on Iraqi territory? An analysis of colonial humiliation in the first few weeks of Iraq’s occupation will help to understand how the United States became a spoiler by omission in relation to postinvasion relative peace and how the country later plunged into sectarian chaos. Given that humiliation in Iraq has been characterized by the loss of sharaf, ihtiram, and ird, it is relevant to understand how these emerged in the daily rapport between Coalition troops and Iraqis in the first half of 2003.

THE ORIGINAL SIN

In May 2003, Paul L. Bremer, the U.S. administrator of Iraq in charge of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), also known as the U.S. proconsul, issued the first two orders of his term that many qualify as representing the U.S. original sin in post-Saddam Iraq. These orders, the “De-Baathification of Iraqi Society” and the “Dissolution of Entities with Annex A,” respectively, stood for the outlawing of the Baath Party, a purge of all high-ranking party officials from government posts, which included the four ranks officially known as “senior party members” as well as the top three layers of management in the Iraqi public sector, and the disbanding of the Iraqi Army. These two sweeping orders affected an estimated 32,000 to 85,000 civil servants and about 400,000 members of the armed forces, according to the Washington Post correspondent Doug Struck. According to Bremer’s memoirs, the rationale behind those two decisions was to build a “New Iraq” that would not bear the ghosts of past Baath Party rule. Because Saddam Hussein’s rule represented a brutal dictatorship in the eyes of many Iraqis, any remnant of this former regime had to be eliminated. This initiative stemmed from the post–World War II Germany’s denazification policies, which were thought to have paved the way for the country’s successful reconstruction.

The two main architects of de-Baathification were the Iraqi exiles Kanan Makiya and Ahmad Chalabi, whose common vision of a new and improved Iraq, for better and for worse motivations, merged when they sat side by side in an airplane nine years before the 2003 invasion of Iraq. For whose benefit was the simplistic analogy of Baathist equals Nazi presented? Because World War II had a limited impact in Iraq in comparison to Europe, this analogy was not as resounding to Iraqis as it
might have been to those in the West. In the eyes of former Baath Party members, these two orders were a quick fix to the increasing embarrassment that the elusive search for weapons of mass destruction (WMD) was causing Coalition forces in front of the international community. Many found this offensive and called it retributive justice in a political context that should have called for national reconciliation.48

While Bremer’s first motivation was a show of force against a naively singled-out part of the Iraqi population, a more pragmatic reason might have stemmed from short-term thinking. According to Dan Senor, former chief spokesman for the Coalition, CPA Orders 1 and 2 were geared toward the Iraqi Shiite majority as a means for the Coalition to gain its political support.49 This was at a time when leaders such as Mohammed Bakr al-Hakim were openly referring to the U.S. presence in Iraq as an occupation, paving the way for unrest in a clear effort to gain political leverage.50 In the spring of 2003, as time was pressing for the U.S.-led Coalition to strengthen its support on the ground, both with the Kurds and with the Shiites, the two orders were expected to put out immediate fires. Evidence from the ground suggests that a recruiting of Shiite support might have been the true and sole motivation for Orders 1 and 2. Former Iraqi Air Force Brigadier General Nadhom M. recalls:

Because I had been promoted to General, I was supposed to serve at the Baghdad al-Bakr Air Base, but since I was a Sunni, the commandment sent me to watch over a Shiite colleague who had been appointed to run the al-Motasen Air Base in my village of Doloyia, in the Salaheddin province. The day Baghdad fell, my Shiite colleague, Colonel Ala Abdul H., left the base for his village near Hilla and organized for everything he could find to go with him: air conditioners, vehicles, and even a tractor. He told me that I should take at least a few air conditioners to keep them safe from looters. I knew that as the summer was approaching, I might be tempted to use them for my own house, so I refused. Besides, I knew very well that no one was ever going to return all this to the state of Iraq. Colonel Ala then worked for U.S. contractors for a little while before being called back into the army. I wasn’t called back, and why exactly? Because I am a Sunni. Ala was also a high-ranking Baath Party member, but no one ever came to de-Baathify him, did they?51

This recollection signifies that in the same way that the Saddam Hussein regime favored Sunni Muslims over Shiites, never fully trusting the latter to be fully in charge of strategic locations such as the
al-Motasen Air Base, Orders 1 and 2 as well as the de-Baathification commission might have applied double standards according to the sectarian origins of former Baath Party members, thus victimizing a large segment of the Iraqi population at a time when a coordinated insurgency remained to be formed. In that particular case, both individuals were high-ranking officers in Saddam Hussein’s army, yet only one, though publicly known as a looter and a corrupt individual, was allowed to return to work thanks to his religious affiliation.

HUMILIATION, POLARIZATION, AND ORDERS 1 AND 2

The de-Baathification initiated by the CPA called for all former party members to sign a form in which they abjured their membership. In doing so, they also were made to approve the following statement: “I will obey the laws of Iraq and all proclamations, orders and instructions of the Coalition Provisional Authority.” After delivering a copy of this document to my hotel, a former Baath Party member and Baghdad University professor pondered: “Can you tell me what is so different? I was obliged to join the party and I am now obliged to leave it. Not only this, I have lost my job and my students will not be able to graduate this year. All this to make a point? To whom exactly? To us Iraqis or to the American taxpayer? Coercion is the only thing that I can see here, once again!”

In his memoirs, Bremer recalls a similar reaction by someone likening his de-Baathification order to fascism, to which he bluntly replied: “Since the objective of the order was to dismantle an avowedly fascist party, this comment struck me as particularly stupid.”

I must have met a very high concentration of “stupid” Iraqis in the spring of 2003, as a majority of them, Sunnis and Shiite alike, heavily criticized what they called a victimizing policy that they feared would accentuate the security vacuum from which post-Saddam Iraq was suffering. Bremer’s comment highlights the abyss that separated good intentions from optimal results in the first few months that followed the fall of Saddam Hussein. Later in his book, Bremer asserts that both he and his team realized that the de-Baathification process had the potential to marginalize many former officials. As a matter of fact, the party counted an estimated 2 million members who were not all ideological followers of Saddam Hussein, as they had either joined the Baath Party to survive Saddam’s brutal regime and/or did not have blood on their hands. Should this constitute a truthful recollection of the past, one might candidly wonder why de-Baathification actually took place. Could the CPA have knowingly become a sorcerer’s apprentice? Surely it could have
evaluated this move as potentially risky for the liberator image that the Coalition was seeking to maintain at all costs. Everything about this policy, including the language of the document that former Baath Party members had to sign, bore in the eyes of ordinary Iraqis the hallmarks of an occupation and was internalized as highly humiliating. The role that humiliation plays in the collective perception of these orders is striking. Overnight, thousands of Iraqis were stripped of their sharaf, nobility granted by their belonging to a political elite, and their ihtiram, a monopoly of coercion through the threat of physical force mostly found in Iraqi armed and security forces. This collective stripping of honor, this collective humiliation of thousands of Iraqis on part of the CPA, can be seen as the first step toward a collective polarization against what was increasingly being viewed as an occupation force.

What were these thousands of disenfranchised Iraqis to do to reclaim this lost honor? An analysis of the immediate consequences of the de-Baathification and dissolution of the country’s security forces will shed light on the answer to this question.

Here is a simplified explanation of the immediate consequences of the de-Baathification of Iraq: Regardless of the political implications attached to the invasion of Iraq, imagine a university that changes management overnight and a new management that refuses to work with any staff member recruited by its predecessors. Instead, it counts on a handful of qualified staff and fills the remainder of academic positions with individuals from the neighborhood with no or very limited experience in teaching, research, administration, project management, and so on. Overnight, the next-door neighbor who happens to also be a local historian in her spare time becomes a university professor in charge of maintaining the academic excellence of the university’s history department. Despite her best intentions to make things work, one might foresee a few challenges ahead due to her lack of training, experience, and academic qualifications. Now imagine this scenario multiplied to the infinite and applied to governmental ministries, security services, banks, hospitals, airlines, and so on. Even with the best of intentions, one might foresee a few problems for many to adjust to their new functions, to say the least, and for the country’s trains to run on time.

PEOPLE WITH GUNS

According to a U.S. official in charge of training personnel in the Baghdad Police Academy, Iraqi security forces never recovered from the de-Baathification, for several reasons. First and most important, many experienced law enforcement professionals were cast aside to the benefit
of poorly trained individuals with strong political ties to opposition factions and sometimes even organized crime. The Iraqi police, it should be noted, was not only Saddam Hussein’s castigating arm but also prevented the activities of organized crime networks, monitored the movements of Islamic parties, which had been tolerated only after the 1991 Gulf War, and considerably limited criminality in all its forms, including the prevention of outbursts of the socially deprived as seen during the looting of Baghdad in April 2003. One recurring, and double-edged, argument of Baghdadis at the time, both Sunnis and Shiites, was that under Saddam’s rule, at least the streets were safe.\(^57\) Second, some of the key security personnel who could have been rehabilitated with hindsight either left the country or joined the insurgency in the immediate months that followed the promulgation of Orders 1 and 2.\(^58\) This situation regarding the police can be transferred to all key Iraqi ministries that were to help in the rebuilding of Iraq in the spring of 2003, a time of crucial importance for the Coalition to surf on its liberation wave and keep providing all basic services that the Baathist welfare state used to provide, such as electricity, running water, health care, and so on.\(^59\) In the case of health care, de-Baathification meant that the Ministry of Health was in chaos and unable to coordinate international aid until a CPA-designated official took over in later summer 2003 and allegedly favored inadequate contractors with ties to the U.S. Republican Party for reconstruction bids.\(^60\) Cases in which hospitals were never built are now under investigation.\(^61\)

As for the disbanding of the army, its immediate repercussions constitute a no-brainer for any army professional. Asked about the disbanding of the army by the CPA, a U.S. Special Forces officer replied: “I had my guys coming up to me and saying, ‘Does Bremer realize that there are [four hundred thousand] of these guys out there and they all have guns?’ They all have to feed their families. . . . The problem with the blanket ban is that you get rid of the infrastructure; I mean, after all, these guys ran the country, and you polarize them. So did these decisions contribute to the insurgency? Unequivocally, yes. And we have to ask ourselves: How well did we really know how to run Iraq? Zero.”\(^62\) This comment can account for the rapid deterioration of the security situation that occurred in Iraq from May 2003 to the fall of 2003.

I have interviewed several former members of the Iraqi armed forces between 2003 and 2007. One story particularly resonates with the preceding comment. Former Brigadier General Nadhom M. recounts the first few months after the invasion:

We all became jobless overnight, and did not know what to do. Bremer says in his book that we got pensions, this is not true. I was
given only $120 as a one-time payment, and I didn’t even go to collect it. It was one more way for them to humiliate us. So, what to do? Since me and my colleagues had always been secular, there was no way that we were going to join Islamic groups. I got a job with a French company so I didn’t have time to participate in any of this, but many of them wanted to fight the occupation, so they formed their own tiny groups and started to irritate the Americans, in the same way that a mosquito could bite a giant. Their firepower was way inferior to Coalition troops, so they patiently set to wear them out, day in, day out.63

This statement accounts for the establishment of what was to become the Islamic Army in Iraq (IAI), a secular movement, despite its name, geared toward ending the foreign occupation of Iraq.64 According to Nadhom M., although the disbanding of the Iraqi Army is only one of several reasons that led to the establishment of the IAI, it precipitated it greatly. It can therefore be considered a structural cause to the establishment of a nationalist insurgency movement over time. Other reasons that account for the emergence of nationalist groups such as the IAI can be found in the engineering and the intentional crystallization of sectarian divisions existing between Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds, as well as the daily interaction between ordinary Iraqis and Coalition troops.

It was not until November 2003, when the insurgency started to flare up against U.S. troops, and more than six months after Order 1 was declared, that the CPA set up Iraq’s Supreme National Commission for De-Baathification, where former officials could appeal the decision that made them pariahs.65 Despite its establishment, the commission continued with prior polarization, victimization, and cheap analogies to Nazi Germany.66 The commission did not help in the case of Sihama Khalaf, the former principal of a small government-run school, who more than two years after being fired was still not able to return to work.67 She had faithfully filled out all the necessary paperwork for her appeal, including letters from peers and pupils’ parents certifying that she had not committed any atrocities. However, at the time of her interview by U.S. journalist Doug Struck in 2005, the commission still had not reviewed her case, let alone given her a pension, as had been promised by both the commission and the CPA. Khalaf’s case is not isolated.

In effect, the de-Baathification order crippled the country’s administration, facilitated the spread of crime, and hindered the reconstruction of infrastructure whose functioning was of vital importance to the support that the Iraqi population was expected to grant the Coalition in future months. It is undeniable that this helped attract support for an
organized insurgency. One of the most effective arguments of any insurgency force is to show a population whose support it seeks that the state or occupying power is not guaranteeing its safety or guaranteeing the population’s day-to-day well being. In fact, Orders 1 and 2 facilitated the future establishment of insurgency forces, by way of antagonizing a large segment of the Iraqi population against the Coalition.

As a consequence of the worsening security situation and upon realization that the Coalition was losing its struggle for peace in post-Saddam Iraq, Paul Bremer publicly admitted in April 2004 that the de-Baathification order had been “poorly implemented” and applied “unevenly and unjustly.” As a result, Iraq’s Supreme National Commission for De-Baathification was dissolved two months later, only to be allowed to resume its activities after a while by the Iraqi government elected in January 2005.

AN ATTRACTIVE SCRIPT

From the preinvasion phase to very early on into the occupation of Iraq, the Sunni Muslim population was stigmatized as being in complete collusion with the government of Saddam Hussein. In a self-congratulatory opinion piece on his tenure in Iraq, an unrepentant Bremer keeps referring to “the formerly ruling Sunnis,” “rank-and-file Sunnis,” “responsible Sunnis,” and “the old Sunni Regime.” At the time of the invasion, Iraqi Sunnis were understood to be the faithful servants of the Baathist dictatorship, the arm of terror, the disciples who were unquestioningly following orders.

Nothing could be further from the truth. While it is undeniable that Saddam favored many Sunnis over Shiite, as the story of Nadhom M. illustrates, the concept of asabiyya mentioned earlier meant that Saddam favored only people from his area: Tikrit. For instance, one of the most renowned tribes from the Anbar Province, for instance, the Buisha tribe, was always openly defiant of Saddam’s government. In the same way that the Shiite district of Sadr City is now renowned as the outlaw area of Baghdad, where one can obtain all sorts of fake administrative papers, from fake birth certificates to fake car registration plates, under Saddam’s rule, the Sunni Muslim Buisha tribe in Anbar Province was the main contact for ordinary Iraqi citizens to obtain these services. This tribe was renowned for its falling out with Saddam, and as a result, its members were not favored by his administration. Saddam’s brutal dictatorship meant that all opponents were to be castigated, whether Sunni or Shiite, and that, despite a few exceptions, all key government offices were run by Tikritis from or close to Saddam’s family.
Regarding sectarian issues in Iraq, the vision of U.S. leaders, particularly that of Paul Bremer, was, at best, extremely naive, as if, once again, Iraq had to be understood in the most simplistic way by the world, and most important, by the American taxpayer.

In an article highlighting Paul Bremer’s monumental errors of judgment after the invasion of Iraq, U.S. analyst Nir Rosen asserts that, in an effort to make the war digestible to the American public, as well as a U.S. administration largely ignorant of the complexities of Iraqi politics, the CPA resorted to grossly inadequate analogies in invoking examples such as the Rwandan genocide or Nazi Germany. Thus, when mentioning the tensions that existed between Saddam Hussein’s regime and oppressed minorities, while conveniently omitting to mention that the Baath Party counted more Shiite than Sunni membership, Rosen asserts that Bremer “treats Iraqis as if they were Hutus and Tutsis,” while “at least a third of the famous deck of cards of Iraqi leaders most wanted by the Americans were Shiites.” Rosen then asserts that if one was to strictly abide by this simplistic analogy, Shiites, who made up the majority of the Baath Party, ought to have been labeled as Iraqi “Nazis” and Sunnis as “Jews.” Could the CPA not have resorted to a less insulting political analysis?

And to whose benefit was this travesty? Chris Toey, a soldier of the 1st Battalion of the 82nd Airborne Division’s 2nd Brigade, comprising the five companies that were sent to Fallujah in April 2003, recalls: “We were sent straight from Afghanistan, where we were given a bit of cultural training about our mission there. We were told that Iraq was just ‘same thing, different place,’ and that the Talibans of Iraq were the Sunnis. That made things so simple to us: Osama bin Laden equals Talibans equal Iraqi Sunnis, a no-brainer really.” He follows: “When we got to Fallujah, a Sunni town, we knew what we had to do, and more importantly who we had to fear: just about everyone.”

While one can be tempted to say that the rest is history, a close look at Fallujah reveals how the Sunni versus Shiite script and its crystallization in the eyes of the world, and more important in the eyes of Coalition soldiers, led to a polarization that directly accounts for the establishment of a nationalist insurgency.

THE COMPLEXITIES OF FALLUJAH

Fallujah, situated in the heart of Anbar Province, about forty-five miles east of Baghdad, is a tightly knit tribal and religious community. Even under Saddam Hussein’s regime, though economically favored by the government, it had the reputation of being administered in a
semiautonomous manner by the tribes that make up its population of approximately 350,000 inhabitants. Known as the City of Mosques, as it boasted about two hundred Muslim temples before sixty of them were destroyed by two U.S. campaigns in April and November 2004, Fallujah was always known for its deep sense of religious orthodoxy, tradition, and strict gender roles. In Spartan Fallujah, superfluous distractions such as restaurants or cinemas have come into existence only after serious teething problems. Rosen recalls, for instance, that when the first restaurant was opened in town in the 1980s, it was immediately blown up, as residents felt ashamed at having restaurants because they were perfectly capable of receiving guests in their own houses. It was only after the same restaurant was rebuilt a third time, after being blown up twice, that it became a permanent fixture in town, and the same fate was reserved for the first cinema a few years later.

The people of Fallujah have always had a reputation for being resistant to change and for being probably the most conservative and toughest people in Iraq. In the face of this already-alarming singularity, an extra zest of complexity was embodied by the extra importance of the concept of fiz’a, a term related to asabiyya, under which, if a tribal or family friend experiences hardship, one has to defend him at all costs. For these reasons, while the rest of Iraq experienced heavy looting after the fall of Baghdad, Fallujah remained under the tight control of its elders, tribal leaders, and local codes of honor and did not suffer any unrest when centralized order collapsed in Baghdad. As soon as Baathist-run local government institutions fell in early April 2003, tribal and religious leaders formed the Civil Management Council, which included a city manager and a mayor. Had the Coalition not reached Fallujah, this town might very well have continued to operate undisturbed.

While order remained in town, local families and tribes were also competing for political power. As power struggles existed within the Buisha tribe, the very same tribe that had always been openly defiant of Saddam Hussein’s power in the past, two of its sheikhs, Ghazi Sami al-Abed and Saradan Barakat, started to compete to win the sympathy of U.S. troops. As a result, in the early days of the occupation, Sheikh Ghazi of Fallujah organized numerous barbecues for U.S. Special Forces patrolling the region. Far from being an urban myth, this important though forgotten fact suggests that things could have gone very differently for Coalition troops in post-Saddam Iraq, and that the script according to which Fallujah was a “bad-ass town,” in the words of soldiers interviewed for this book, was not as obvious as it now appears. Had occupation authorities in Baghdad understood the complexities and uniqueness of this part of Iraq, as well as Iraq itself, a decentralized
scheme of Coalition control could well have been established by relying heavily on the existing competition between local sheikhs to keep tight political control over the region.

Instead of rivaling in their fight against the U.S. occupation, as soon became the case when local insurgency forces erupted later on in 2003, these same people could have competed for U.S. approval and validation, the same way in which before the sheikhs competed for the validation of supreme ruler Saddam Hussein. This scenario apparently was not even considered by Coalition authorities, who had decided very early on that Iraqi Sunnis were all Saddam loyalists and therefore could not be trusted. A one-size-fits-all rationale of political control was established, placing the overall burden of maintaining civil peace onto the shoulders of Coalition troops whose orders came from outside Anbar Province.81

“WE THROW THEM CANDY; THEY THROW US STONES”

In an effort to ensure the safety of Fallujah’s inhabitants, if only in the eyes of the Coalition, seven hundred soldiers from the 82nd Airborne Division deployed to Fallujah on April 23, 2003. Most of the division’s troops took over the former Baath Party headquarters in the center of the city, while approximately 150 men moved to the al-Qa’id primary school.82

Soon, the inhabitants of Fallujah came to disagree with what they viewed as the neocolonialist arbitrary takeover of a town that, according to them, was “running” perfectly.83 They deplored the fact that occupation authorities had to work in a centralized manner rather than rely on local capability that was already established. They deplored the fact that they had been deposed of their collective ihtiram, their collective monopoly of physical force. Soon, local residents started to publicly vent resentment of what they understood as the occupation of their city. Within twenty-four hours of the 82nd Airborne’s deployment to Fallujah, along with other U.S. troop deployment in Anbar Province, a first incident occurred in a nearby location, the town of al-Ramadi, in which two U.S. soldiers were injured by a hand grenade.84 As Fallujah’s local leaders met with Coalition troops on the same day, rumors started to spread about the behavior of U.S. soldiers, especially toward local women. Among those rumors, one could hear that soldiers’ night-vision goggles were used to observe women hanging laundry on the roofs of their houses, inappropriately staring at women, distributing to children bubble gum with pornographic pictures, and so on.85 As local clerics accepted these rumors as true, they rapidly became facts. To anyone with a basic understanding of Iraqi culture, this type of rumor ought to
have triggered an immediate response from the U.S. command on the ground, as the rumors were symptomatic of a rapidly spreading civilian alienation from Coalition troops. The rumors were accusing U.S. troops of deliberately transgressing the sacrosanct Iraqi honor code of *ird*, the preservation of Iraqi women’s purity, a form of direct humiliation that in Iraq usually warrants death. Because of this increasing polarization and the seriousness of some collective allegations, some influential local clerics decided that it had become potentially dangerous and alienating to meet with U.S. troops to discuss any issue. This was a second and very telling symptom of escalation that Coalition forces ought to have detected.86

As this polarization grew stronger, an escalation in the form of heavier U.S. raids throughout the city, triggered by increasing local aggressiveness, increased tensions between parties. Following an unfortunate chain of missed opportunities to defuse tensions, in what could be considered a self-fulfilling prophecy, Fallujah became the powder keg that every one had expected it to become.

On April 28, tensions were running high both in Fallujah and in the rest of Iraq. Because it was Saddam’s birthday, many foreign observers expected pro-Saddam demonstrations.87 As is usually the case with anniversary dates of an invasion, the toppling of a leader, or a terrorist attack, media outlets worldwide braced the general public for a looming threat. This was of course the case for U.S. soldiers in Fallujah, who were regularly told in morning pep talks of the significance of any day that could mean something to the enemy.88 One can safely assert that on April 28, both U.S. troops and Fallujah residents were heavily antagonized.

That evening, a spark materialized. Several demonstrations took place against both Saddam Hussein and the U.S. presence in Fallujah. Demonstrators shouted slogans against both the United States and Saddam in various parts of the city, and, as is usual in Iraqi family and public gatherings, shots were fired into the air. One demonstration took place in front of the local al-Qa’id primary school, where U.S. troops were stationed. Accounts of the events that followed differ greatly. According to Fallujah residents, U.S. soldiers opened fire at an unarmed crowd of demonstrators, killing twenty-seven people and injuring seventy-five. According to Coalition troops, U.S. troops came under direct fire and responded accordingly, killing ten protesters.89

I personally visited the site a few days after the event and found no ballistic evidence to suggest that the school building had been shot at, a fact also mentioned after an investigation by Human Rights Watch.90 According to a representative of the Coalition forces the absence of evidence on that particular building could have an explanation in the fact
that protesters missed their targets when firing at the school. While plausible, this interpretation does not match soldiers’ testimonies of “hearing the crack of bullets snapping over their heads” right before shooting at the crowds. How could bullets both miss the building and still come close enough to soldiers to warrant an armed response?

In any case, what followed was a classic case of spiral escalation of violence. The next day, while local residents mourned their dead, shouting for revenge to regain their lost *ibtiram*, U.S. troops raided parts of the town to find possible provocateurs who could have manipulated the crowd to open fire against them. People were arrested and weapons found, which is as surprising as finding running water in a New York City apartment. The manner in which the raids were carried out was appalling to local inhabitants: houses were forced open, women searched or “touched” in the eyes of residents, and some were arrested and sent to the Abu Ghraib prison because they did not want strange men to enter their houses while they were alone.

I recall a situation in which male members of one household were all rounded up in front of their family home, handcuffed, beaten in front of the women of their families, and later taken for questioning, only to return a few weeks later with no charges. I recall seeing a woman, a schoolmistress, alone in her house at the time of a raid, resorting to defend her honor in not allowing strange men into her house. As she held her AK-47 in defiance, a team stormed into her house and arrested her on suspicion of taking part in insurgent activities. She was later taken to Abu Ghraib. I remember talking to a man on a hospital bed, with three bullet wounds in his chest, telling me that he was wounded by stray bullets after trying to collect his children who were caught up in a raid while playing in front of their house. When I asked this man what he would do when he returned home, he said, “Join the insurgency of course!” After all these raids, often involving women, a collective ird had to be restored on top of a collective *ibtiram*.

Both parties felt that they had been victimized, offended, and disrespected, and that they deserved reparation. The tragedy, however, is that reparation for *Homo dedecorus* means blood or blood money, while for *Homo culpabilis* it means the establishment of a special panel of inquiry, a fair trial, or a sincerely heartfelt apology. In guilt societies, the organization of gentlemanly duels as a means of reparations are long gone, but not in Fallujah, where the concepts of *asabiyya* and *fiz’a* are part of everyday life. On April 30, a demonstration protesting against the harsh raids of the previous few days resulted in three more Iraqi deaths; once again, Coalition troops invoked deadly fire, revenge was sought, and raids were organized through town, until the next incident, which
triggered the same endless chain of events. By mid-June 2003, daily raids were carried out in the harshest of manners in response to daily attacks. No one understood how this violence had originated, with each side blaming the other instead of asking the obvious: how could this cycle of violence be broken?

A vicious circle of attack and revenge pervaded everyday life in Fallujah. More and more residents were either shot or sent to the nearby Abu Ghraib prison for resisting raids in their houses, possessing weapons, or just being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Meanwhile, somewhat ironically, U.S. troops in Fallujah were still trying to capture the hearts and minds of the local population. They built a soccer field, handed out soccer balls, and gave out sweets to children each time they patrolled the streets. In the words of Rosen: “They might have won over the children in the morning, but handing out candy by day and breaking down their houses to arrest Daddy at night was sending confusing signals.” By mid-June 2003, a confused military police officer confided: “We give them candy, they throw us stones.” That is the story of the U.S. occupation of post-Saddam Iraq.

Other troops, in comparison, fared much better in other parts of Iraq. This was the case of Korean troops observed in the northern city of Erbil. While it is true that they were not facing a politically hostile population, as the Kurds were in favor of removing Saddam Hussein from power, the fact that the Koreans did not behave aggressively and made a point of leaving their bases only to carry out humanitarian work partly accounts for the relative calm in northern provinces.

FROM POCKETS OF REBELLION TO WIDESPREAD INSURGENCY

The pattern of events in Fallujah was replicated in several other locations throughout Iraq during the summer of 2003. In the weeks following U.S. President George W. Bush’s infamous Mission Accomplished speech, Iraqi support for an emerging nationalist insurgency against what was perceived as a neocolonial occupation materialized either in direct involvement or in financial or indirect support. It took months of buildup for this massive popular resentment to register on the Coalition radar. It took months for the Coalition to realize that what it called “pockets of resistance” had become a widespread public insurgency in which ordinary human beings had decided to reclaim the honor lost through a collective sense of humiliation. In the meantime, other political currents bound to contend with Coalition troops on a more global arena started to emerge in post-Saddam
Iraq. Iraq was about to be occupied by another deadly foreign invader: al-Qaeda. Just as some well-intentioned Iraqi exiles had assisted Coalition forces in their invasion, others were recruited by foreign terrorist organizations for the same purpose, another invasion. A second phase of conflict started with the bombing of the UN office in Baghdad in August 2003.

Within this framework, a common denominator still united forces engaged in postconflict violence: humiliation. In the first instance, that of ad hoc violence perpetrated by the average Iraqi, the following chapter will explain how Iraqis found it necessary to organize themselves to take up arms as a last resort of restorative justice against a perceived occupier. In the second instance, we will examine the formation of al-Qaeda in Iraq. The following chapter will seek to understand how foreign groups seeking to establish a caliphate in post-Saddam Iraq recuperated the theme of humiliation, as well as how it played a role in unifying nationalist insurgent elements.
That tall man in a flying robe you are going to see soon, with the whiskers and the long hair, is a first-class fighting man, highly skilled in guerrilla warfare.... If he is your friend, he can be a staunch and valuable ally. If he should happen to be your enemy—look out!

—U.S. Army, Instructions for American Servicemen in Iraq during World War II

Mazzin el-Khazragi was born in Wales to an Iraqi father and a Welsh mother. As a Shiite exile, he had always been in favor of a regime change in Iraq, and as soon as the Saddam government fell in April 2003, he and his wife decided to start a new life in Baghdad. He sold his coffee shop in Cardiff and made his way to his promised land for a preliminary visit. We met at the Jordan–Iraq border crossing. As we were both sitting for long hours on an uncomfortable bench for the authorization to exit Jordan, we started a conversation on the current political situation in Iraq. El-Khazragi told me about an ominous incident he had just been involved in. As he was making his way to the border earlier that morning, he and his traveling companions had stopped near a village called al-Zarga to buy drinks and snacks. As it was dawn, they decided to go and pray at the local mosque. As el-Khazragi’s friend placed on the ground his turbah, a clay tablet that Shiite Muslims use when praying, a man in short robes came running over, took the turbah, and tried to hit him, calling him a rafudhi. This derogatory term, employed by Sunni Muslims, means “rejecter,” rejecter of the rightful companions of the Prophet
Muhammad.1 After some bystanders came over to restore order and the aggressor was pushed away, all returned to pray. El-Khazragi entered the prayer hall, but did not have a turbah with him. He still wanted to make a statement to everyone, including the aggressive man in short robes. He decided to take a piece of paper to replace the traditional turbah and knelt down beside the man to pray shoulder to shoulder. Visibly distraught, the man cut short his prayer and left the mosque in a hurry. At that point, the group was told to leave, as he might come back with others to confront el-Khazragi’s group. This incident felt rather strange, as the only people who were talking of a civil war at the time were members of the Coalition forces, and as WMD had yet to be found, no one in Iraq was duped by what they perceived to be yet another pretext for a U.S. occupation of their country.

As el-Khazragi and I were trying to understand this event, we looked around and saw distinct groups of foreigners wearing the same Afghan type of garb. This costume, associated with Wahhabism, an ultraconservative trend of Sunni Islam originating from Saudi Arabia, and also associated with al-Qaeda, was interpreted by el-Khazragi as evidence that Sunni extremists were “pouring” in through the Iraqi border. Once we all obtained our exit visas, we made it to the Iraqi side of the border station, where a U.S. Marine let us pass with no identity check whatsoever, telling us, “Have a good one!” Everyone was welcomed to Iraq then; it was only in 2005 that visas became obligatory for foreigners to visit Iraq.

A reflection on el-Khazragi’s story brings up many questions. Who were these people in short robes? Why were they crossing the Iraqi border? Where were they coming from? What was their mission? This chapter will bring meaning to this incident by providing an analysis of the different political currents that brought insecurity to Iraq from April 2003 onward. Of importance is the examination of the role that humiliation has had in boosting the political message of those different currents, from their formation to the recruitment of their followers, both at home and abroad. This chapter will contend that the conflict that brought men in short robes to Iraq started many years before in a London-based think tank, and that its Iraqi version is only a symptomatic expression of a self-fulfilling dialectical disagreement facing Islam and the West, revolving around a central narrative of humiliation. Because a study of humiliation as a direct catalyst of the ad hoc escalation of violence between occupiers and occupied has already been initiated in the previous chapter, the mutation of Iraqi vigilantism into an organized resistance will be assessed alongside the same narrative. Last, the relationship between both sources of violence will be examined within their
relation to occupying forces as well as the general public both in Iraq and abroad.

**SYSTEMS THINKING**

The 2007 Nobel Peace Prize awarded to former U.S. Vice President Al Gore and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has created a global awareness on the importance of thinking about conflict in terms of systems as opposed to situations. Climate change is now mainstreamed into a phenomenon that influences not only the ice shelf in Antarctica but also aspects of civil peace around the world. A few years on, images of the human disaster provoked by Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans are still present in everyone’s minds. Whether or not one agrees that its intensity was provoked by manmade climate change, situations provoked by the catastrophe, such as hordes of homeless people looking for shelter, looting, insecurity, the U.S. National Guard’s patrolling of the ravaged streets of New Orleans, are all the symptomatic expression of the system that climate represents, a system that if touched at one end, is likely to change at another end. When taking this into account, one realizes that there is much more to climate than meteorological forecasts; there is also human security, civil peace, sustainable development, and so on. All these are part of a system that needs to be taken into account before artificially altering one end of that system at the expense of the other.

The physicist Fritjof Capra clarified this idea in his analysis of two different paradigms that account for the organization of the universe. The old or Cartesian paradigm is the centralized and compartmentalized understanding of the world and everything within it. According to this paradigm, one can live a compartmentalized life of luxury, stability, peace, and prosperity while the African continent is plagued by nothing short of the ten plagues of Egypt. Equally, according to this vision of the world, the Bush administration can relocate its conflict with al-Qaeda onto Iraqi or Afghan territories without fearing for stability within U.S. borders. What this vision of life does not take into account is the idea that waging war is costly not only in terms of money and lives (albeit mostly Iraqi lives) but also in terms of the image of the United States worldwide. This loss of positive image, in turn, is bound to attract people against its cause and anything associated with it in the long term. Literature shows that such a phenomenon has started to occur. Capra’s new paradigm of holism and systems theory seeks to allow for an understanding of the world according to horizontal ramifications and connectedness that most hitherto strictly defined compartments have between one another.
To put it simply and in the context of this book, systems theory asserts that reducing the invasion of Iraq to solely using the country as a proxy battleground to ensure stability for the civilized world is destructive, counterproductive, and very costly in the long term. Systems thinking applied to the Iraq conflict takes into account not only the number of U.S. troops dead and injured but also that of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) sufferers, subsequent suicide rates of returning service members, financial costs and their impact on the U.S. economy, rising oil costs, the weakening of the U.S. dollar, and so on.

In that light, it is undeniable that the Iraq conflict has had significant repercussions within U.S. borders. For instance, a CBS investigation reported in November 2007 that an estimated 120 U.S. service members had committed suicide every week between 2004 and 2005, probably as a result of PTSD. While these figures are widely discussed in relation to the methodology used during the study, those numbers are symptomatic of a growing awareness of the human costs of the Iraq War as well as the high incidence of PTSD among soldiers returning from the front. As for the holistic paradigm, it simply means that instead of understanding a system as the sum of its components, the system itself dictates how the components will behave, all this within a pattern of chaos.

CHAOS AND IRAQ

A holistic vision of the Iraq conflict in the summer of 2003 dictates that instead of viewing Iraq as a land with pockets of instability, relatively safe in some areas and not safe in others, Iraq ought to have been viewed as an occupied entity with pockets of stability to be maintained and expanded at all costs. This seemingly cosmetic approach is not simply trying to find a different name for a similar situation; it is attempting to convey a different approach, an alternative perspective on the issue of security in Iraq. While not necessarily politically savvy, security always sounds better than insecurity, and so this shift in perspective could have resonated differently on the ground. Had it been a public narrative for U.S. troops, it is possible that ground troops would have paid more attention to winning the hearts and minds of Iraqis. Instead, they took the same hearts and minds for granted, hence a daily carelessness about keeping Iraqi civilians happy.

Of importance to this holistic vision of the Iraq conflict is the notion of chaos. According to the chaos theory, systems thinking should not be understood as a solely linear vector that predicts the direction of overall change prompted by an alteration at one end of the system. Rather, systems thinking has to take into account that there will be a variation,
as minimal as it might be, promoted by change and, most important, that the direction of this variation will by definition be chaotic.\textsuperscript{7} In other words, it cannot be predicted. In the same way that some experts were wrong about understanding Iraqi society, its traditions, and the importance of humiliation as a catalyst for negative change in perception toward Coalition forces, those experts were equally mistaken in thinking that a containment of the Fallujah situation would lead to the stability of Iraq as a whole. Containment was not the answer, first of all because it was violent, and violence begets more violence in a shame society, and, second, because containment cannot necessarily act preventively.

Chaos dictates that unpredictability has to be taken into account in relation to conflict; it considers that conflict is airborne and prone to spreading beyond physical barriers. It also asserts that any artificial disruption of that chaos may have irreversible and even more deeply chaotic consequences. True, an understanding of the cultural setting of Fallujah may well have averted a crisis in April 2003, but what systems thinking and chaos theory insinuate is that no one can predict a given chain of events, not even the actors themselves. Therefore, when violence is initiated, no one can know the extent of its subsequent escalation. It might take time and incubate or be instantaneous and erupt, but more important, it will invariably occur. Take the example of a candle being extinguished. Can anyone predict which direction the smoke will go? Yes, one can, according to the direction and strength of the airflow around the flame. However, can anyone assert with certainty the path that the smoke’s swirl will take? No one possibly can. The smoke might go in a specific direction, while its trail swirls in a pattern out of control.

Events in Fallujah toward the end of April 2003 could have been predicted had observers been aware of the direction of the wind, that is, a cultural understanding of the city. However, no one could possibly have predicted how the insurgency was going to go once it was triggered, not the inhabitants themselves, and much less the men in short robes making their way toward the city from the Jordanian border. Were they going to be received well? Was their political plight going to be followed by the population of Fallujah right away? According to this vision, keeping the peace for and with the Iraqis ought to have been paramount in the weeks that followed the occupation of the country, because from the moment that it was lost, no one could predict the extent of the gravity of the forthcoming escalation, which would result in the destruction of most of the city. A systems thinking way of looking at Fallujah and Iraq as a whole could have ensured a smooth transition from Baath Party rule to occupation. Easier said that done? Let us look at the bigger picture and specifically at the role of humiliation and hubris.
in bringing chaos to the system of East–West relations. A wider outlook on humiliation and chaos will provide an understanding of Fallujah as a microcosm for the self-fulfilling dialectical disagreement between Islam and the West.

HONEYPOT DOCTRINE

In October 2003, I met for the first time an American soldier outside Iraq. We had both traveled to Germany to attend conferences, he on counterterrorism and I on peace operations. As we waited for our luggage at the Frankfurt airport, he told me that his trip had originated in Jordan. I understood immediately that his assignment was centered on Iraq and became interested in getting to know more. We had lunch a few days later. With hindsight, the conversation we had then was an eye-opener.8

The officer, Jim O., was part of the U.S. Special Forces and overly trained in all aspects of military sciences, history, and even business management. He was devoted to his country, his mission, and more important, his president. He had no doubts about his mission in the Middle East and was absolutely certain that he was there for the benefit of its people. According to him, the War on Terror was serving humanity at large. His sincerity and genuineness were disarming. He was convinced that he was bringing long-term peace to the Middle East region and to the world as a whole. Because I felt equally entitled to claim ownership of saving the world through peace studies, we were both partly irritated and partly intrigued by each other’s neocolonialist claim to hold the right solution for the Middle East. He was a perfect specimen of a neoconservative and I of the anti–Mary Matalin camp. Needless to say, no one from the Middle East was there to play referee and most probably would have laughed at our intellectual hubris. Despite our differences, and probably because of them, we became friends instantly and have had many conversations and arguments ever since. Two very important ideas surfaced during this original conversation. First, that Iraqis and Afghans—he had served in Afghanistan immediately after the September 11, 2001, attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon—ought to be grateful to the United States for liberating them, and that a few mishaps and teething problems should not alter the overall result, that is, the benevolent liberation of their country from tyranny. Second, that one of the primary motives of the Bush administration to invade Iraq was to concentrate all fighting against al-Qaeda in a unique geographical spot.

This reductionist approach, more commonly known as the Bush honeypot doctrine, contended that Iraq would have to be sacrificed for the
Insurgency, the Sunnis, and Humiliation’s Role

United States to fight its foe, al-Qaeda, on Iraqi ground. According to this vision, all al-Qaeda fighters would run to Iraq to come to the rescue of their Muslim brothers in harm’s way, not knowing that they would walk into a U.S. trap. Once in the territory, it would be easy for the Bush administration to hunt them down and kill them. The free entry of foreign fighters into Iraqi territory would be the signal for the opening of hunting season: nothing more than deer hunting in Texas. Needless to say, al-Qaeda fighters, the same ones who rid Afghanistan of their Russian invaders in the 1980s, are a little more difficult to eliminate than Texan deer. This consideration was obviously not taken into account by the Bush administration.

The honeypot doctrine not only was implicit in White House speeches and press releases before the Iraq War but also was echoed by neoconservative media outlets in the months following the invasion of Iraq. A friend once said that for a Lebanese politician to suffer a violent death—it almost comes with the job—he has to have enough enemies that want him to be eliminated. The same is true in relation to the invasion of Iraq. If there were enough reasons to warrant its invasion and occupation, whether for the benefit of its people or not, then it had to be invaded.

The claim that Iraq would act as a lightning rod for international terrorism is only one of the many reasons the Bush administration invaded Iraq. It may, however, account for the fact that Iraqi border crossings were not controlled from April 2003 to early 2005.

Nonetheless, it is difficult to ascertain whether the opening of Iraqi borders is related to the honeypot doctrine. The Coalition has always contended that it was extremely difficult to secure Iraqi borders because they amounted to thousands of square miles of desert and mountainous landscape, and an efficient Iraqi border police had to be trained. This latter justification does not hold, as the Coalition soldier who told me to “have a good one” could very well have acted as a border authority. In any case, dozens of foreign fighters made their way into Iraq as early as April 2003. Because chaos theory suggests that it is impossible to control and predict any chain of event, one can assert that, yes, maintaining open borders may well have attracted foreign fighters. But hang on a minute! Were those foreign fighters going to behave like docile prey? Once these individuals had taken the direction of Iraq, their swirl of activity could be impossible to predict. So, whose honeypot was Iraq to be after all?

REVERSE PERSPECTIVE

Let us change perspective on the presence of foreign fighters in Iraq and inquire whether the presence of Coalition fighters there could not, in the
long run, have been to the benefit of America’s enemies. In the years that followed the invasion of Iraq, a steady stream of reports has suggested that “activists identifying themselves as jihadists . . . are increasing [in Iraq] in both number and geographic dispersion.” Moreover, it is now undeniable that global terrorism has increased since the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Is this increase directly connected to the invasion? The answer appears to be yes, because, as the 2006 National Intelligence Estimate notes, “The Iraq conflict has become a ‘cause célèbre’ for jihadists,” which will lead to “increasing attacks worldwide.” According to these assertions, it is timely to ask whether the invasion of Iraq could have served the long-term interests of al-Qaeda. Indeed, because al-Qaeda had been denouncing foreign interference in Middle Eastern affairs for many years, it only made sense that any foreign invasion of Middle Eastern land would serve as a rallying cry for its movement worldwide. According to analyst Bruce Hoffman, the “idea that al-Qaeda wanted to make Iraq the central battlefield of jihad was first suggested by al-Qaeda itself” as early as February 2003—one month before the U.S.-led Coalition invaded the country.

Did the Bush administration take this message seriously? Or did it assume that its military might and the support of the Iraqi population would overcome this potential obstacle? Paul Bremer’s biography seems to put weight on both assumptions. First, it was assumed that Iraqis would necessarily be grateful for being “liberated.” Second, for the few rogue elements that might decide to spoil the U.S. victory, it was thought that firepower would be the ultimate answer. Could Iraq have represented a honeypot for followers of al-Qaeda to eliminate foreign “imperialists”? No one can answer with certainty that this was an al-Qaeda strategy, even though Iraq and the UN sanctions enforced against it were recurrent in al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden’s speeches throughout the 1990s. The result, however, is that the 2003 invasion of Iraq did attract foreign fighters to Iraq, and those foreign fighters were not necessarily militants before the invasion. While the number of foreign fighters present in Iraq has been estimated to be relatively small in comparison to the number of Iraqis who have taken up arms against Coalition troops since April 2003—reports suggest that Iraqi nationals constitute between 94 percent and 96 percent of insurgent combatants in Iraq—it is believed that these foreign fighters arrived in Iraq precisely because of the “revulsion felt at the idea of an Arab land being occupied by a non-Arab country.”

Let us therefore call the honeypot doctrine an opportunity, one that ironically also came to benefit Osama bin Laden because his rhetoric of many years had been validated by U.S. actions in Iraq. This opportunity
presented itself both to the Bush administration and to bin Laden, hence the dialectical nature of the invasion of Iraq.

This honeypot opportunity also presented itself to Iraqi nationals, who simply chose to “indulge” in a hunt against an enemy of choice. Hajji Mahmoud, a Sunni Muslim on a waiting list to carry out a suicide operation, expressed it to me quite simply when I met him for the first time in Baghdad in November 2005: “I have dreamed of killing American soldiers and Zionist Jews for some time. I could never indulge, since I would never have been granted a visa for Israel. The 2003 invasion gave me the best opportunity to do it at home. . . . In a way, the mountain came to Mohammed! [Laughs].” We will return to his case in more detail in a later chapter. Regardless of which party to the so-called war on terror initiated the Iraq conflict, the results speak for themselves. As early as July 2003, Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez, commander of U.S. ground forces in Iraq, recognized that the country had become a “terrorist magnet where America, being present . . . in Iraq, create[d] a target of opportunity.” It seems, therefore, that the invasion of Iraq created an unprecedented opportunity for both al-Qaeda and Iraqi nationals to strike at their lifelong enemy. Moreover, whether or not insurgents had been militants before the invasion of Iraq, feelings of revulsion against the Coalition were deepened by the images of occupation seen on television in the aftermath of the invasion. Were these images new? Unfortunately they were not.

**OSAMA BIN LADEN’S MESSAGE: DÉJÀ VU**

On October 7, 2001, in the immediate aftermath of the first U.S.-led air strikes against Afghanistan, Osama bin Laden issued the following statement: “Neither America nor anyone who lives there will enjoy safety until safety becomes a reality for us living in Palestine and before all the infidel armies leave the land of Muhammad.” This message constitutes the overall contention of bin Laden against his Western foe. It has been the same since 1994, as evidenced in an open letter sent to the chief mufti of Saudi Arabia, bin Baz, a letter that bore the return address of a London-based think tank, the Advice and Reform Committee. At the time, bin Laden denounced the occupation of Saudi Arabia as well as some Middle Eastern regimes’ collusion with the West. In the years that followed, his message became more and more specific in terms of the grievances that were imputed to Western imperialism, mainly embodied by the United States, Israel, the United Kingdom, and Saudi Arabia, the main U.S. ally in the Gulf. In his overall message to the Muslim world, which is commonly referred to as the *umma*, bin Laden has been
denouncing what he perceives as the double standards of Western powers in relation to war mongering, the killing of civilians, and the seemingly low value placed on Muslim life compared to Christian life.

Over the years, his message has diversified as he has sought to reach the rest of the world, especially the populations of Western nations, whom he strives to educate in relation to the alleged exactions committed by the governments they have brought to power. The Western mainstream media, referred to as “big media institutions,” are particularly targeted for siding with government institutions and rallying around their nations’ flags in times of conflict, as well as for allegedly misinforming populations.26

In relation to the sanctity of Muslim life, he repeatedly asks the following: “In what creed are your dead considered innocent but ours worthless? By what logic does your blood count as real and ours as no more than water?”27 According to his vision and understanding of history, bin Laden sees the United States as the “leader of terrorism in the world,” this mainly as a result of the death tolls caused by the Truman administration’s use of atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II, a death toll estimated at between 150,000 and 280,000, as well as by the casualties resulting from the UN sanctions against Iraq, and an all-time favorite, the Crusades!28 Countless are the references made to the Crusades over the years, so many, in fact, that Westerners are primarily referred to as Crusaders in most speeches.

The main issues deplored by bin Laden in all his speeches revolve around the theme of humiliation. They denounce the social injustices, political repression, and corruption that oppress and humiliate the working class of Muslim countries allied to the United States, and that result in people “struggling even with the basics of every day life [because of] economic recession, price inflation [and] mounting debts.”29 In his call for the support of the disenfranchised within the umma, bin Laden asserts that it is time for the people of the Middle East to strike back against years of oppression, suffering, death, despair, and neocolonialism. His promise for engaging in combating the West and its allies relies on the support of religious scholars sympathetic to his struggle.30 The holy grail that he promises the umma for joining his struggle is not a few virgins, as the Western media always stresses as a means to debase bin Laden’s overall message, but the restoration of human dignity for all.31 As for the means to regain this dignity, they are prescribed in the umma’s involvement in a global insurgency against Western imperialism, double standards, and aggression.32 This insurgency is set to take the form of a jihad.
In the war of communication against bin Laden, and most certainly as a means to invalidate his message, it has been the norm in the Western media to report bin Laden as an usurper of Islamic law because jihad can be called for only by a cleric. However, in reality there are two types of jihad. An offensive jihad must be called for by a Muslim cleric, it is true. However, a defensive jihad can well be called by anyone. Because, according to bin Laden, the umma is being occupied by Western powers, and is “financed...using [the] umma’s wealth and savings,” referring to oil and their revenues, it only makes sense for any Muslim to defend his or her land as well as faith. At the center of this forsaking of neocolonialism used to be Israel, since its creation in 1948, though since the 2003 invasion that place has been taken by Iraq in his overall narrative. A narrative of occupation, it seems, coupled with the loss of human dignity and humiliation, is a recurring theme to one seeking to end the involvement of Western powers in Middle Eastern affairs. It is also important to stress that bin Laden sees the West as a simple vector of humiliation from God himself, chastising the umma for supporting the wrong leaders: “O God, we beseech you to put this nation’s feet firmly on the right path in order to strengthen those who obey you and to humiliate those who disobey you.”

ON AL-QAEDISM AND CHAOS THEORY

Of crucial importance to the overall message of bin Laden are the connections that exist between historical events, mainly connected to the creation of the state of Israel. In the eyes of bin Laden, the past actions of Western powers speak for themselves in terms of their aggressive nature toward the umma and ought to be understood in a broad context. As he denounces the mainstream Western media for not connecting events to one another, he always justifies his actions as the only possible response to violent acts of the West against what he considers his people.

In relation to the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan, he asks: “Is it part of a long series of Crusader wars against the Islamic World? Since World War I, which ended [eighty-three] years ago, the entire Islamic world has fallen under the Crusader banners.... They divided up the whole world between them, and Palestine fell into the hands of the British. From that day to this, more than [eighty-three] years later, our brothers and sons have been tortured in Palestine.” Later, he asserts, “We should therefore see events not as isolated incidents, but as part of a long chain of conspiracies, a war of annihilation in all senses of the word.”
In terms of systems thinking, it seems that bin Laden has been seeking to unite the umma after years of political, territorial, and cultural compartmentalization against a list of common enemies. The innovation in this process has been his reliance on ideas more than on physical structures, which has been referred to as al-Qaedism. Upon the realization that repressive regimes such as the one in Saudi Arabia would have a stronger chance to obliterate organized cells than ideologically based, ad hoc bottom-up structures, bin Laden used his humiliation-based messages to the world, and more important to the umma, as a means to motivate his overall struggle against the enemies of the umma. In that sense, communication has been his most important tool since the beginning of his campaign against the West. This is nothing short of a revolution in the field of terrorism and insurgency studies.

Osama bin Laden is the first challenger to have used chaos principles in his struggle against a superpower’s authority in terms of foreign affairs. To apply this change to chaos theory, which contends that the “power of a butterfly’s wings can be felt on the other side of the world,” bin Laden’s use of humiliation as means to provoke the butterfly into movement has had a resounding effect throughout the world, from altering air travel to harming the budget of oil consumers worldwide. Because ideas are airborne and can cross borders without control, bin Laden’s strength has been in motivating people to rise up against a perceived Western aggressor, all across the Muslim world. How was this achieved? One can decipher three distinct phases in the chaotic expansion of al-Qaedism, all of them instrumentalizing Western governments at different stages of their development. First, bin Laden’s messages and localized activities in the Middle East were designed to elicit a state response that would motivate young men to engage in a struggle against the West. The first phase was meant to motivate and take advantage of state repression from regional allies of the West, such as Saudi Arabia and Israel. Bin Laden’s messages of condemnation, based on denouncing state humiliation and promising a restoration of human dignity for all, were bound to motivate a few to join his ranks to trigger the second phase. This preliminary phase was centralized and vertical in terms of preparation and command, and eventually it led to the preparation and successful implementation of the attacks on U.S. soil on September 11, 2001. To put it simply, a few educated young men who sought change and equality in their own countries joined the ranks of bin Laden after becoming born-again Muslims. They moved to Europe and the United States to continue their education and prepare the second phase, 9/11, which intentionally sought to trigger a Western response, which was the initiation of the so-called war on terror: a massive U.S. retaliation against
the *umma*, in their territory, based on all the types of humiliation that had been denounced and foretold in public addresses since 1994, which of course would boost overall popular support for Osama bin Laden.

Of importance here is the fact that the young men who carried out 9/11 were educated and had chosen to become vectors of change. They had prospects, money, and a successful life in their countries of origin. Why did they engage in such a radical path? Let us take the example of Ziad Jarrah, pilot of United Airlines Flight 93, whose White House-bound plane crashed into Pennsylvania on September 11, 2001. I met with his father, Samir Jarrah, in Almarj, Lebanon. At the time of my interview in November 2003, more than two years after 9/11, Jarrah still was having a difficult time believing that his son had died on 9/11. He explained that his son had wanted to become an airplane pilot since he was a little boy, when he used to collect miniature airplanes, and that he had become politically aware very early on. Jarrah explained that during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, which killed an estimated twenty thousand civilians and culminated in the infamous war crimes of Sabra and Shatila, the Jarrah family had to flee Beirut. For three days and three nights they walked to safety, constantly under the threat of an Israeli air raid. When they reached their destination in the Bekaa Valley, Ziad, who was seven years old, saw his sisters joke and laugh. He was not amused and told them, “Now is not the time to play, look at what is happening around us!” Jarrah says that since that episode, his son had always been politically aware, bitter, and angry at what he observed in international politics. However, Jarrah cannot understand why or how his son became a born-again Muslim, and he assumed that it occurred while he studied engineering in Germany.

Osama bin Laden later claimed that it was on the occasion of the 1982 invasion of Lebanon that he got the idea to strike the World Trade Center. While it is impossible to know for certain whether this episode is the one that bonded Ziad Jarrah and Osama bin Laden intellectually, the symbolic connection between the perceived injustices done to the *umma* and the response in kind of this first phase of al-Qaeda operation is striking. Once again, this event across time resonates around chaos theory and its butterfly effect. One crime against humanity, perceived as an injustice and allegedly allowed to occur by Western powers in 1982, prompted another crime against humanity in 2001.

The U.S. response to 9/11 can be defined as the second or globalization phase of bin Laden’s overall plan. In a sense, the fierce U.S. response to the events of September 11, 2001, was a godsend to bin Laden in terms of portraying the West as a ruthless attacker on Muslim territory, tram-pling basic human rights principles with the creation of the Guantánamo
detention center, among other exactions, and seeking to appropriate the wealth of the *umma* through the invasion of Iraq and alleged control over its oil resources. This phase of globalization of al-Qaedaism would then serve as a self-fulfilling prophecy for bin Laden’s ideas, all geared toward the gradual impoverishment of the West, a return to isolationism in foreign policy, the incurring of a loss of support for the state of Israel and other regional allies, and, finally, a return of the golden age of Islam whereby the Sharia would finally prevail within the entire *umma*, whose dignity would be restored and who would be seen as triumphant over years of humiliation.

In terms of systems thinking, this scenario proved to have merit, as the United States is now greatly impoverished as a direct result of its war on terror policies. However, in terms of chaos theory, al-Qaedaism itself has lost a lot of support in the process, as a result of the perversion of its main message in post-Saddam Iraq, a path whose difference can be explained by the uncontrollable swirling metaphor. This particular idea will be developed at a further stage. To return to al-Qaedaism, the restoration of human dignity for the entire *umma* can be seen as its main manifesto. How did al-Qaedaism translate to Iraq?

**NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH**

In April 2003, Professor Abdallah Schleifer of the American University of Cairo put it very simply:

> These people, the whole world, but particularly Arabs have been watching Israeli troops, especially in the last year, crashing into Arab districts...in Gaza, in the West Bank, so what they saw was an Israeli Army, which is highly technological...and the officers are all European looking, like you look, like I look, and these images, unfortunately in the Arab psyche, are mingling now. The Israeli soldier and the American soldier become one image, and the Palestinian civilians who are being brutalized somehow blend into the image of this collateral damage, or accidental bombings, and it all becomes one image and that’s a disaster for the American side of it in the Arab perception.⁴⁷

As exploited in bin Laden’s messages to the *umma* since the early 1990s, the *naqba*, or 1948 Arab defeat leading to the exodus of millions of Palestinians toward neighboring countries as a result of the creation of the state of Israel, has had a tremendous impact on the Arab psyche.⁴⁸ The collective resentment toward the Israeli occupation of
the Palestinian territories can be characterized as the only trait that all Arabs share with one another throughout the world. This resentment, transcending even religious boundaries, has been exacerbated since the beginning of the second Palestinian intifada in September 2000, whose magnitude matched the extent of Palestinian disillusion prompted by what was perceived as the staggering Oslo process. Tragic events such as those which occurred in Jenin, the building of the wall or security fence between Israeli and Palestinian territories, the Israeli persistence in building settlements despite international condemnation, the relentless state repression against the Palestinian population, and so on, have been fueling Arab anger not only against Israel but also against its main ally, the United States. As scholars Buruma and Margalit observe: “You cannot humiliate and bully others without eventually provoking a violent response. . . . The daily sight of Palestinian men crouching in the heat at Israeli checkpoints, suffering the casual abuse of Jewish soldiers, explains some of the venom of the intifadas.”

Taking this “baggage” into account, and placing it into a postinvasion Iraqi context, one can better understand the emotions of the inhabitants of Fallujah in the last few days of April 2003. This feeling of being occupied, bullied, and targeted by occupation forces has indeed triggered a violent response from a population that did not want to suffer the fate of their Palestinian brothers and sisters. Yasser al-Dulaimi, a Fallujah resident I interviewed in Baghdad on several occasions, recalls: “It all went so fast. They had come into the city to dominate us like they did to the Palestinians. Then they brutalized us, took people to prison. They did horrible things. They imposed terror into us all over town, with their raids—searching for what? We all had arms in our houses, since when does having a weapon make us terrorists? We had to defend ourselves to fight back. We took all the help we could get.” This quote is the simple story of Sunni Muslim post-Saddam Iraq. This is as simple as it gets.

Because most households were armed, and arms were also available for purchase in the open-air markets, and because asabiyya dictated revenge, ordinary men and women started to organize themselves into groups of vigilantes, a sort of neighborhood watch. Each time a raid was carried out, people became more and more organized to defend their neighborhoods. They kept one another informed, often were tipped off by the local police, and started to organize groups of armed citizens to duly receive Coalition troops when these decided to make incursions into
neighborhoods. Over the weeks that followed the April events, these neighborhood-watch groups became more and more centralized around locally prominent figures who had the means to compensate groups after every event. These compensations were not salaries; they were supposed to replace weapons that might have been seized, to look after families who were left in financial hardship after the arrest or the death of a family member, or to pay for medical care for wounded relatives. After a while, and as the escalation between Coalition troops and Fallujah residents worsened, financial resources shifted from being simple compensation to a reward for preemptive attacks on Coalition troops. Slowly, and as the level of violence heightened within the town, neighborhood-watch groups faded away to the benefit of more resourceful, cohesive, and purposeful groups of local insurgents, some of which were later recuperated by some franchised insurgent groups such as al-Qaeda or the 1920 Brigades.

Several key men were behind this paradigm shift, though none were former Baath Party officials as the Coalition had claimed at the time.

Three men stood out during those times as influential figures, one as the co-coordinating agent of neighborhood-watch groups and two others as promoters of al-Qaedaism. The former was a pharmacist, Abu Ali. His prominence later faded to the benefit of a locally born Wahhabi who had just returned from Afghanistan to promote the ideas and practices of al-Qaeda, Omar Hadid. The third promoter of al-Qaedaism was a local imam, or prayer leader, Abdullah al-Janabi.

In the months that followed the arrival of U.S. troops in Fallujah, Hadid and al-Janabi became the main power brokers in town. While Hadid acted more as a logistical coordinator to recuperate the local efforts that had been harassing U.S. troops, conducting street patrols and directing traffic, al-Janabi was a spiritual leader and later became the head of the Mujahideen Shura Council, a council that acted as an Islamic court to provide judicial rule over the city. Neither man was a Saddam remnant or die-hard Baath Party loyalist. One should not go as far to state that Hadid was an ordinary man either, as some international media has claimed. He had just spent three years in Afghanistan with Osama bin Laden before returning to Fallujah in April 2003. In the late 1990s, he had been thrown out of Saddam Hussein’s special bodyguard unit for not being secular enough, not drinking with the lads, and praying far too much, or five times a day. After returning to Fallujah and working as an auto-body repair technician, he killed a Baath Party official and fled to Kurdistan to organize his transfer to Afghanistan. On returning to Fallujah after the 2003 invasion, he became the perfect person to spread al-Qaedaism in Fallujah. As for al-Janabi, Saddam Hussein had
forbidden him to deliver Friday sermons at his local mosque because he was considered too vociferous against some of Saddam’s government policies. Obviously, al-Janabi was not a Saddam remnant either. In the months that followed the U.S. invasion, local efforts in Fallujah became coordinated by two main currents, one, Islamic in nature, revolving around ideas of al-Qaedaism, and the other more secular, geared toward harassing U.S. troops. Both had the ultimate goal of ridding Fallujah of its invaders.

How did this new paradigm translate on the ground for foreign observers to see, hear, and watch? Stencils and graffiti appeared on walls, warning Coalition troops that people were becoming organized in their resistance efforts against them. Among them could be seen, in English: “American Soldiers: run away to your home before you will be a body in a black bag, then be dropped in a river or a valley,” as well as the usual “Death to America and Israel.” Residents became increasingly aware of foreign observers; hostility was palpable for anyone walking in the open street. Videos calling for a unified insurgency started to emerge in stores. Bands of armed men started to patrol the streets of Fallujah, directing traffic and acting as a de facto police force. Women were seen in public less and less, and when they were, they were increasingly wearing the black niqab head cover, seen mostly in the Gulf countries. Foreign-looking men in short robes also started to appear in the streets. These people were similar in number to the Westerners, which means very few, but in an environment such as Fallujah, they were easily noticed. Those people were the helping hand that al-Dulaimi had referred to earlier, who within weeks had come to join local al-Qaeda leaders Hadid and al-Janabi.

THE FUSION

I personally never came into contact with al-Qaeda while in Fallujah, likely for several reasons, including being an infidel, being a woman, not having those types of connections, and not being that courageous. Freelance journalist Nir Rosen, who is Muslim, a man, has connections I never had, and spent a lot more time than I did in town, talked to the son of Abdullah Azzam, mentor to Osama bin Laden.

This son, Hudheifa Azzam, embodied all the “help” that al-Dulaimi had referred to in his conversations with me. When Hudheifa came to Fallujah from Jordan, it was made very clear to him by clerics and tribal leaders that they wanted to give the United States a chance, because they were convinced that its troops had brought them democracy. However, after the April 28, 2003, shootings in front of the al-Qa’id school and
rumors that U.S. soldiers had raped a woman, the same clerics and leaders said, “OK, we want to start now, or tomorrow we will find our mothers and daughters or sisters raped.”

It is at this very moment that the connection between bin Laden’s narrative of defensive jihad and restoration of human dignity for all fused with the situation in Fallujah, with Hadid working as a liaison between these ideas and local people who knew him. From that moment on, al-Qaedaism had reached Fallujah, and foreign fighters came to fight hand in hand with the newly established neighborhood-watch scheme. The weight of humiliation, rumors, and spiraling violence found a fertile ground in an area that needed only a spark to ignite, a spark that originated with the shootings on Saddam Hussein’s birthday. In the weeks that followed, foreigners were lured in to serve the cause of Fallujah. From that moment on, communication in the form of videos served a significant role for several purposes, principal among them to recruit foreign fighters to the cause of Fallujah.

“ALL THE HELP WE COULD GET”

During the weeks that followed the April 2003 shootings, Fallujah and its inhabitants remained open to foreign visitors, journalists, and even foreign contractors working for the nearby U.S.-run Camp Fallujah. While the media hype that followed the April events painted the city as a dangerous pro-Saddam stronghold, Fallujah was just like any other Iraqi city in that if one respected its dress code and traditions, and kept a low profile, it was possible to walk through the streets with an Iraqi guide undisturbed. Despite the need for some journalists to always paint themselves as being in grave mortal danger, there was nothing heroic or particularly dangerous about traveling to Fallujah, at least until December 2003. True, residents became increasingly suspicious of Westerners as the months went by, because of the treatment they were receiving from U.S. soldiers on a daily basis, triggering an escalation of attacks against troops throughout the entire Anbar Province in the fall of 2003. However, foreign journalists shadowed by their Iraqi fixers were not targeted as such. The only risk associated with traveling to Fallujah was the risk of becoming collateral damage in the escalation of violence between neighborhood-watch groups and Coalition troops. Anyone could take a car and come on a day trip from Baghdad or stay with a family for a few nights, provided that one had forged and maintained a good relationship with residents.

If this was true for Westerners, it was probably even more true for visitors originating from throughout the umma. I was never in contact
with any of the foreign fighters that had come to Fallujah. I had seen some at the Jordan–Iraq border in the spring of 2003, but that was the extent of it. Understandably, we were not revolving in the same circles. I came to understand how they made their way to Fallujah with the help of Yasser al-Dulaimi.

Al-Dulaimi is an interesting character. Years before the fall of Saddam Hussein, he had felt the divine call for a religious life and had joined al-Janabi’s madrassa, or religious school, in the Great Mosque of Fallujah. He became an imam and spent two years practicing until one day al-Janabi told him to stop partying, drinking alcohol, and being his usual gregarious joker self. But al-Dulaimi’s life did not improve much, so he was thrown out of his mosque. He was disappointed but looked at the bright side of life and decided to join the Iraqi Army. He successfully completed his training, became an officer, and was posted in Kut-al-Amara, where he was stationed during the U.S.-led invasion. He returned to Fallujah after the defeat, or what he calls the invasion of his city, and started to lend a hand to his neighborhood vigilante group. Because he wanted to provide for his growing family, he decided to join the Fallujah police. After a quick training at the Anbar Police Academy, supervised by the U.S. Army, al-Dulaimi was assigned to the main police station in town, for a salary of $430 per month. His job was that of a regular police officer, manning checkpoints and carrying out prisoner transfers from out of town.

How did his family and friends take all this? They were very pragmatic, as were the members of his former vigilante group, who had become part of several newly established insurgency movements. While Hadid’s Fallujah-centered group was clearly becoming al-Qaeda, other Anbar-wide Sunni nationalist groups had also started to emerge, such as the Army of Muhammad, the 1920 Brigades, and the Islamic Army in Iraq. These groups were strictly nationalist and wanted only to combat the foreign occupation of their country. Other groups, including al-Qaeda, were Islamic in nature. They were bound to rid Iraq of its occupiers and establish a caliphate, or Islamic state, returning to the seventh-century golden age of Islam, the Muslim version of the Garden of Eden. Two of these groups were al-Qaeda and Ansar al-Sunnah, located north of the Anbar Province in Nineveh Province and formerly known as Ansar al-Islam before Saddam Hussein disbanded it. This was the group that Hadid fled to before traveling to Afghanistan in 2000.

In Fallujah, all these groups, except Ansar al-Sunnah, were part of what al-Dulaimi called the Majlis a-Shura, the Mujahideen Shura Council headed by al-Janabi. These groups had a presence in the council and held regular meetings with the Fallujah police. They knew that the police
force was a necessary evil in post-Saddam Fallujah, as U.S. troops had decided to establish their version of law and order in town, and because some people such as al-Dulaimi needed a reasonably paid job. Therefore, to assert direct control over this occupation force, they ensured that all movements of the Fallujah police would be reported to them. When al-Dulaimi had to go to Camp Fallujah, for instance, he first had to get permission from the Shura, and then he could fulfill his mission. When a police officer did not inform the Shura of his whereabouts, he would be abducted, tried, and usually given a warning before being released. There would be no second chance for the stray sheep. In case of blatant insubordination, the police station would be bombed as a warning to the entire police team, usually at night or in the early hours of the morning, and the traitor would be abducted and executed, usually on video for others to see and remain loyal to the Shura. While keeping their fellow insurgents abreast of their movements, some, including al-Dulaimi, were active supporters of the insurgency.

After a while, al-Dulaimi became instrumental in bringing foreign fighters to Fallujah. “We could pass every checkpoint between the Jordanian border and Fallujah, with our police car and uniform, so when a fighter would want to get to Fallujah, or leave for another town like Ramadi, they would just hop in the car, put on handcuffs, we would say to whoever wanted to know that we were transferring prisoners, and that would be the end of it,” he said. Asked if he was receiving money for this, his answer was a categorical: “No!” Asked about his motivations, he replied: “They invade us, humiliate us, arrest us…. What am I supposed to do?”

As the 1943 U.S. Army short guide to Iraq puts it, American success or failure in Iraq during World War II may well have depended on whether or not Iraqis liked them. This was also painfully true of post-Saddam Iraq. Of importance here, as explained earlier, is the small number of foreign fighters in Iraq as a whole, despite a Coalition narrative of an outpouring of foreign fighters in post-Saddam Iraq after April 2003. While Iraq presented a honeypot for foreign fighters to come and fight the United States on Muslim ground, the absolute majority of the insurgency was made up of humble Iraqis, religious and secular, who had had enough of the occupation.

Asked about the number of foreign fighters in Fallujah, al-Dulaimi confirmed there were very few. According to him, the Shura was 100 percent Iraqi, while some of the hit men supposed to maintain order in town (e.g., by abducting uncooperative police officers) were foreigners. The Fallujah police station was one of the only places in town with a decent Internet connection, so another job that fell into al-Dulaimi’s lap
was that of lending this connection, which was set up, maintained, and paid for by the Coalition, to al-Qaeda members for their public messages to be processed and placed online.

What were these messages? And how do they connect to humiliation and the wider narrative of bin Laden?

**SPREADING A SENSE OF BEING HUMILIATED**

In the eyes of al-Qaeda, once the globalization of al-Qaedism had been initiated, it made sense to recruit more people to prepare for the return of the golden age of Islam, with the aim of transforming Fallujah into a caliphate. At the same time, other groups that did not have an Islamic agenda, the nationalist insurgent groups referred to earlier, had formed. Again, these groups were strictly against the foreign occupation of Fallujah and Anbar Province and were not interested in a return of the golden age. For the first few months of the occupation, these two different kinds of groups evolved hand in hand in their operations to harass Coalition troops and to recruit new members. They also competed in their messages, though at this point they did not undermine one another as they later did. It is only when al-Qaeda started to attempt to dominate nationalist groups that it eventually lost the support of the local population, because it also had become a de facto occupier. We will explore this more later.

For now, let us focus on the first few months of the U.S.-led occupation of Sunni parts of Iraq and the recruitment tools used by the Sunni insurgency to recruit other foreign fighters from the *umma*, attempt to spread the insurgency throughout Iraq, wage psychological warfare against the enemy, and train newly formed groups.

In the years that followed the invasion of Iraq, I tried to collect as many videos as humanly possible. This was not an easy task, in particular transporting them safely back home. Some of them I bought in video stores throughout Iraq; others I gathered during frantic shopping sprees throughout Baghdad, when it was still possible for a foreigner to go out shopping, and still others were brought to me by contacts from Sunni areas. After gathering these videos, I then had to bring them home with me—not a task for the faint of heart. One lost luggage experience at the airport in Atlanta, Georgia, landed me on a Homeland Security watch list. Apparently finding the videos in my luggage raised suspicions to a high level. As a result, the FBI now pulls me aside to question me each time I enter the United States.

Was it all worth it? Absolutely. My first two videos, purchased in Fallujah in December 2003, are by far the most resounding. They were
shown to West Point cadets four weeks before U.S. businessman Nicholas Berg sadly became the first foreigner to be decapitated on camera.\textsuperscript{63}

The first video starts with the extract of a dialogue, in English, between two Fox News reporters, the first in the United States and the second on the ground in Baghdad. The date is not known, but according to the caption “War Alert, Exclusive Video, Third Infantry Storming Baghdad,” it can be dated around April 8, 2003.\textsuperscript{64} The news anchor asks: “What we can see is business as usual here, but what do you say when you see a Ford or a beat up Toyota with some machine guns, I mean, not much of a fight against a Bradley or an Abraham?” The correspondent replies: “No, that kind of attack is going to lose. . . . It is a futile effort.” Immediately after this comes the second scene, a close-up of a man being decapitated as he is held down by an army boot on a bed of snowy grass. This horrific scene was not filmed in Iraq but likely originated in Chechnya, where insurgents executed some Russian soldiers in such, and it has been cribbed from a Web site known for its gruesome videos.\textsuperscript{65} This footage is well known within certain circles and was shown to me for the first time in Kosovo in 2000. Because the video from Iraq does not have a logo (a rare occurrence as most insurgency videos can be traced), it cannot be established for certain that it is an al-Qaeda video. What is clear is that the audience targeted by this video is both foreign and Iraqi. On one hand, it is a device of pure psychological warfare as it represents a clear sign to foreign invaders of what their fate will be if they do not leave Iraq, which is the reason that a Fox News clip was chosen in its original language with no subtitles. While it is undeniably a threat, this video is also a warning, as Islam dictates that one must warn an adversary before attacking him.\textsuperscript{66} On the other hand, it is also a direct link between the rhetoric of bin Laden, who constantly referred to the invasion of Chechnya in his speeches over the years, and the Iraq insurgency. Its Islamic nature is obvious, as the man’s decapitation is done according to the halal ritual of slaughtering an animal while reciting prayers.\textsuperscript{67} This targeting of a Muslim audience serves two main purposes. The first is to provide a link between the Iraq situation and other insurgencies (i.e., if we did it in Chechnya, you can do it in Iraq). Second, it can be interpreted as a practical guide for potential insurgents. The intended message is clear: should you kill an invader, you can do so accordingly, and above all do not forget to film it and disseminate it. The humiliation nature of this video is also clear: it is a show of potency against a foreign invader, a retrocession of humiliation after the dismissive Fox News comments on the futility of any Iraqi attempt to defy U.S. troops. The metaphor of an impotent, underequipped Muslim world, symbolized by the beat-up Toyota, is being matched by the simple, yet deadly efficient,
means used to kill the occupier in the most traditional of manners. This tit-for-tat response to humiliation is a recurring theme in most videos I have come across in Iraq. Of importance here is that while this video certainly had an impact on a certain audience (though it is impossible to know whether it served as a guide for the brutal murder of Nicholas Berg a few months later), it profoundly disgusted and disturbed many Iraqis that came across it. This blatant revulsion at the time represented a very early first step against the presence and dogma of al-Qaeda in Iraq. Because this practice and many others did diminish Iraqi people’s support for al-Qaeda in the following years, this first occurrence is worth mentioning here. Therefore, this particular video may have acted as a recruitment device, but at the same time it was a deterrent for many.

The second video can also be placed in the recruiting category, but more important as a widening device on the part of the growing insurgency against the foreign occupation of Iraq. It was purchased in Fallujah in the fall of 2003, at the same time as the first video. It is called “Baghdad’s Fences: For the Eyes of the People of Anbar Province and the City of Ramadi” and originates from the Al-Noor Bureau for Arts Production and Distribution in Ramadi. The video starts off with images from three Hollywood blockbuster movies that are renowned for showing U.S. soldiers facing difficulties: Ridley Scott’s *Black Hawk Down*, Oliver Stone’s *Platoon*, and Francis Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now*. The voice of the preacher Hisham al-Etabi chants over these images, invoking “men who have honor and pride to take their swords... for Shiites and Sunnis [are] hand by hand united.” This reference to swords is a direct call for religiously mixed towns of Iraq, such as Baquba, to join the insurgency burgeoning in Fallujah and Ramadi. In Shiite Islam, the sword is a symbol that represents the sword of Imam Ali, cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad who died in a succession strife in AD 661. Confirmation of this comes later with the assertion that there is “no difference between Sunnis and Shiites.” The video then calls on all the people of Iraq, from Mosul to Basra, for “Arabs and Kurds,” to bring “honor” to the rest of the country. Of crucial importance here is the constant reference to honor and pride, clearly related to the feelings of collective humiliation deriving from both the occupation and the treatment of the Iraqi population. The video attempts to be as nationalist as possible, calling on every sect and ethnic group to rise up against the invaders. It also seeks to be all inclusive. People who choose not to fight are asked to lend a hand to the insurgency by not divulging “information about the men who have pride,” while thugs and looters are called on to join as they “will not gain from looting and crashing doors.” Those who chose to collaborate with the occupation are referred to as “traitors
[who] betrayed the ones who have manliness.” This characterization of traitors clearly uses the notion of masculinity as a marker to dehumanize the people who are not with them. Numerous are the videos that refer to collaborators as homosexuals, for example. This early video bears the hallmarks of humiliation as well as nationalism, and it is a clear indication of the motivations that triggered early insurgency initiatives in Anbar Province. While occupation is a drive, humiliation creates a catalyst to both trigger anger and motivate support.

Three other early videos are of importance to the spreading of a humiliation narrative by the insurgency and to the identity-assertion of some newly established insurgent groups. The media department of the Islamic Army in Iraq (IAI) released one of these videos. As previously explained, the IAI is a secular movement specifically geared toward ending the occupation of Iraq. Despite its name, its aim is not to turn Iraq into an Islamic state. The video cannot be dated but coincides with attacks that occurred against Baghdad International Airport and various U.S. bases most probably in the fall of 2003. The video, which shows in detail various attacks one after another, opens with the following statement: “Our injured population will not accept being humiliated, our population will resist the invaders, its old people hand in hand with its young people. We have had enough! We have had enough!” It then continues with several clips of harassment operations against Coalition troops using improvised explosive devices (IEDs), more commonly known as homemade roadside bombs. These are usually buried on the side of a road and detonated with a remote control when a U.S. convoy passes by. Mortar shells and Russian-made Katyusha rockets, as well as fire attacks on convoys, are other preferred methods of local insurgency harassment. When there are casualties, they are often shown with a crowd of men and children dancing around, visibly rejoicing at the impact the insurgency is having on the ground. This is the standard type of video made by strictly nationalist insurgency groups. Other early videos of the Islamic Army in Iraq always start with the same statement of collective humiliation, followed by harassment operations. Of importance, as the months went by, is the incremental use of humiliation pictures likely derived from mainstream media outlets. A second IAI video released early on uses a series of pictures before showing its latest attacks. Among the pictures are several of men being held facedown on the ground by U.S. soldiers in army fatigues, women being arrested by soldiers, children being searched by soldiers. The symbolic expression of the boot holding the head is directly connected to the notion of humiliation through a stripping of ihtiram, the monopoly of physical force, while the arrest of women is clearly connected to the loss of collective ird. Two images
follow of an insurgent holding an AK-47 and making a victory sign, and of another insurgent reading the Koran. Though the Koran is included in this IAI video, its use is purely cosmetic and identity related (i.e., Iraqi Muslims against the Coalition infidels). For strictly religious groups such as Ansar al-Sunnah and al-Qaeda, the fighting methods shown usually involve human beings, and mostly foreigners.

Another early video, dated around early 2004, belongs to Ansar al-Sunnah. It starts with a sermon by an angry cleric: “Shame on the superpower for attacking a weak state and humiliating its disarmed population.” He then continues by calling on the rest of the umma to come to the rescue of Iraq: “Brothers, we sleep here with our wives; our brothers in Iraq don’t sleep.” The video then explains the motives of Ansar al-Sunnah: “The name of this army is ‘Ansar al-Sunnah.’ We call on our brothers who fight under the flag of faith and jihad to join this army until the Muslims achieve their dream of establishing an Islamic state. This army will be the hope of our nation, it will be its sword against its enemies internally and externally.” The clips of attacks that follow are of operations carried out between July 2003 and January 2004, all dated and located with precision. The earliest operation is dated July 22, 2003, and was carried out by a self-appointed martyr Barwa al-Kurdi, who launched his loaded vehicle into a U.S. military convoy in Mosul, allegedly killing twenty soldiers. The man, sitting between two AK-47 rifles, says in a preoperation recorded statement: “My name is Barwa; I am from Erbil. . . . I conducted this operation because all Muslims should know that there are no more excuses, they have to face the nonbelievers. We can see that the Muslims and the Islam have been humiliated by the Crusaders led by America. . . . Today jihad obliges all Muslims to bring back the rule of God. . . . I chose to do this, I was aiming to please the Almighty God. Muslims should know that the non-believers are more vulnerable than they imagine.”

The importance of this video goes beyond the mention of humiliation as a driving force behind the attack. After careful investigation, it turns out that no attacks in the vicinity of Mosul are found on U.S. Army record in that particular day of July 22, 2003. The next two attacks recorded near Mosul were on July 23 and July 24. The former is not described and the latter was officially reported as an attack on a convoy with “small arms fire and rocket-propelled grenades,” while local residents who witnessed the incident claim to have heard a loud explosion followed by rifle fire. Accounts of this attack obviously differ greatly as to the number of casualties and the modus operandi of the insurgent operation. This type of discrepancy has also been exposed by Radio Free Europe and Human Rights Watch in special reports on insurgency.
Because it is impossible to ascertain which party to this conflict is closer to the truth, it can be asserted only that it was in the interest of the insurgency to boost the number of casualties and in the interest of the Coalition to lower that number. I personally have witnessed the Coalition lower the number of casualties after the Mount Lebanon Hotel bombing on March 17, 2004. That evening, only a handful of journalists, including myself, managed to make it through to the building facing the site of the bombing. Neighbors told us that an entire family, the Zeiahs, whose house was located next to the hotel, had been wiped out while they were watching, with numerous guests, a soccer game on television. I personally saw at least twelve bodies being taken out of the rubble that night, among unaccounted-for body parts. The next day, Paul Bremer’s CPA announced that six civilians were killed and forty injured. Returning to the Ansar al-Sunnah video, what can be disputed is the modus operandi, as there is a significant difference between an attack with rocket-propelled grenades and a self-appointed martyrdom operation. At the time, in the summer of 2003, it certainly was in the interest of the Coalition to not divulge that it was facing a growing insurgency, let alone the emergence of suicide operations, a hallmark for al-Qaeda and the then-defunct Ansar al-Islam (which after the fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime metamorphosed into Ansar al-Sunnah). The Coalition narrative, at the time, was still claiming that a few Saddam remnants or die-hard loyalists were refusing to concede defeat and acknowledge that the U.S. mission in Iraq had been accomplished.

CONNECTING THE DOTS

It is clear that the insurgency against the U.S. occupation of Iraq burgeoned in Sunni-populated areas of Anbar and Ninewa provinces. Although this chapter focused on the months following the invasion of Iraq, it will be necessary to analyze the evolution of the insurgency over time, after the first establishment phase, and to understand how other parts of Iraq reacted to being occupied. One question remains, If humiliation is paramount to explaining political instability in post-Saddam Iraq, why were other parts of Iraq not overtly resisting occupation as early as April and May 2003? Were they treated better by the Coalition? Were they not humiliated? The de-Baathification process explored in Chapter 1 can shed light on the emerging institutionalization of humiliation of one part of Iraq by another. A subsequent analysis of other parts of Iraq and its population in the months following the April 2003 occupation of the country will push this argument further. The old divide-and-rule principle of any occupation was certainly what prevented the entire country
from rejecting Coalition troops at a very early stage in the occupation of Iraq. This will be explained at length in subsequent chapters.

From the humble accounts that this work can bring to the overall Iraq War debate, humiliation seems to have been a decisive factor in the establishment of neighborhood-watch groups in Sunni parts of Iraq, which later on metamorphosed into structured insurgent groups unified into one operating council, at least in Fallujah. What this chapter has attempted to show is the connection between old and new events, among different parts of Iraq, of the world, and of the *umma*, as well as the terrifying foresight shown by one man, Osama bin Laden, who connected the dots where many others had failed before. The importance of systems thinking and chaos theory is crucial to anyone or any state seeking to counter and invalidate the discourse and rationale of organized violence against the West. Undoubtedly, humiliation awareness is at the core of this effort. The next chapter on the Abu Ghraib scandal and human rights abuses shows that someone at the heart of the Bush administration was all too aware of the importance of humiliation in waging the war on terror, both abroad and on Iraqi soil.
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CHAPTER 3
Abu Ghraib, a Source of Ethno-Religious Unrest

Moslems pay much attention to good manners. . . . Handshaking in Iraq is considered an important part of good manners. . . . But do not touch or handle an Iraqi in any other way. Do not wrestle him in fun, and don’t slap him on the back. . . . Above all never strike an Iraqi. . . . Don’t under any circumstance call an Iraqi a “dog,” a “devil,” a “native” or a “heathen.” These terms are all deadly insults to him. . . . Moslems do not let other people see them naked. . . . These things may seem trivial, but they are important if you want to get along well with the Iraqis.

—U.S. Army, Instructions for American Servicemen in Iraq during World War II

In September 2003, I had the privilege to take part in the first annual meeting of the Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies Network, in Paris, France. Scholars from all over the world who had an academic interest in studying humiliation gathered around Professor Evelin Lindner, who had been nurturing contacts with all of us for many years. While humiliation is a topic that everyone can partially understand and relate to, this meeting succeeded in assembling a multidisciplinary group of scholars whose research had come to the point where they all needed one another to deepen their life’s work: their commitment to human dignity and understanding the mechanisms of humiliation. On the third day of our meeting, I presented my preliminary work on applying concepts of shame, honor, and humiliation to post-Saddam Iraq. I was one of the very few scholars who had been fortunate enough to be able to travel
to Iraq in a freelance capacity very early on in the conflict. The initial data that I had gathered was of great help to further understanding our common subject at this meeting, even though it greatly differed from what could be seen, heard, and read in the mainstream media.

One U.S. Army public relations disaster that went a long way in losing Iraqi hearts and minds was of particular interest to my audience: the names painted on the U.S. tanks that had participated in the invasion of Iraq. Those names, geared toward building a rapport between war machines and the men operating them, as well as fostering group identity among fighters, were downright insulting and humiliating for average Iraqis, many of whom could read and understand English perfectly. Those names, among many others, were “Another Round Anyone,” “Abusive Father,” “Alcoholics Anonymous,” “Camel Tow,” “And Hell’s Comin’ with Me,” “Deadly Commemoration,” and the unforgettable “Crusader 2.”

Among the many incredible scholars at the annual meeting was Don Klein, a psychology professor who had fought in World War II and had dedicated his life to understanding and refining the concept of shame and humiliation in the realm of psychology. At the end of my presentation, Klein came up to me and said outright that he did not believe what I had just said about those names, that they were too grotesque to actually be real. He said that this was not the type of mistake that the army he fought with during World War II was capable of making. I did not have pictures to support my claim. The U.S. convoys were becoming trigger happy even as early as that time in the conflict, and they might have confused my camera for something else. Klein and I parted with the understanding that I had not dreamed those names, but that it was still very hard to comprehend how the Coalition could have been so careless in leaving offensive names such as these on tanks whose troops were supposed to win the hearts and minds of Iraqis.

This incident taught me that pictures are everything in times of war. Indeed they were in the Abu Ghraib scandal. In May 2004, pictures of Iraqi detainees suffering from various forms of degrading, humiliating, and physically hurtful treatments were released to the world. I had heard tales of abuse from former Abu Ghraib detainees, but, like Klein and the tank names, I had dismissed them as exaggerations. Like many, had I not been faced with pictures of the abuse, I might not have believed it had taken place.

In the context of the systemization of violence between Iraqis and Coalition troops in the fall of 2003, the images of abuse carried out at that time leave us with many questions. So far, the thesis advanced in this book has been that ignorance of what humiliation represents in an Iraqi
context is to blame for the escalation of violence in post-Saddam Iraq. Events at Abu Ghraib radically change this outlook. From the point of view of a scholar specialized in Iraqi culture, it is very difficult to believe that a handful of working-class soldiers who could barely place Iraq on a world map before being deployed there could skillfully abuse Iraqis in the way that they did. From the point of view of a scholar who is aware of the narrative of Osama bin Laden, this type of event makes one’s eyes roll in disbelief: how could any nation be so careless as to become in the eyes of many an abuser whose actions undoubtedly boosted al-Qaedaism as an ideology?

What happened in Abu Ghraib? Does the abuse that detainees there faced amount to torture? How does it compare to abuse reportedly carried in other Coalition bases throughout Iraq? Was it systematic or the result of the dereliction of duty of a few bad apples? How did the humiliation faced by Iraqis in Abu Ghraib further escalate the Iraqi conflict to a point of almost no return for Coalition troops? And last, what impact did the abuse have on Iraqi society?

While analyzing the case of abuse in the Abu Ghraib prison, and placing it in a context of wider humiliation within both the war on terror and the Iraq War, this chapter will also seek to understand the structural expression of humiliation as a violation of fundamental human rights, to help further conceptualize the mechanisms of humiliation in the escalation of political violence in post-Saddam Iraq, accounting for the polarization between different actors within the conflict. The war of images over this scandal will help assess how humiliation has become a self-fulfilling vector in the polarization between the different warring parties of a conflict among the United States, the Iraqi insurgency, and al-Qaedaism worldwide, a conflict that prepared the Iraqi political scene for the emergence of ethno-religious unrest.

**TORTURE OR ABUSE?**

As soon as the Abu Ghraib scandal broke, the U.S. government sought to avoid any mention of the word *torture* in connection with the events that occurred there. Admittedly, any admission of this reality on the part of the Bush administration would have jeopardized whatever face it had left in connection with the Iraq War. At a time when weapons of mass destruction remained elusive, the administration could at least rest assured that it had done a good deed for the Iraqi people. After all, Operation Iraqi Freedom was launched to “disarm Iraq, to free its people and to defend the world from grave danger” as well as to “carry on the work of peace.” Toward this end, a coalition of countries was
formed to “liberate the Iraqi people from one of the worst tyrants and most brutal regimes on earth.” For the many people who “suffered at the hands of this cruel man,” the nightmare was supposed to be “over forever.” The fall of the Saddam regime and the capture of its leader were to bring closure to the Iraqi people, especially its many victims.

Indeed, following the unexpectedly lengthy search for weapons of mass destruction in post-Saddam Iraq, the use of torture by the former regime had become central to the U.S.-led Coalition’s legitimization of what it referred to as the liberation of Iraq. Visits to the Abu Ghraib prison were organized for the international media, mass graves were opened, and survivors of the dictatorship found a voice. In Abu Ghraib, Iraq’s self-appointed liberators proudly exposed torture chambers and torment equipment. Torture videos were also released to and played by the international media. The horrific reputation attached to the detention facility, situated northwest of Baghdad, used to “send a chill down the spine of every Iraqi,” as tales of abominable torture were told by the lucky few who survived imprisonment there. The “new” Abu Ghraib was supposed to represent closure from former practices. It was supposed to embody the democracy of New Iraq. However, its name has once again been associated with torture.

How is torture defined according to international law? According to Article 1 of the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment of February 1985, torture consists of “any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person . . . when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity.” Under the aforementioned provisions of the convention, ratified in part by the United States, torture is suffering intentionally inflicted on an individual, whether it is to obtain information, in retaliation for a suspected crime, or to intimidate. Such provisions seek to cast aside the guilt of the person in favor of fair and humane treatment. According to Article 2, the covenant dismisses as irrelevant provisions with regard to politically extreme circumstances such as war or other forms of emergency. It states, “No exceptional circumstance . . . may be invoked as a justification of torture.” However, the United States has made reservations with regards to “cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment,” in accordance with the Fifth, Eighth, and Fourteenth amendments to the U.S. Constitution. According to the Fifth
Amendment, arbitrary detention in “time of war or public danger” is valid. Despite this highly counterproductive reservation, the United States is also a signatory to the four Geneva Conventions of 1949, which it ratified in 1955. Under the Geneva Convention relative to the treatment of prisoners of war: “No physical or mental torture, nor any other form of coercion, may be inflicted on prisoners of war to secure from them information of any kind whatever. Prisoners of war who refuse to answer may not be threatened, insulted, or exposed to any unpleasant or disadvantageous treatment of any kind.”

While an internationally accepted definition of torture is not legally binding for the United States in times of conflict, its ratification of the Geneva Convention requires it to banish any form of torture or “coercion” of prisoners of war, without exception.

International law is very clear in terms of what constitutes torture. International law à la carte, that is to say, the U.S. rejection of Article 2 of the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment of February 1985, is not. In effect, the rejection of by far the most important article of this convention, which stipulates that under no circumstances can the use of torture be justified, opened a Pandora’s box for unscrupulous legal experts of the U.S. Department of Justice to exploit this void to the fullest.

The special circumstance invoked at the time was the prevention of another terrorist attack such as 9/11 on U.S. soil. In the months following the attacks, as the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was starting to interrogate suspected terrorists worldwide, the Department of Justice was asked to reflect on the possibility of using torture against suspects in captivity to enable the CIA to conduct more robust interrogations. To this effect, a memo, signed by Assistant Attorney General Jay S. Bybee, and dated August 1, 2002, stipulates that torturing suspected al-Qaeda terrorists abroad “may be justified,” that the international covenant on torture could be considered unconstitutional because it was clearly interfering with the U.S. president’s role as commander in chief, and that if torture were to be used against detainees, it would be carried out to prevent further attacks on the United States by al-Qaeda. This memo did not condone torture outright; rather, it defined it more narrowly as “equivalent to the pain that would be associated with serious physical injury so severe that death, organ failure, or permanent damage resulting in a loss of significant body function will likely result.” Furthermore, were a U.S. government employee to inflict severe pain on a detainee, it would have to be done with “specific intent” for him or her to be liable for violating rules against this narrow definition of torture. In effect, international law defining torture was narrowed down to organ failure...
and death. On the ground, this meant that the gloves were off, that government officials could resort to any type of physical or mental coercion that would not result in death or organ failure, virtually everything from the use of electricity to pulling out fingernails or rape, because none of these practices amounted to torture per se. And were a U.S. government official to accidentally kill a detainee, as long as there was no intent, he or she would not be in breach of any law.

The legal reasoning behind this 2002 memo was later used in March 2003 by Pentagon lawyers in their assessment of interrogation rules in the Guantánamo Bay detention center in Cuba. While President Bush has always declined to say “whether he believes U.S. law prohibits torture,” White House officials have always maintained that detainees in Guantánamo and elsewhere “have been treated humanely.” This is true only if one believes that forced sodomy constitutes humane treatment.

On December 24, 2004, a colleague and I met in Zarqa, Jordan, with a former Guantánamo detainee of Palestinian origin named Hussein Abdelkader Youssef Mustafa. Mustafa was taken into custody in Pakistan on May 25, 2002, and was released two years later with a U.S. Army–issued letter stating that he “pose[d] no threat to the United States armed forces or its interests in Afghanistan” after all. Mustafa was a schoolteacher in Pakistan and believes that he was arrested because he had taught Afghani refugees in Pakistan and had visited Afghanistan once, in 1988. This type of arbitrary arrest is unfortunately rather common in the war on terror. As a prime ally in the war on terror, Pakistan has had to bring proof of its loyalty to the United States through the arrest of all its suspected Islamist dissidents since 9/11. It has been argued that the Pakistani government promoted quantity over quality in the arrests that were carried out in its territory since 9/11, favoring the shipping of Islamists remotely associated with the Taliban government and al-Qaeda over the arrest of important al-Qaeda operatives, themselves heavily infiltrated at all levels of Pakistani affairs. Immediately following his capture in Pakistan, Mustafa was sent to the Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan to be later transferred to Guantánamo Bay. We asked Mustafa to give us the full details of the treatment that he received both in Bagram and Guantánamo. He was very evasive and alluded only to uncomfortable positions usually referred to as “stress positions,” sleep deprivation, beatings, and humiliating situations such as being forced to defecate in front of others. We knew from another colleague that this was not all that he had suffered, and we presumed after the interview that he had not spoken freely as a result of my presence in the room:
he might have felt ashamed to disclose the sexual nature of his abuse in front of me, a Western and non-Muslim woman. As a devout Muslim, he had asked his son to bring me a piece of cloth to hide my ankles as I was sitting on the floor across from him during the interview. This was enough of a hint that he was not feeling comfortable speaking in front of me. This incident humbled me as to the gross limitations that exist for Western women carrying out research in the Middle East. I am fully aware that I will never be able to get to the bottom of issues such as these. We therefore asked our fixer, Mayada al-Askari, to go back to him a few days later to ask him exactly the nature of his abuse. Al-Askari recalled that Mustafa became visibly angry when asked the same questions, and he replied: “My torture was even less than what they did to others. A broomstick was inserted in my backside and I was beaten severely and water was thrown on me before facing an air conditioner. . . . If a prisoner did not comply and cooperate in details in Bagram, he would be abused according to how convinced the interrogator was that he was guilty; and to reach the stage of not guilty in the eyes of the interrogator, one went through a long period of being physically abused.”

Mustafa said that this type of practice (as it cannot be called torture under U.S. law), was random, common, and that many of his inmates had been subjected to either rape or beatings as part of interrogations supervised by U.S. government officials. About his time in Guantánamo, Mustafa said that he was treated better, that he was never sexually assaulted again, but that at least thirty inmates attempted suicide during the two years he was there. He never stated whether he had attempted suicide himself. Before being sent to Guantánamo, a U.S. government official in charge of interrogating him told him that he believed Mustafa was innocent, but that because his name was “in Washington” he would have to be sent to Guantánamo anyway.

It seems that, like the Pakistani security services, the Guantánamo Bay detention facility was also working under prisoner quotas imposed by higher authorities in Washington, DC, Mustafa’s ordeal is a clear indication that prisoners in U.S. custody were not treated humanely. Furthermore, under international law’s definition of torture, the treatments he was subjected to clearly amount to torture.

Can humiliation be interpreted as torture? What type of treatment was inflicted on prisoners in the Abu Ghrabib detention facility? A further understanding of Iraqi culture will enable us to answer these questions in a culturally sensitive manner. As we will see, the treatments inflicted on detainees in Abu Ghrabib ought to be understood primarily in relation to Iraqi culture.
HOMOSEXUALITY IN IRAQ

As exposed in Chapter 1, in Iraq women are viewed as intrinsically shameful individuals, whose sexual purity, ird, has to be maintained at all costs. Thus, any representation of a man as what is understood as being female, that is to say, an object of male sexual gratification, will lead to shame, dishonor, humiliation, and disgrace in the eyes of society, and will consequently generate severe mental suffering. Homosexuality is one of the most shameful states of being in Iraq, and it is even punishable by death since 2001 in an amendment of the 1990 Iraqi Penal Code. Even though Iraq was a fundamentally secular society due to Baath Party ideology, Saddam Hussein had this amendment issued in 2001 to gain the support of Iraqi religious conservatives in the run-up to the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq.

Needless to say, and as will be discussed in a subsequent chapter, neither Paul Bremer’s CPA nor the new Iraqi government ever thought of challenging this law. Any amendment of this nature would most certainly have lost any ultraconservative Shiite support for the January 2005 elections geared toward the drafting of the new Iraqi constitution, of which Article 17 could not be more ambiguous in relation to homosexuality. It states that “each person has the right to personal privacy as long as it does not violate the rights of others or general morality.” Indeed, when “general morality” assumes that being gay is the worst thing that can “happen” to anyone (most people in Iraq still believe that homosexuality is a choice), one can see how the new constitution will fail to bring a Western type of democracy to New Iraq. What should be clear here is that homosexuality is a great taboo, which, like female “impurity,” justifies the perpetration of honor crimes. Under Article 111 of the 1990 Iraqi Penal Code, men who have killed a family member in defense of their family’s honor are exempted from prosecution. This applies to cases of sexual deviancy perpetrated both by women and by men who behave as women. Of importance here is the notion of a man who behaved like a women according to Iraqi society. The word to refer to a homosexual man in Iraqi slang is maniouk, which roughly translates as “the possessed,” meaning one who receives a man’s penis in a sexual act. This definition is very important because receiving another man’s penis means certain death, while receiving fellatio, considered more as bisexuality than homosexuality, for instance, is barely tolerated in some instances though punishable by social death if it is made public. Of importance here is the religious and social environment within which the homosexual transgressions are made. Because Sunni Islam is much more strict than Shiite Islam concerning this type of issue, any homosexual
act or even suspicion of homosexual act will be punished by death in Sunni tribal areas of Iraq, such as Anbar Province, for instance, while it might be tolerated if it is not made public in some more liberal parts of Baghdad, such as the mixed Shiite and Christian district of Bataouine. Therefore, both in Iraq and in the Mediterranean region, that is, among Muslim and Christian communities alike, sexual acts that question the manliness of an individual, that is to say, being penetrated “as a woman” are usually sanctioned by death, state or clan incurred.\\footnote{27}

The French scholar Lagrange narrates the story of a “young boy caught being sodomized by a friend his own age [who] is killed by his father because of the shame brought upon the family, while the other boy, the ‘top’ (active partner) is expelled from the village.”\\footnote{28} While male bisexuality can be tolerated if not talked about publicly, it is always a fine line for anyone not to daringly cross, as the loss of honor for any man means social death, arguably the worst form of disgrace anyone can suffer.\\footnote{29}

These subtleties do not mean that homosexuality does not exist in Iraq. Indeed it does, just as in any society. Omar B., a young Sunni man from Abu Ghraib to whose case we will return shortly, and who is now deceased, was not shy about narrating his sexual escapades in Baghdad. He once admitted to having received fellatio from another man in the aforementioned Bataouine district.\\footnote{30} Hussein M., a member of the Mehdi Army’s Special Groups, Shiite death squads whose activities were tolerated by the U.S.-led Coalition from the fall of 2005 onward, and responsible for the ethnic cleansing of Sunni Muslims mostly in Baghdad, was very up-front about disclosing that any effeminate man arrested by those groups, to which he belongs, would systematically be raped before being killed and casually dumped on the streets of Baghdad.\\footnote{31} What remains to be established, of course, is what exactly it means to be effeminate according to Iraqi standards. Let us leave the subtleties related to homosexuality in Iraq to come to one conclusion: homosexuality is an extreme taboo in Iraqi society, punishable by death in most cases, although one can find some degrees of flexibility according to one’s socioreligious background.

Thus, as has been established in an earlier chapter that the loss of honor represents the lowest form of social disgrace, ostracism, and probable death, any humiliation of sexual nature, that is to say, the stripping of all three types of honor discussed in Chapter 1, geared toward the loss of individual and collective honor brings about severe mental suffering, which can also be associated with physical suffering in terms of the honor killings emanating from the loss of honor. Does this humiliation amount to torture? Let us come back to the international law definition
of it. Following the definition given previously, characterizing it as causing “severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental,” the act of humiliating a prisoner, which will ensure the stripping of his honor, can be qualified as torture. In the case of the sexual humiliation of women, their objectification in Iraqi society makes them a vector to bring shame onto their families. Because a woman will suffer immediate physical pain through the honor crime perpetrated against her, sexual humiliation also undoubtedly amounts to torture.

An analysis of the humiliations inflicted on the Abu Ghraib detainees will help shed light on the exact links between humiliation and torture in this particular situation and the Iraq conflict in general. Because Iraqi culture is now clearer to us in terms of what homosexuality represents, let us look at whether the treatments perpetrated in Abu Ghraib represent “severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental.”

TORTURE?

To focus on an analysis of the evidence rather than generate a controversy over abuse allegations, the evidence of abuse used in this book for analysis of the ill treatment of Iraqi prisoners at the Abu Ghraib detention facility is mainly based on the first official U.S. Army report published as a result of Major General Antonio Taguba’s investigation of the 800th Military Police Brigade, which was administering the facilities at the time of the alleged abuse. According to the Taguba Report, the nature of the abuse suffered by detainees at the Abu Ghraib facility was “intentional” and amounted to “punching, slapping, and kicking detainees,... videotaping and photographing naked male and female detainees[...],... forcing groups of male detainees to masturbate themselves[...],... positioning a naked detainee on a MRE [meals ready-to-eat] box... and attaching wires to his fingers, toes, and penis to simulate electric torture[...],... writing ‘I am a rapist [sic]’ on the leg of a detainee alleged to have forcibly raped a [fifteen]-year-old fellow detainee[...][and] a male MP guard having sex with a female detainee.”32 Major General Taguba also found “credible” allegations of “[s]odomizing a detainee with a chemical light and perhaps a broomstick.” Furthermore, soldiers were accused of “[u]sing military working dogs (without muzzles) to intimidate and frighten detainees, and at least in one case biting and severely injuring a detainee.”33 When compared to the definition of torture in the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, and Degrading Treatment or Punishment, these graphic descriptions of abuse are unquestionably inflicting severe pain or suffering, either or both mental or physical. While the degree of
physical suffering seems self-explanatory, the notion of mental suffering has also been explained in an Iraqi context. Considering the strict Iraqi honor system, the reflections on homosexuality provided previously, and the international law definition of torture, the evidence provided in the Taguba Report leaves no room for further discussion on whether all these acts constitute torture under international law.

Punching, slapping, and kicking amount to torture because they generate physical pain. Videotaping and photographing naked male and female detainees is torture because these acts can provoke mental pain, according to Iraqi honor codes, and physical repercussions in the case of the women who undoubtedly will die as a result of the exposure. Forcing groups of male detainees to masturbate themselves, hence the simulation of homosexual acts, definitely creates mental suffering. Does the simulation of electric torture qualify as torture? While it certainly generates mental pain, let us get back to it in more detail later.

A very disturbing finding, a male military police officer “having sex” with a female detainee, almost slips unnoticed amid other findings. Yet it is being reported in a troublesome manner. Let us pause here to reflect on how gender loaded this statement actually is. “Having sex” seems anodyne, as if it were a harmless sexual act of love and affection. Was the detainee having sex or was she being raped? The report leaves this question unanswered but has much more to say about men being forced to wear women’s underwear.

While all the acts committed against detainees in Abu Ghraib amount to torture under international law, not all have resulted in death or organ failure, the preferred Bush administration definition of torture. All acts perpetrated in Abu Ghraib can be analyzed in different terms, with regard to the perceptions that can derive from them, as well as the degree of physical and mental pain inflicted on prisoners. These expressions of abuse take different meanings according to the humiliation that they generate. What cannot be disputed, however, is that the expression of honor attached to the preservation of a woman’s purity is common to most individuals, at every level of the social construct. The safeguard of a woman’s purity and the condemnation of all nonmanly types of behavior are a common expression of honor among Iraqi males. For this reason, the “punching, slapping and kicking [of] prisoners” will not have the same resonance within Iraqi culture as the “videotaping and photographing [of] naked male and female detainees” or the “sodomizing [of] a detainee,” which according to the aforementioned cultural standards is one of the worst possible forms of humiliation, as the actual taking of the photographs makes all these sexual transgressions public. Pictures can leave a potentially public trail that cannot be
dismissed. Before addressing the possible reasons behind the taking of these pictures, one question remains: exactly what was photographed and videotaped in Abu Ghraib?

**SPINNING**

A first batch of pictures was released by a CBS documentary and by Seymour Hersh in The New Yorker in May 2004. These pictures were quite graphic in nature. They exposed men wearing female underpants; naked men in a pyramid; men simulating fellatio; the infamous “triangle man” wearing only a poncho and standing on a MRE box with electrodes tied to his extremities, and we are told, also to his sexual organs; a man being “walked” with a leash by Private Lynndie England; England pointing toward the genitals of a naked detainee standing in line with other naked detainees; a man being terrorized by a military working dog without a muzzle; Private Sabrina Harman posing near a corpse with her thumbs up; Specialist Charles Graner, alleged ringleader, preparing to punch detainees laying on the concrete floor of a corridor.

The pictures are grotesque, shocking, and disastrous in terms of winning the hearts and minds of Iraqis. They are also clearly humiliating in light of the Iraqi honor system hitherto discussed in this book. Of importance here is that these pictures were released without context. As a matter of fact, in the pictures that were originally circulated was the picture of the “sexual humiliation of a father with his son.” This gruesome detail was never highlighted in the mainstream media of the United States.

Let us step back for a minute and focus beyond the content of these pictures. One question stems: had these pictures not been leaked to the U.S. media in May 2004, would the tales of abuse and torture at Abu Ghraib ever have seen the light of day? Let us reverse this question and ask whether the “leaking” of these pictures at that particular point in time in the Iraq War, in May 2004, may have allowed the Bush administration to literally get away with murder? At a time of grave danger for its overall war on terror policy of legalized torture, as well as in an election year, these pictures may well have given away part of the Bush administration’s integrity as bait to ensure its reelection. In effect, and whether or not intentional, the release of these pictures ensured that the world media, eager for anything it could get in relation to the Iraq War at a time of information drought, completely fell for this bait and lost its integrity as a monitor to the centers of power. It mostly reported on the content of these grotesque pictures instead of questioning the content of pictures that were not shown.
In fact, the pictures released in May 2004 were the softest and least explicitly violent of a few hundred images that were not shown to the general public at the time. All these pictures were shown to the U.S. Senate, where a Republican Senator reportedly stated that they contained scenes of “rape and murder.” In 2004, U.S. Defense Secretary Rumsfeld himself commented that these pictures show acts “that can only be described as blatantly sadistic, cruel and inhumane.”

The U.S. journalist Seymour Hersh, at the time of the release/leaking, reportedly said during the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) 2004 Convention:

Some of the worst that happened that you don’t know about, OK? Videos, there are women there. Some of you may have read that they were passing letters, communications out to their men… The women were passing messages saying ‘Please come and kill me, because of what’s happened.’ Basically what happened is that those women who were arrested with young boys/children in cases that have been recorded. The boys were sodomized with the cameras rolling. The worst about all of them is the soundtrack of the boys shrieking that your government has. They are in total terror it’s going to come out.

Major General Antonio Taguba, who headed the investigation into the abuse at Abu Ghraib, told Hersh, once Taguba had retired, that he saw “a video of a male American soldier in uniform sodomizing a female detainee.” The existence of video was hidden from the public, as “it’s bad enough that there were photographs of Arab men wearing women’s panties.”

At a time when the world media was entertaining the general public with stories of men being paraded in female underwear, no one bothered to scratch the surface and uncover the horror of what had really happened in Abu Ghraib. For once, no one could say that pictures were not available. They were. It was more than a year later, after a fierce court battle between the ACLU and the Pentagon, that a judge first ordered the release of some of the missing pictures and videotapes. During that time, the reason invoked by the Pentagon to not release this information was that it would reopen old wounds. When an Australian news network finally released the missing pictures in February 2006, Abu Ghraib had become “old news” in the public’s psyche, and their release went by almost unnoticed. That was the end of the Abu Ghraib scandal.

Given all this, one seriously wonders whether the release or leaking of only a few pictures was not just a damage limitation exercise on part of
the Bush administration. As a matter of fact, their existence was bound to be made public any day because of the spreading of the news to military families that something wrong was happening with their relatives deployed in Iraq. It was on January 13, 2004, that a whistleblower from the 372nd Military Police Company, Joseph M. Darby, obtained pictures from one of the incriminated soldiers, Charles Graner, and gave them to the Army’s Criminal Investigation Division (CID). From that moment on, the CID understood immediately that the pictures had been shared among soldiers and that they were bound to come out publicly.\textsuperscript{45}

This was confirmed to me as I traveled to the hometown of the 372nd Company, in Cresap Town, Maryland, in September 2004. There, I met with local radio reporter Bridget Nolan who explained: “We all knew that bad things were happening over there. Some pictures had been sent to relatives, and people were writing home saying that bad things were happening in Iraq, but that they were not being part of them directly.” She continued: “From January [2004] on, we knew that an internal enquiry had started, and many here were afraid that the Army would let our people down.”\textsuperscript{46} This is exactly what happened, as the pictures taken in Abu Ghraib were released under a narrative of dereliction of duty of a few bad apples, while never questioning, as the U.S. psychologist Philip Zimbardo ingeniously points out, the barrel.\textsuperscript{47}

**TROPHY PICTURES?**

Torture there was, undoubtedly, but why were pictures of this torture taken, shared, and exposed? Would it not be important for anyone engaging in torture to not leave traces of the acts? Would it not be shameful for anyone to be publicly exposed as a torturer? Why would one of the soldiers incriminated in this scandal refer to what happened as just “fun and games”?\textsuperscript{48} Several arguments have been put forward to answer these questions and to ask more in connection with what happened. Let us decipher these by asking yet another question: who and what institution did the pictures benefit at the end? As an analysis of Iraqi culture points out, these pictures would have been seen as a strong deterrent to anyone not cooperating in interrogations.

Omar H. is a Sunni Muslim from a village near Abu Ghraib. He was employed by the Virginia-based consultancy company CACI International. Staff employed by this company, alongside another company named Titan, were incriminated by Major General Taguba in his report as men and women “who were not trained in interrogation techniques [hired] to facilitate interrogations by ‘setting conditions’ which were never authorized.”\textsuperscript{49} In effect, civilians with no experience...
in interrogation or prisoner handling, but who had mastered the Arabic language, were dispatched by these companies as part of subcontracting agreements with the U.S. Army to carry out interrogations in Abu Ghraib and, undoubtedly, to get results. The report deplored the confusion that might have existed as to the status of these civilians in the prison, not accountable to anyone and in effect acting under rather blurred guidelines, yet at times giving orders to soldiers.50

Were the pictures taken to set conditions for other prisoners to talk? Were these pictures of a few unlucky inmates a tool to make others speak? Were these pictures not a bare condition-setting exercise? I never met directly with any of the military personnel that served in Abu Ghraib at the time, only prisoners, Iraqi staff, and the family of Sergeant Chip Frederick. However, Omar H., who was working as a translator on a day shift in early November 2003, remembered an event that might account for the “setting” of the conditions referred to in the Taguba Report. He recalled: “A soldier came to see me one morning. He looked distraught and tired. He said that he had to ask me a personal favor. I accepted. He took me to a cell and asked me to translate something to a male detainee. He was visibly shaken and said: “I am sorry for what happened last night. I just wanted you to know that.” As I translated, tears were rolling down their eyes. It was a strange situation. We never spoke about it again.” When I asked him the name of the soldier, he refused to disclose his name. He only said that the soldier was male and that he was one of the seven soldiers of the 372nd Military Police Company who were charged with dereliction of duty in relation to the torture that took place in Abu Ghraib. This anecdote does not exonerate the soldiers who perpetrated those evil acts; it only sheds light on the toll that those acts also left in the minds of some of these soldiers, who will have to live with this for the rest of their lives.

Was the use of torture widespread in Abu Ghraib? Omar H. and the Taguba Report say that no, it was not, and occurred only in some parts of the prison that were handling “high-value detainees,” that is to say, detainees who were believed to be heavily connected to the growing Iraqi insurgency.51 In relation to the setting of conditions for interrogation in an Iraqi environment, the terror that these pictures would place on anyone being interrogated would serve as a strong deterrent: speak or you will be exposed as a gay man to your friends and neighbors. Again, while homosexuality can be implicitly tolerated in certain instances, it must not be publicized and must remain a taboo under all circumstances.52 While society might be lenient toward a man forced into being sexually active with another man, this activity must not become publicly known, especially in the case of a man being sexually objectified.
The capturing of sexual acts as transcribed in the Taguba Report and published in the news media therefore takes a culturally acute meaning in an Abu Ghraib context, too acute, according to Republican Senator Susan Collins, to have emanated from the imagination of ordinary soldiers.\textsuperscript{53} How could any individual such as Lynndie England, who worked in a chicken-meat factory before being called in by the U.S. National Guard, be aware of what buttons to press when torturing an Iraqi male?\textsuperscript{54} Indeed, while bare physical force against a detainee seems to be a common reaction abusive human beings have with regard to one another, such elaborate use of humiliation to inflict severe mental pain, the use of humiliation as torture, generates questions as to the cultural sensitivity shown by ordinary soldiers. This question of cultural sensitivity can stem only from a look into the systemic use of torture at Abu Ghraib. The international media, on the other hand, in its coverage of the events, focused only on the modest social origins and the alleged sadistic tendencies of the soldiers in question, this with a particular focus on Private Lynndie England.\textsuperscript{55} This focus will be analyzed in a subsequent chapter.

While Omar H. and the Taguba Report pointed out that torture was not systematically used in Abu Ghraib, it is still timely to ask how the seven soldiers who were convicted in this case became aware of how to torture an Iraqi. In light of the fact that the U.S. government had narrowed the definition of torture down to “organ failure” and “death,” that the picture taking of the type of torture that was carried out qualifies as a deterring instrument according to Iraqi culture, and that the very acts that resonate with Iraqi culture could not come from a few recruits unaware of their significance, let us further explore the system within which those individuals were able to evolve into torturers. As mentioned earlier, Zimbardo questions the system that provoked these soldiers to carry out their violent deeds: he incriminates the barrel that corrupted the apples. Which barrel can be referred to here? That of the U.S. prison system? That of the U.S. Army? Both?

FROM BARREL TO BARREL: THE U.S. PRISON SYSTEM AND THE WAR ON TERROR SYSTEM

Of the seven individuals tried for dereliction of duty and prisoner abuse, two, Specialist Graner and Sergeant Frederick, had worked as prison guards before being deployed, in Pennsylvania and Virginia, respectively. This fact was heavily relied on by the U.S. media to concur with the Bush administration’s narrative of a “few bad apples” that got out of hand.\textsuperscript{56} Could violent U.S. prison practices against inmates have
been transferred to Iraq? This is of little doubt for some observers of the Virginia prison system, in light of a past scandal that saw inmates being shot with stun guns, slammed against walls, chained to the railings of their beds for sometimes days at a time, and threatened with sodomy and dogs. These events that occurred at Virginia’s Wallens Ridge State Prison in 1999 bear a clear connection to events that occurred in Abu Ghraib in relation to the use of the threat of sodomy and of working dogs. It does not, however, address the institutionalization of these practices at a widespread level.

The U.S. psychologist James Gilligan qualifies the procedural sodomy of inmates in U.S. prisons as an “occupational routine” on the part of prison guards. According to this procedure, called the “booking” ritual, newly arrived inmates are forced to strip naked and present their posterior in a gesture of submission to the guards, one of whom will insert a gloved finger into the inmate’s anus to determine ostensibly whether the inmate is smuggling illicit drugs into the prison. According to Gilligan, this ritual is “consciously and deliberately intended to terrify and humiliate the new inmate or patient, by demonstrating to him the complete and total power the prison . . . has over him.” Could this practice have become part of the dereliction of duty of a handful of soldiers in Abu Ghraib? The confessions of an interrogator who served in Kandahar, Afghanistan, point out that this so-called booking ritual was routine as part of the screening of newly arrived detainees as early as the fall of 2001. Booking was therefore a widespread ritual in the war on terror.

Could this account for the sodomy referred to earlier by Mustafa? If so, it is a very fine line, in perception at least, between a routine inspection by a doctor and an act of sodomy performed by a soldier with a broomstick. This fine line however, given the right set of circumstances that leaves a lot to soldiers’ interpretation, coupled with the pressure from above to obtain “actionable intelligence,” that is to say, time-sensitive information that can prevent a further attack on U.S. troops, is a deadly mix that may well have led to the spread of abuse. Indeed, the presence of a broomstick in Mustafa’s account would point toward a scenario of rape and torture, and he certainly perceived it as such. While the civilian occupation of two of the incriminated soldiers leads us to think that these practices could have derived from the U.S. prison system, the Taguba Report finds a direct link to the Guantánamo Bay Detention Center in Cuba, thus incriminating the U.S. Army system in relation to the abuse that took place in Abu Ghraib. This no doubt points evidence toward an incrimination of the U.S. Army barrel in the search for a systemic explanation of the torture that occurred in Abu Ghraib.
The report asserts that after August 2003, General Geoffrey Miller, former commander of the Guantánamo base in Cuba, introduced the use of “JTF-GTMO procedures and interrogation authorities” as guidelines for interrogation in the Abu Ghraib prison. This occurred in a context of heightened concern over a burgeoning insurgency, and, according to the few videos reviewed earlier, upon covert realization that al-Qaeda had started suicide operations in Iraq. During the months that followed the visit of General Miller to Abu Ghraib, insurgents were shelling the prison daily, and the Coalition was starting to suffer an increasing number of casualties. In light of this, it is no wonder that the pressure for actionable intelligence became harsher and that results had to be obtained at all costs in Abu Ghraib. The problem with all this, of course, is that according to most professionals who worked in the prison, only a small percentage of the Iraqis detained there had operational links to the insurgency. Those procedures brought in by General Miller to Abu Ghraib were the very ones discussed in the memos referred to earlier, which defined torture as actions resulting in organ failure and death, and that also connected Islamic culture and traditions to some of the techniques that were to be used to obtain results from the interrogation of prisoners in the war on terror.

What did the guidelines amount to? After the relieving of duty of Generals Dunleavy and Baccus for failing to provide results in their interrogations of detainees in Guantánamo, literally for being too soft on detainees, General Miller, an artillery officer with no experience in prison management, was sent to Guantánamo to reevaluate interrogation rules of engagement. Encouraged by the Department of Justice memo mentioned earlier, General Miller acted with outstanding zeal to review interrogation techniques within the prison. These techniques amounted to placing detainees in stress positions, stripping detainees naked, simulated drowning (called “water boarding”), using female interrogators to question detainees (called “invoking feelings of futility”), and so on. Among practices for invoking feelings of futility, an incident reported in a Frontline documentary explains how a female interrogator intentionally infuriated a Muslim inmate by making him believe that she was smearing her menstrual blood onto him. Needless to say, menstruation is considered highly impure in Islam. The detainee is reported to have furiously lunged at the female interrogator, only to be restrained by his shackles on his way to throttle her.

Regardless of the fact that “the wrong people were being questioned in the wrong way,” Miller established stringent culturally sensitive rules, which, given the wrong supervision, could easily have slipped out of control. In a New York Times article by Don van Natta Jr. in
March 2003, written in connection with the capture of Khaled Sheikh Mohammed, incriminated in the brutal murder of *Wall Street Journal* correspondent Daniel Pearl and suspected of being involved in the preparation of 9/11, “American officials” admitted that “women are used as interrogators to try to humiliate men unaccustomed to dealing with women in positions of authority.” Although this article did not raise much concern at the time, it now takes another dimension: that of the pre–Abu Ghraib recognition of the use of cultural anthropology in interrogation practices. Indeed, on the basis of a cultural anthropology of Iraq formulated earlier, the hypothesis that Graner and Frederick’s experience of inflicting abuse in the U.S. prison system could have been reiterated amid a chaotic commanding environment at Abu Ghraib, as the Taguba Report suggests, does not take into account the anthropological sophistication of the torture of humiliation as practiced in that prison. Therefore, with all the evidence shown so far, it seems understandable that the few bad apples who indeed did go too far in “setting up” interrogation conditions at Abu Ghraib were encouraged by a system of blurred guidelines regarding the institutional use of torture, a blurred chain of command in the prison itself in relation to both the authority of civilian and military personnel, and more important, culturally fitted guidelines of humiliation according to Iraqi customs. This explosive mix created the ideal conditions for the soldiers to go astray and become overzealous.

Beyond the debate surrounding the origins of the Abu Ghraib scandal also lies the standard practice of humiliation within the U.S. prison system, the institutionalization of humiliation as a submission tool for authority. While the international debate focuses on either proving the culpability of a few soldiers or uncovering the institutionalized use of humiliation as a form of torture in the context of the war on terror, a larger debate needs to be initiated with regard to the institutional use of humiliation in the U.S. prison system. As the French scholar Wacquant emphasizes, the marginalization of a large segment of the U.S. population, imprisoned en masse and denied fundamental rights to human dignity and even life, remains to be addressed within U.S. society. In both cases, whether the exactions at Abu Ghraib are the result of the deviance of a few or those of an institution, what remains clear is the use of humiliation by U.S. governmental institutions is widespread and institutionalized.

With regard to qualifying other evidence as torture, privileging the infliction of physical pain onto an individual over that of mental pain, can one still assert that the Abu Ghraib exactions amounted only to abuse, as many of the torments documented in the Taguba Report only simulated torture?
THE HYPERREALITY OF SIMULACRA

While part of the media coverage of Abu Ghraib focused on a few bad apples, another overall narrative connected with the release of the softest of pictures revolved around the idea that the kind of abuse that took place had nothing to do with the torture that Saddam Hussein used to inflict on his people. The media framing of the Abu Ghraib issue maintained that while the threat of electrodes or military working dogs was used, no one actually did act on these threats. Indeed, President Bush qualified the events that took place in Abu Ghraib as “disgraceful conduct by a few American troops” as opposed to the “death and torture” that took place in the same location under the Saddam Hussein regime.

Though wires were only attached to detainees’ body parts to simulate torture, does the fear that such acts generate not amount to torture per se?

The French scholar Jean Baudrillard uses the example of a bank robbery to determine whether a simulation can generate the same results as reality. According to his explanation, should one decide to simulate the robbery of a bank, one would storm into a bank with a plastic gun, demand that money be delivered to him, and observe other actors’ reactions. While the intent was not to rob a bank, the result might well trigger the same effects as if the robbery were real: the bank manager or a passerby might suffer from a heart attack at the sight of the “robber” and the police might shoot at the “criminal” before checking to see whether he or she did intend to rob the bank. The simulation or simulacrum of the bank robbery would eventually lead to a situation that does not belong to the realm of reality, but not to fiction either if the “thief” and the heart-sensitive person died. Such a situation belongs to the realm of the hyperreal, which represents the “generation by models of a real without origin or reality.”

Employing the same logic, the simulacra of torture in Abu Ghraib had the same effect on the detainees; the fear and rejection that were generated on the part of the inmates toward their U.S. captors would result in the same violent response and polarization as if the torture had been real. The image of the detainee standing on an MRE box symbolizes the hyperreality of the torture that occurred in the Abu Ghraib prison. Whether or not the act was a simulacrum, the images of physical torture it conveyed did amount to severe mental pain, hence torture. The same can be said of using fake menstrual blood on a detainee in Guantánamo Bay. In fact, Mustafa recalled during his interview that while he was held at Guantánamo, at least thirty of his peers attempted suicide. Thus, the blood may not have been real but the result certainly was: a cohort of
highly religious detainees for whom suicide is a sin still tried to resort to it as a way to free themselves from their daily torment. This account may coincide with a reported mass suicide attempt of twenty-three detainees that took place in 2003.\textsuperscript{76} It is important to note that this suicide attempt epidemic occurred after General Miller took command of the prison. Regardless of the intent behind the humiliations that took place both in Guantánamo and in Abu Ghraib, the result is that the humiliation of prisoners can be fatal.

Were Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo the only detention facilities where torture occurred? Or was the humiliation of prisoners a widespread phenomenon?

**CAMP FALLUJAH**

Young Omar B., mentioned earlier in relation to homosexual acts in the Bataouine district of Baghdad, was originally interviewed in connection to his detention in Camp Fallujah from mid-January 2004 onward.\textsuperscript{77} Omar B. was an insurgent who worked for the 1920 Brigades, mentioned in Chapter 2, a nationalist group geared toward ending the U.S. occupation of Anbar Province. Based in the Abu Ghraib area, this group mostly carried out IED attacks, ambushes, and mortar attacks against U.S. facilities in the vicinity of the prison. The 1920 Brigades later became part of the Sunni Awakening initiative, a coalition of insurgent groups allied to U.S. troops in a common effort to rid Anbar Province of its al-Qaeda occupation.\textsuperscript{78} We will return to this phenomenon in subsequent chapters.

Omar B. was arrested by U.S. troops in January 2004 as he was transporting ammunition in his car. Asked why he had joined the 1920 Brigades, he said that he had done so as a result of some relatives being arrested and witnessing torture in the Abu Ghraib prison. Omar B. said that as people were being released and starting to speak out, many, like him, had joined the insurgency to cleanse their collective honor. Omar B. never received payment for his involvement with the 1920 Brigades. Of importance here is the date when Omar B. was arrested and transferred to Camp Fallujah, as it coincides with the time when whistle-blower Joseph Darby revealed to his chain of command what had happened in Abu Ghraib. Because Omar B. was detained for about a month from mid-January onward, it can be concluded that his detention coincided with the CID inquiry on alleged abuse in Abu Ghraib. Omar B. recalled one particular incident involving two U.S. soldiers. One night, he was brought into a cell by two soldiers, a male and a female, and was told to translate what they were to tell an Iraqi detainee. Omar B. did not know
the detainee and says he was rather young. After touching Omar B.’s genitals, the female soldier instructed Omar B. to tell the other detainee to undress. Both detainees’ hands were free and neither was restrained by shackles. The male soldier touched the young man’s genitals to a point of arousal and told him to penetrate the female soldier. After doing so for a while, he then told the young Iraqi to penetrate him. While this was taking place, Omar B. was told to watch and translate their instructions to the young man. After a few moments, the young Iraqi fell on the floor, naked from the waste down and in tears. He was left alone in his cell. Omar B. says that he was visibly ashamed at what had happened, could not look at him or anyone in the eyes, and clearly felt humiliated. No pictures were taken during this incident.

What new information does this incident bring in relation to Abu Ghraib? First, it clearly shows that Abu Ghraib was not an isolated sequence of events incriminating a few bad apples, and that conditions were ripe in other detention centers across Iraq for another type of sexual abuse to take place. Second, it demonstrates that while an inquiry was being carried out into the Abu Ghraib abuse, other acts of barbaric torture were being carried out elsewhere in Iraq. Because no pictures were taken, this act appears to be more of a sadistic game between soldiers, hence another variant of what could happen if some soldiers were left to their own devices. The U.S. Army barrel, clearly, set the conditions, knowingly or not, for abuse to occur on many levels across Iraq.

**THE BANALITY OF EVIL**

At this point in time, it is very important to slow down and refrain from an all but too easy incrimination of soldiers per se. Rather, it is timely to look at the almost inevitability of some reactions of human nature in extreme circumstances. For the self-righteous people who are now reading these lines and believe that the soldiers who carried out those acts are appalling monsters, I have news for you: research suggests that a high percentage of us would have perpetrated similar acts given the same set of circumstances. Of importance here is the contention that many ordinary people can turn evil given the right set of circumstances. We should all accept this as individuals and humbly reflect on the toll that some circumstances may have on our morals, beliefs, and behavior. In connection to the abuse and torture that took place in Abu Ghraib, it is now vital not to humiliate the individuals who perpetrated those horrible acts but to look at the psychological mechanisms that allow a system to get the better of our morals. As much as humiliation should
not be carried out against Iraqis, it also should not be resorted to in the case of the soldiers who acted in Abu Ghraib, Camp Fallujah, Bagram, and no doubt in many other places the world does not know about. No one should become similar to his or her abusers, this at any scale. This is not to excuse what happened. However, obedience to authority remains a reality that needs to be acknowledged.

The Yale University psychologist Stanley Milgram as well as Zimbardo both contend that most of us would, under the same set of circumstances, be capable of similar abuse. In a series of experiments that spanned a period of twenty years, Milgram sought to explore how ordinary people could carry out acts of barbaric nature simply on the basis of having been given orders to do so. This experiment stemmed from the trial of Nazi bureaucrat Adolf Eichmann, on which Hannah Arendt wrote that Eichmann was not a sadistic monster but only an ordinary bureaucrat who was doing his job. Milgram therefore set up an experiment according to which a random sample of teachers would be authorized to give students electric shocks if they did not show good enough results in a short-term learning exercise. Those electric shocks were not truly administered to the students, who were aware of the experiment and supposed to act out suffering as the voltage of the shocks increased during the experiment. The voltage was to steadily increase from 45 to 450 volts. Before the experiment started, all teachers were given a shock of 45 volts so they could experience what they would be administering to their learners as the experiment went on. In effect, the teachers were the real objects of the study, which according to nineteen different combinations was supposed to take into account possible variations in relation to gender, the way that orders were administered, a fake heart condition of the learner, and so on. Despite faked cries of pain on the part of the learner, none of the respondents refused to administer shocks before 300 volts were reached, while in the first set of experiments, 65 percent of all people taking part did administer up to the maximum 450 volts. One of the lowest scores was reached in experiment 10, which was carried out far from the prestigious facilities of Yale University, in a tiny office of Bridgeport, Connecticut. This tends to signify that the greater the standing of authority is, the more abiding the obedience becomes. When applying this to Department of Justice memos, hierarchical pressure to obtain actionable intelligence both in the so-called war on terror and Abu Ghraib context, obedience to such a high-standing authority that depicts torture only as organ failure and death is therefore almost inevitable, in at least 65 percent of cases as reported by the Milgram experiment.
A second experiment, the Stanford Prison Experiment, conducted by Zimbardo and that directly revolves around prisons, can shed light onto the sadism reported by Omar B. in Camp Fallujah. Here again, the experiment concluded that given the right set of circumstances, many ordinary people could become evil at a day’s notice. This experiment is focused not on obedience to authority, but on human responses to captivity and its effects on both inmates and guards. Conducted in 1971, the experiment divided a team of twenty-four male undergraduate volunteers into two groups, the prisoners and the guards. The experiment was set to last fourteen days but lasted only six. After a relatively calm first day, a riot broke out on the second day, and the next four days slipped into patters of sadism, chaos, and trauma. The experiment had to be stopped after six days as more than a third of the “guards” displayed sadistic tendencies and some of the “prisoners” were experiencing severe signs of trauma. Almost overnight, nice young men with absolutely no criminal history and no obvious disposition for violence had both become sadistic torturers and abused subjects. In terms of psychology, the experiment showed how situational attributions can account for events, as opposed to dispositional attributions, that is to say, how a system that sets up the right set of conditions can be responsible for a given situation. In effect, as the Milgram experiment shows that most people obey authority regardless of the harm it may cause other individuals, the Stanford Prison Experiment demonstrates that given the right set of circumstances, many individuals can be conditioned to become torturers. Therefore, while both experiments do not exonerate the individual soldiers for what they did in Abu Ghraib, Bagram, and Camp Fallujah, they do reveal that the barrel, the system in which one finds him- or herself, will induce one’s behavior.

As Zimbardo was struck by the similarities between his experiment and events in Abu Ghraib, he came forward as an expert witness in the trial of Staff Sergeant Ivan “Chip” Frederick, from Maryland. Despite an eloquent and articulate witness statement from Zimbardo, Frederick, who pleaded guilty to conspiracy, dereliction of duty, maltreatment of detainees, assault, and committing an indecent act, was sentenced to eight years in prison. I also met with his father, Ivan “Red” Frederick, in Maryland in January 2005, at a time when no member of his family knew where Chip was being detained or what was to happen to him. The senior Frederick told me about his son, his personality and childhood, his commitment to serving his country both at home and abroad. He told me about his days as a corrections officer, about his marriage to Martha, an African American woman. He recalled the days
when the scandal broke and the CID was starting its investigations. He shared with me pages of Chip’s journal where he asked to be given a copy of the Geneva Conventions. Too little too late perhaps, although this detail is clearly an indication of the fact that no proper training was given to the guards in Abu Ghraib, a fact corroborated by the Taguba Report.\(^87\) What Red Frederick was particularly poignant about was the U.S. media treatment of his son as a “racist hillbilly” and a murderer, in effect, the public humiliation of his son. He recalled in particular a live interview by CNN anchor Paula Zahn in which she implied that his son was a murderer, an allusion that took both parents by surprise and that was made just before a commercial break, preventing Frederick from finishing a reply to the effect that no evidence existed on these allegations and that his son was innocent until proved guilty.\(^88\) Frederick was deeply hurt by this interview and said he felt betrayed by Zahn, whose producers obviously never mentioned prior to the interview that any of these allegations would be made. This left the Frederick family powerless to fight back, with a deep distrust of the media in general, and feeling alone in their sorrow over what had happened and their feeling that no one higher than a handful of low-ranking soldiers would ever be found responsible for the abuse.

Needless to say, while the Abu Ghraib scandal shattered the lives of the soldiers condemned for it, as well as their families, it also had a tremendous escalatory effect on the Iraq conflict.

FROM SOMALIA TO FALLUJAH: RAISING THE STAKES

On March 31, 2004, four employees of Blackwater, a private military company (PMC), lost their way in the Fallujah city center. They were subsequently filmed being killed, dismembered, dragged through the streets of Fallujah, and hanged from a bridge.\(^89\) A first reaction to this event might be to believe that it came as a response to the perceived humiliation felt by Fallujah residents, in an act of reciprocity in humiliation. While the Abu Ghraib pictures of U.S. service members abusing Iraqi inmates came after the death of the contractors, pictures of humiliation—elderly men being held facedown in the ground; women being searched, and so on—had been circulated around the country. Moreover, as the interview with Omar B. suggests, local residents were already aware of the abuses that had been taking pace in both Abu Ghraib and Camp Fallujah. Taking into account Baudrillard’s bank robbery example, these pictures, true and staged, had superseded reality: as a consequence, disaster materialized in the dehumanization and humiliation of the bodies of these four
contractors. On the question of why private military contractors were targeted, it is worth mentioning that a video that namely condemned Halliburton had just been released. The video is the reading of an e-mail sent by a soldier to his family, in which the soldier asks why the U.S. Army should endanger the lives of its troops to protect Halliburton convoys, while U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney, who was the chairman of Halliburton, was clearly benefiting from the economic impact of the war. This video was geared to illustrate low soldier morale and to let the Iraqi population know that they should target PMCs. Let us return to the main question. Despite all these explanations, the sheer violence of this act puzzled many observers, including me. It was clearly raising the stakes in terms of violence and savagery, and as many Iraqis argued at the time, was very un-Islamic.

As soon as news came out of the massacre, I called Abu Ali to ask about this event. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Abu Ali had been prominent in organizing neighborhood-watch groups in Fallujah from very early on in the process that saw an escalation of violence between 82nd Airborne troops and local residents. He immediately distanced himself from what he referred to as an act of barbarism. He blamed the local youth, who he claimed “had become uncontrollable in their actions.” While he mentioned that the contractors may well have been killed by a neighborhood-watch group, as PMCs were reputed to be trigger happy with local populations and thus viewed extremely poorly, he explained that the scene had been hijacked by a few and then got out of control. Did the hijacking invoked here involve only a few sadistic youths? I am more inclined to think that it had been staged. True, should this hijacking narrative be verified, its implications could suggest that the rejection of the occupier had been socialized into rites of passage within the local male youths, in the same way that being arrested by the Israeli army in Palestine has been integrated as a rite of passage into adulthood for young Palestinians.

However, the intensity of this event did not concur with events in other places in which such rites of passage have occurred. The filming of the event can lead to another explanation. Indeed, within a sphere of Baudrillard’s hyperreal, the staging of such an event, mimicking and superseding acts of resistance, humiliation, and submission, also raises concerns with regard to its filming, especially in light of the growing presence of al-Qaeda in town at the time, as well as their attempts to oversee and control the insurgency there. Whether the crew that filmed the event had been asked to film the ambush that killed the contractors, and stayed on, or whether the lynching of the contractors had been
staged, the use of the media as a platform for acts of barbarism is of equal importance.

A detail that caught my attention was that the local stringer of a major news agency, in whose video store I found two of the videos mentioned in Chapter 2, the Hollywood footage of *Black Hawk Down* and the Chechen beheading, is the same man who filmed the lynching of the Blackwater contractors, according to Abu Ali. The movie *Black Hawk Down* depicts the attempted U.S. capture of warlord Mohamed Farrah Aidid in 1993, which resulted in U.S. soldiers being dragged down the streets of Mogadishu, Somalia, a trauma for the American public at the time. Direct responsibility for this event has been claimed by Osama bin Laden on several occasions since. Whether sheer coincidence or not, past events in the Somalia capital became undoubtedly connected to the lynching of the four contractors in Iraq. Should these events account for youths mimicking their elders, the local youths not only mimicked their elders but also reiterated events that occurred in Mogadishu in 1993, which were portrayed in resistance videos disseminated around Iraq. Should it not be a coincidence, this event could point toward an al-Qaeda bid for total control of insurgent activities in Fallujah. This event, widely condemned throughout Iraq, may well have been geared toward inducing a strong reaction on part of the United States, a reaction that would in turn serve as a recruitment call for al-Qaeda in other parts of Iraq. In light of the events that followed, this latter scenario seems plausible.

MOUSTACHES COME OFF! OPERATION VIGILANT RESOLVE

In April 2004, I undertook a lecture tour of the U.S. East Coast to put my findings on humiliation to the test of U.S. academic audiences. My first port of call was the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. I exposed my work relating humiliation to the escalation of violence in post-Saddam Iraq to a group of cadets during the dean’s hour and showed, as mentioned in Chapter 2, the video of a Russian soldier being beheaded in Chechnya that I had purchased in Fallujah in December 2003. As mentioned earlier, this video was in direct response to a Fox News clip in English that referred to the futility of any attack against the U.S. Army, a report of propaganda to whose humiliation was responded with a short clip of the ultimate projected humiliation of U.S. firepower by ordinary Iraqis: a bare knife and a few prayers. My point in showing this footage at the time was that a battle of images over the issue of
humiliation had been initiated by the Iraqi insurgency, a battle of images that was being lost by the United States in relation to all the footage and images that showed the humiliation of daily raids against the Iraqi population.

One of the faculty members present said that the West Point community had heard from a few of its graduates who were posted with the Marines in Fallujah. They had said that while the Marines were in California preparing to be deployed to Fallujah, they had received acute training on cultural sensitivity and that they were all privately commenting that they would never commit the same mistakes as the 82nd Airborne Division that had roughened the local Fallujah population from very early on. The Marines had grown moustaches to show the local population that they were making efforts to understand them. They had planned a few soccer tournaments and other such things. After the lynching of the Blackwater contractors, only a few days after the Marines’ arrival in town, the moustaches came off, and so did the gloves. They reportedly engaged in a few raids of the same type that had been carried out in late April 2003 and that had triggered the escalation of violence between U.S. troops in town and residents.

At the same time, the U.S. government was deciding how to react to the public humiliation of the incident with the Blackwater contractors. As the moustaches came off, Operation Vigilant Resolve was launched on April 4 to “pacify” Fallujah, in which the U.S. military tried to capture the city. This attempt failed and the operation ended on May 1. It was a resounding fiasco in more ways than one. In terms of Iraqi hearts and minds, the death toll and sheer force used on the city to avenge the death, in the eyes of the Iraqi population, of a mere four contractors, was astounding. This, of course, was in line with Osama bin Laden’s messages to the umma as discussed in Chapter 2, where he refers to an exchange rate between Western and Muslim lives. An estimated six hundred Fallujah residents were killed, U.S. troops blocked residents’ access to the local hospital for more than two weeks, and, as can be expected in such a situation, many of the people who died were noncombatants. Others, such as Abu Ali, died in battle. This battle was a fiasco because it killed most of the moderates who had engaged in neighborhood-watch activities and spared the hard-liners devoted to al-Qaeda such as Omar Hadid and Abdullah al-Janabi.

As the lynching of Blackwater contractors may have signified the open bid for an al-Qaeda leadership of insurgent activity in Fallujah, Operation Vigilant Resolve served as a de facto purging element to open the way for al-Qaeda’s mastering of the city. Staged or not, the lynching of the four contractors produced one staggering result: it intensified
al-Qaeda’s presence in Fallujah. By the end of April 2004, most nationalist, hence moderate, elements of the insurgency had been eliminated, thanks to a de facto instrumentalization of U.S. Army. For the rest of Iraq, all sects and ethnic groups included, Fallujah no longer was a Sunni extremist tribal town of Anbar Province. It was a symbol of Iraqi honor and courage in the face of imperialism and adversity. The town had been martyred to the cause of Iraqi freedom and collective honor.

As I came to deliver a talk at Columbia University a few days later, a colleague there gave me a copy of the handwritten letter of an Iraqi Kurdistan university professor. This man, a Kurd, who had always been a fervent supporter of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, wrote the following: “I believe that U.S. was able to gain love of Iraqis, if U.S. used rational politics towards the... question of the ‘4’ Americans, who were killed in ‘Falluja.’ Almost [all] of Iraqis, refused this terrorist act. Iraqis feel, now, that U.S. used savage force to kill women, children, and civilians, and they believe that U.S. have huge responsibility towards Iraqis and it mustn’t used [sic] force in such way.” This statement was echoed all over Iraq. Toward the end of April, a coordinated wave of attacks was set in central and southern Iraq to regain control over the country in the run-up to the planned June 30 political handover between Paul Bremer’s CPA and the interim Iraqi government. This culminated in the August 2004 battle of Najaf, in which a contingent of Fallujah residents was sent to Najaf to assist the Shiite Mehdi Army in resisting the U.S. assault of the town. This battle lasted for three weeks until Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani negotiated a truce with U.S. troops. The price of this truce was the organizing of the January 2005 elections, which will be explained at length in Chapter 5.

THE DEATH OF NICK BERG: A CRIME THAT WENT TOO FAR?

A couple of weeks after the first pictures of the Abu Ghraib scandal were revealed to the world, a horrific video was released in response. This was the first beheading video made in the Iraq conflict, the first of many to come. It staged the death of young businessman Nick Berg. He was twenty-six years old. Although it is difficult to assert whether Berg’s killers staged the attack after being inspired by the Chechen video discussed earlier, there are striking comparisons. On both videos, the victim is killed in the same way: the victim’s head is held on its side on the ground, he is decapitated with a knife, and his head is held up as a trophy. Of importance in the decapitation is the slaughtering aspect of the killing, which represents a contrast to an execution. Thus, this
may not necessarily be interpreted as a beheading. It amounts more to a
sacrifice than an execution, as it is staged as the ritual of Kurban Bayram
in Islam, celebrating Abraham’s attempt to sacrifice his son Isaac’s life
as an offering to God and representing a purification ritual. The message
given by the slaughterer to the audience is chilling: “For the mothers
and wives of American soldiers, we tell you that we offered the U.S.
administration to exchange this hostage with some of the detainees in
Abu Ghraib and they refused. So we tell you that the dignity of the
Muslim men and women in Abu Ghraib and others is not redeemed
except by blood and souls. You will not receive anything from us but
coffins after coffins . . . slaughtered in this way.” Before being killed,
Berg states his name and that of his siblings, as exposure of his iden-
tity. It is the same ritual that can be found in the video staging the
murder of Wall Street Journal correspondent Daniel Pearl. It is also
reminiscent of the practice of lynching in the United States until as late
as the 1930s. There, the victim would have to state his or her iden-
tity and alleged crime before a mob would be unleashed to savagely
kill him or her. Every step of this ritual would be photographed and
even filmed, and postcards of the event would be sent home with in-
scriptions such as: “Warning, the answer of the Anglo-[illegible] race to
black brutes who would attack the womanhood of the South” or “Negro
Barbecue.”

In reference to French scholar Michel Foucault’s analysis of capital
punishment in Western societies, within which the culprit at times states
his crime before being executed, Berg’s crime in the eyes of his killers is
his identity as an American citizen of Jewish faith. The reference to
dignity and to Abu Ghraib made by Berg’s captors sheds light in relation
to the way that he was killed. As appalling as this video is, the inten-
tion of Berg’s killers was to stage it as a purification ritual that would
cleanse the collective honor of Iraqi men and women, in the same way
that the Kurban Bayram in Islam is meant as purification. The video
was later attributed by the CIA to the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, Abu
Musab al-Zarqawi. Of importance here is the fact that bin Laden
later condemned this act through his alleged “number two,” Egyptian
Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, as being unnecessary and counterproductive.
Because, as has been explained earlier, the overall tactics of al-Qaeda
have always been to generate public support, such an act, as well as the
lynching of the four contractors in Fallujah earlier, clearly did alienate
many Iraqi Muslims against al-Qaeda in Iraq, especially because other
radical militant groups such as the Lebanese Hezbollah or the Pales-
tinian Hamas had condemned the brutal murder of Nick Berg almost
immediately. In a letter sent by al-Zawahiri to the leader of al-Qaeda
Abu Ghraib, a Source of Ethno-Religious Unrest

in Iraq, al-Zarqawi, al-Zawahiri warns that the umma will never find “scenes of slaughtering the hostages” as “palatable.” He also reminds al-Zarqawi of the following: “We are in a battle, and . . . more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media. . . . We are . . . in a race for the hearts and minds of the umma. We can kill captives by bullet. That would achieve that which is sought after without exposing ourselves to the questions and answering to doubts. We don’t need this.” Al-Zawahiri’s message very clearly states that al-Qaeda should not become its own enemy, and that the scenes of slaughtering—note that he refers to slaughtering and not beheading—are reflecting as badly on them as the pictures taken in Abu Ghraib did on the Bush administration.

This dissonance between al-Qaeda in Iraq and al-Qaedaism, as well as al-Qaeda’s steady loss of Iraqi hearts and minds because of this particular type of event, is worth noting as a prelude to a forthcoming discussion on the Sunni Awakening of Anbar Province in the fall of 2007. As many Iraqi Sunni Muslims resented the fact that al-Qaeda in Iraq badly reflected on their religion as well as on them as a modern and evolved people, the slaughtering of Nick Berg planted a doubt within the umma as to the viability of al-Qaedaism in the long run. Still, al-Zawahiri also noted the “praise of some . . . zealous young men” over the slaughtering of Nick Berg as a tit-for-tat response to Abu Ghraib. As a matter of fact, many foreign fighters came to Iraq as a result of this.

OVERALL IMPACT

In all the insurgency videos that have been collected, there is a clear before-and-after Abu Ghraib effect to be found. While humiliation and human dignity were always prime recruiting narratives in videos, no specific events were ever mentioned. A few pictures of perceived humiliation used to amount to women being searched in raids, detainees with bags over their heads, truckloads of detainees. No one, however, knew where these detainees would go and what would happen to them. They would only hear tales of abuse on the return of some detainees, but somehow the connection between what they were told and the reality of these allegations was not made because of a lack of photographic evidence. The pictures released after the Abu Ghraib scandal changed that. They gave a new focus to many of the recruitment videos collected afterward.

One particular video released by al-Qaeda is striking in its rhetoric. The video, which is not dated, states: “America came here to humiliate the Muslims. What happened in Abu Ghraib is the clearest example,” thus capitalizing on the scandal to reach out to the doubtful who might
not have supported al-Qaeda before this. A clip is then shown of an ambulance trying to go through an Iraqi police checkpoint and being forced to stop. Both the driver and the paramedic are taken out of the car, pushed to the ground, and severely beaten. A voice then says: “The Army and the Police are causing our misery, they dance on our injuries and prove to their allies, the Crusaders, that they are the best at humiliating the Sunnis.” Another clip begins. A woman is weeping. She says between sobs: “I am one of the persons who suffered the most in Fallujah. The most important was the humiliation that I faced when the [Iraqi] National Guard arrested me. They could not find my husband so they arrested me. They tied my hands and put me in a truck. I faced a kind of humiliation no one will know about except God.” This humiliation is no doubt of sexual nature, as she explicitly states that she will have to answer to God for this, presumably after her own honor killing. She then continues: “I wanted to die before seeing this happen to me.” This statement obviously concurs with the statement of Seymour Hersh regarding the tactical arrest of family members in order for suspected insurgents to come forward, as well as the torturing of family members of suspected insurgents, to have them confess to being part of the insurgency.\(^{111}\) Again, it is worth pointing out here that most of the detainees taken into custody in Abu Ghraib were later released and reported to be innocent.\(^{112}\) Through this statement, al-Qaeda is trying to incriminate all Iraqi institutions that are collaborating with the Coalition. It is trying to connect what happened in Abu Ghraib to the Iraqi government, implying that it is the government that advised the U.S. Army on how to torture Iraqis according to their honor codes. An Iraqi man is then shown. A voice states that he is a colonel working as a liaison officer between the Iraqi police and the U.S. Army. He is then said to have confirmed that sexual abuse against prisoners is not confined to U.S. soldiers but is also practiced by Iraqi police officers. It goes so far as saying that the Iraqi police are more zealous than Americans in sexual abuse. It insinuates, again, that Iraqis masterminded the type of torture that occurred in Abu Ghraib. This is a clear attempt on behalf of al-Qaeda to enlarge the scope of the conflict to not only killing Coalition soldiers but also Iraqi collaborators to the U.S. administration.

Other videos that exploit the Abu Ghraib crisis feature several potential suicide bombers stating that they chose to come to Iraq to avenge the *umma* after what happened in Abu Ghraib. These people mostly came from Yemen, Algeria, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and Syria.
SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY

Twelve months after the fall of Baghdad, the self-fulfilling prophecy of simulacra and humiliation had become a reality. Steadfastly, humiliation continued to precipitate Iraq into a gradual movement of insurgency, and has, as the video mentioned previously illustrates, paved the way for a further division, this time between the people of Iraq. This division, which would be exacerbated by the January 2005 elections, would become an abyss between the people who were perceived as supporting the Coalition, and the others, a division unfortunately formed along religious lines. This will be the subject of the last chapter of this book.

In relation to Abu Ghraib, the link between humiliation as a human rights violation and the escalation of violence needs to be acknowledged, not to provide the military with effective occupation techniques but to avert polarization and distrust between human beings who all seek the same experience of life. Whether it concerns soldiers who enlisted in the army for an education or to protect their way of life, or Iraqi civilians engaging in acts of resistance to be able also to protect their way of life, both grassroots sides of the occupier-occupied divide have been antagonized by an escalating humiliation of each other. Structural expressions of humiliation need to be addressed as thoroughly as those that are granted exposure through the media. Moreover, any form of humiliation needs to be analyzed as a breach of human rights and human dignity, whether it be toward male or female members of the population.

In his book, which uses the Stanford Prison Experiment to understand the Abu Ghraib catastrophe, Zimbardo calls on every reader to become a hero in times of political hardship. He advocates for people not to become sucked into a vortex of fear and hatred of the other. He believes that the results of the Milgram experiment and the Stanford Prison Experiment are not a fatality if individuals start upholding their personal values when questioning their system. This was understood by Major General Antonio Taguba, the officer who uncovered a reality that no one was ready to see, while being limited to a box that prevented him from questioning the system that put everything in place. Regardless of his boundaries, Taguba’s results opened the door to a debate that has since smeared the top echelons of the U.S. administration. As a result, Taguba was asked to retire in January 2007 and has since been ostracized from his Army environment. As he commented to Seymour Hersh, “They always shoot the messenger.” The message given by Zimbardo ought to be a lesson learned from civil rights miscarriages such as the ones that put the Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib systems in place.
Last, I find it important to reflect on how al-Qaeda chose to recuperate the Abu Ghraib crisis to its advantage and how it instrumentalized women in the process. According to the Iraqi honor system, the woman who appeared in the video is probably dead, as her public statement would have warranted her honor crime. In light of this, one has to seriously wonder whom this message of hatred really served and for what purpose it was shown. The following chapter will contend that Iraqi women have been the overall object of humiliation in the conflict that has opposed perceived occupiers and occupied and in the unfolding conflict between different sides of the Iraqi population. As the Iraqi honor system illustrates, gender is central to an understanding of humiliation as a catalyst for violence in post-Saddam Iraq. Above all, gender roles, ascribed to both Iraqi and American men and women, are the protagonists of the Iraq War.
CHAPTER 4

The Gender Factor and How It May Hold Keys to Peace

The Moslems will immediately dislike you and there will be trouble if you do not treat women according to their standards and customs.

—U.S. Army, Instructions for American Servicemen in Iraq during World War II

All of my career, I had wanted nothing but to serve as a soldier, yet time and again I found myself singled out not as a master parachutist, not as a rising officer, but as a woman.

—Brigadier General Janis Karpinski, One Woman's Army: The Commanding General of Abu Ghraib Tells Her Story

My very first story as a journalist focused on the abduction of a sixteen-year-old girl from the streets of “newly liberated” Baghdad. This subject was not a particular priority for my editor or any of my colleagues. It was published only on a slow day for the newspaper, that is to say, on a day when its Middle East correspondent did not have anything particular to report. A niche it was, and I was glad to have exclusivity on a subject that no one else wanted, cared for, or, sadly, even understood. For many, it was not deemed as serious as other subjects revolving around the growing insecurity in Baghdad, a potentially emergent insurgency, and so on. For me, gender represented the symptom of what was to come in terms of insecurity. As lootings dragged on into the months of May 2003, rumors started to emerge that women were being abducted and sold into prostitution outside Iraq. It did not take long for anyone with
previous research experience on the subject of sexual slavery to realize that the same mechanisms used to channel potential foreign fighters into Iraq could be used to traffic women out of that country. Moreover, as women, femininity, and gender relations represent the backbone of the Iraqi honor system, and by way of association Iraqi collective identity, it was obvious that the spreading of rumors around the abduction of women could lose Iraqi support toward Coalition troops, a support that they could not afford to lose so soon in the occupation. Because Iraqi women represent the collective honor of Iraq, the postconflict security vacuum and anarchy could have appeared as a lack of respect for the Iraqi population. It was indeed not long before local newspapers not only denounced the growing threat against Iraqi women but also spread rumors of direct Coalition abuse against Iraqi women (e.g., Coalition soldiers having sex with Iraqi women in their Humvees). This was a grave sign that was not identified to the extent of its severity. Because gender is not considered as serious a subject as terrorism, WMD, or democracy, no one realized the potential threat that its use might represent. The contention of this chapter is that a genuine gender lens applied to post-Saddam Iraq could have helped avoid conflict escalation based on the collective perception of humiliation from very early on, and just as important, could have ensured the well-being of Iraqi civilians, men and women alike, in post-Saddam Iraq. By genuine lens, I will argue that while gender has been invoked from all sides of the Iraq conflict, it was never done with the best interest of the people involved in mind. Rather, the humiliation of both Iraqi and American women, perceived or real, has been instrumentalized throughout the Iraqi conflict. This process had a direct impact on the current political situation in Iraq. This chapter analyzes the mechanisms of marginalization of women in the Iraq conflict as a means to separate fiction from reality in gender awareness. In a race against time and prejudice that for many has already been lost, some women’s pledge to survive socially as a gender will be assessed against political, religious, and occupation-incurred pressures.

What is engendered humiliation? How does it apply to an Iraqi context? Could gender and humiliation awareness have helped save Iraq from postconflict turmoil? How have women been instrumentalized and humiliated in post-Saddam Iraq? How has this contributed to an emerging chaos? This chapter first addresses the question of gender and the self-fulfilling worsening of the situation of Iraqi women as the conflict went on. Then it reviews and analyzes the instrumentalization and humiliation of both Iraqi and American women in the Abu Ghraib crisis and the following uprising in various parts of Iraq. This leads to a gendered analysis of the realities of everyday life in post-Saddam Iraq. As women
appear to find themselves at the center of the escalation of violence in post-Saddam Iraq, it is important to place their experiences in a context of universal humiliation, whereby all parties to the Iraqi conflict meet in their objectification and division of their and one another’s women. I conclude in stating that while attempting to establish themselves as an integral part of a democratic New Iraq, women feel that they have been left behind, and all parties to the Iraqi conflict are using them as bait in their humiliation of one another. Many of the women who were part of the Iraqi conflict feel disempowered, cheated, and exploited by the very people who vowed to uphold women’s rights in New Iraq, the U.S.-led Coalition and the Bush administration, as well as the antiwar movement. While a vertical polarization has occurred between occupied and occupier in New Iraq, alienating not only the international community from the Iraqi people but also Iraqis taking part in the reconstruction effort, interpreted by the insurgency as the haves and the have-nots, another polarization has taken place, this time horizontally within the Iraqi and the Coalition social structures.

WHAT IS GENDER?

Gender awareness is not feminism. Being gender aware signifies being aware of the roles that men and women are expected to display and embody to be considered functional members of a given society. Gender awareness is about men and women, not only about women. It analyzes roles ascribed to a biologically defined shell and not to biology per se. For example, the social expectations bestowed on Iraqi men differ from those bestowed on men in the United States. While an eldest Iraqi son will be expected to primarily ensure that his sisters do not tarnish family honor by engaging in illicit sexual activities, an eldest American suburban son might be expected to do well at school, sports, not smoke too much pot, and actively prepare for a successful university career. While both sons will later be expected to provide for their families, the definition of providing will, again, differ from one society to the next. What it means to be a man or a woman greatly differs according to the societies in which one finds him- or herself, and that difference is what gender is all about. It is not therefore about sex but about social expectations bestowed on biology. Parts of some societies have tried to transcend biological differences in considering that because gender is a social expectation, society might redefine gender boundaries to a realm beyond biology. This postmodern outlook opened the gender debate to transgender studies, which attempt to do away with biological differences in considering gender to be almost a philosophy of life.
makes a person born with the biological attributes of a man endorse the social role of a woman, and vice versa? Scholars of gender studies have sought to deconstruct the social mechanisms of the construction of gender, as well as the role that gender plays in holding societies together as compartmentalized blocks within sociopolitical monoliths. Gender has therefore been partly identified as the cement that holds the political connections of a nation-state together—a cement that is often mixed with religion. The role of men and women, established as functional parts of society, are therefore considered primordial in upholding the identity of a nation, hence state control over sexual relations within society through religion, the legal system, or cultural traditions. Several examples uphold the idea that ascribed gender roles intrinsically define the identity of a nation, hence the importance of maintaining them intact and promoting them in their exclusivity. In Israel, the leader of the fascist party Kach, Rabbi Kahana, proposed a law in the Israeli parliament to forbid sexual relations between Jews and Arabs, in order to uphold the socioreligious identity of men and women as an exclusive part of the Israeli nation-state. In Palestine, women have been encouraged to bear children as a way to wage a demographic war against the state of Israel. In Palestinian society, when a woman such as Wafa Idriss, the first female “suicide bomber,” is declared to be sterile, she is devalued, rejected, divorced, and sent back to her family as a failure, hence Idriss’s last resort to sacrifice herself to become a functional member of her nation at all costs and to restore the family honor tarnished by her divorce. South Africa, during its apartheid regime, also forbade sexual relations between people of different races, this, again, to cement the identity of the South African apartheid regime, a regime in which being a white woman meant being married to a white man. Gender can therefore define a nation, a race, a military force, and even a religion, or at least its organized interpretation.

WHAT IS ENGENDERED HUMILIATION?

It is in this context that the role of gender in the escalation of violence in post-Saddam Iraq needs to be understood and further analyzed. It has already been established that the concept of the preservation of a woman’s shame has had a central role in the escalation of violence in Fallujah, and in the display and use of torture in Abu Ghraib. The socialized role of the woman as the sole receiver of a man’s sexual attention has also been crucial in understanding the impact that the type of torture used in Abu Ghraib and other places has had on the umma, Iraqi society, and more important in Iraq as a whole in the lead-up to the expansion of the opposition against the U.S. occupation of Iraq in
the spring of 2004. While gender awareness helps understand the root of the collective Iraqi resentment of the occupation of Iraq, the situation of Iraqi women as objects of this socialization appears to be of great importance to understanding the mechanisms of this collective resentment. The instrumentalization of women as a vector for collective humiliation is crucial to an understanding of conflict escalation in post-Saddam Iraq. It is not only necessary to understand gender roles in Iraqi society but also important to understand how these roles match with daily situations, how expectations meet with reality, and how possible differences will be met with collective hostility. In short, an examination of the situation of Iraqi women in the spring of 2003 leads us to first understand the root of the escalation of violence in post-Saddam Iraq. In the war of images of the Iraq War and the war on terror, the public humiliation of some women has been used to diffuse collective attention away from the institutionalized use of torture on part of the Bush administration, as well as the reality of the situation of Iraqi women. In light of these explanations, the engendering of humiliation is to be understood as the utilization of the humiliation of the female gender, both in an Iraqi and in an American context, as a means to set the political agenda for conflict escalation, damage control, or more remotely, peace. To imply that women have been the instruments of a man-made conflict is a polarized assumption that does not have its place in this book. However, the instrumentalization of the female gender in the context of perceived humiliation in the unfolding of the post-Saddam Iraqi conflict, whether intentional or not, is what this chapter analyzes. In short, the use of humiliation in relation to women to justify, deny, or repair violence is worthy of analysis. How has humiliation been engendered? A first glance at rumors in post-Saddam Iraq will answer this question.

SYSTEMATIZING FEAR: RUMORS AND THE “NEW” IRAQI MEDIA

One of the first people I met upon arrival in Baghdad in the spring of 2003 was a California-based female researcher for Human Rights Watch. She candidly said that she had been sent to Baghdad to “chase rumors” pertaining to the situation of Iraqi women. Indeed, in the immediate aftermath of the war in April 2003, images of looting and public disorder slowly became synonymous with a growing precariousness in Iraqi women’s lives. Steadily, reports on women and girls started to emerge on how they were being targeted by criminals for rape, abduction, and murder; how they were offering themselves to Coalition soldiers for prostitution, and so on. These reports made it seem as if the fall of Saddam
Hussein had collectively perverted Iraqi women. This came as an army of inexperienced Iraqi journalists, unleashed after years of dictatorship, had become involved in a contest of high bidding in the pornography of chaos. Embraced by an international media industry seeking to further the news value of the Iraqi conflict, the alleged insecurity in Baghdadi streets was being blown out of proportion. An opinion piece in the newly established al-Muajaba newspaper, published on June 1, 2003, illustrates how rumors were made to become facts. It states, “Wake up, people, wake up.... Invaders are in our country.... Voices We’ve been through hard times under the old regime, but we were better than we are now. Our streets are filled with shame.... Look at girls who are having sex with the Americans in their tanks.... A man I know saw a girl.”

Despite the spreading of such rumors in Iraqi streets, no exact facts were being offered to back up such claims. However, statements relying on as little evidence as “a man I know” soon became news, hard facts, and subsequently the talk of town. Because the same type of rumors, albeit factual, once revolved around Saddam Hussein’s eldest son, Uday, who was renowned for abducting any Iraqi woman who captured his fancy, the Iraqi public was used to such allegations.

How were these rumors initiated? Why did civil insecurity become synonymous with violence against women and girls? While research pertaining to the impact of rumors in the escalation of violence, whether in war or peace, remains scarce, their impact in the field can prove vast. As the French scholar Jean Baudrillard states in relation to the hyper-reality of a given situation, no matter how real or not the situation is, it is its incurred result that really counts. Therefore, whether or not a rumor proves to be based on accurate facts, the fact that it is believed will give it weight and lead to a serious impact. An example suited to Iraq can be that of honor crimes, which are often based on rumors, or in some extreme cases, even on dreams! In the case of rumors pertaining to the alleged violence against women in post-Saddam Iraq, a collective belief in the veracity of this imagined, or not, situation had the potential to polarize the population against Coalition troops. The Belgian scholar Luc Reychler classifies rumors according to their impact on a given conflict (i.e., positive or negative), the extent to which they are spontaneous or planted, and the emotional needs they tend to cater to (i.e., fear, hostility, and/or wishes). The Lebanese scholar Fadia Nassif Tar Kovacs goes further into a conceptualization of rumors. She not only classifies them according to criteria similar to those used by Reychler but also characterizes their evolutionary dynamics.
self-fulfilling prophecy. According to research based on conflict escalation in the Lebanese civil war, Tar Kovacs accounts for the self-fulfilling prophecy impact of rumors of fear mutating into rumors of violence. Such a process, she argues, directly accounts for the formation and escalation of violence. Fear, based on rumors, is an unavoidable parameter in conflict escalation. As seen in Chapter 2, the fear of being arrested or just touched by soldiers in the case of female residents of Fallujah did account for some tragic escalations in this town. One can therefore ask, Does the media coverage of the chaos following the end of major military operations account for the formation of violence against women in post-Saddam Iraq?

THE WIN-WIN SCENARIO FOR A SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY

As reports of chaos and lootings prevailed in the international media following the fall of Saddam Hussein, rumors of Iraqi women being abducted and raped started to spread. In those weeks however, skepticism was running high in Baghdad with regard to the so-called incessant threats against women’s integrity. Both my Human Rights Watch colleague and I went to great length to chase rumors and find women who had been subjected to violence. As I was investigating this topic and approached some Iraqi female professionals, some of them deplored what they saw as the utilization of women’s safety for demagogical aims, this on all sides of the occupier-occupied divide, and more important, the pro- and anti-invasion divide. While the Coalition had partly used Saddam Hussein’s human rights violations to go to war, some Iraqi feminists started to denounce the exploitation of violence against women for vindication purposes on the part of those who opposed the invasion of Iraq and/or wanted to derail the U.S.-led occupation of the country. The rationale behind this thinking was that because many people wanted to see the United States fail in its postwar occupation of Iraq, aimed at reconstruction, economic and social prosperity, the building of democracy, and so on, women could become the easy catalyst for a collective Iraqi resentment against Coalition troops. This scenario of “doomed to fail” would serve many, both in the anti-invasion movement as a form of vindication and in the pro-invasion movement, in the case of Iran, to take over the country when the United States finally carried out the “dirty job” of ousting Saddam. Iraqi feminists were afraid that, once again, women were going to be used to make a point for or against the war, for or against the building of peace in a sovereign New Iraq, much in the same way that Afghan women had been instrumentalized in
On May 18, 2003, five weeks after the fall of Baghdad, I met with lawyer Sahar al-Yassri in her Baghdad office, in which a painting of Saddam Hussein was proudly hanging in defiance. Despite her clear and unequivocal support for Saddam Hussein, on the basis that he was secular and had granted women many of their basic rights on the basis of Baath Party ideology, Sahar voiced her anger at the exploitation of women’s situation by the people whom she thought were seeking to validate the anti-invasion movement both in Iraq and abroad. For her, Iraqi women were still in a position to make a future for themselves in New Iraq, and despite her condemnation of the invasion of Iraq by the U.S.-led Coalition, she recognized that there was a small window of opportunity for a democratic New Iraq to emerge. She argued that the situation of women was not that desperate, and that it was for all, both Iraqi men and Iraqi women, to contribute to a stable reconstruction of the country. However, a few weeks after Saddam’s fall, she felt that women were slowly being prevented from keeping their equal standing in Iraqi society by alarmist reports keeping them away from the public sphere. She claimed, “Women are being utilized at all ends of the political spectrum, in the same way that Afghan women’s rights were invoked during the ousting of the Taliban regime. . . . [T]hey are now invoked to claim that New Iraq is not working. When one sees how Afghan women are worse off since the fall of the Taliban, I dare to wonder where we will find ourselves in a year’s time.”

To prevent the political recuperation of Iraqi women’s rights by either party to the conflict, she had decided to gather professional women in a reunion that was to commonly reappropriate Iraqi women’s fate. One day after making this statement, Sahar became the victim of a carjacking. She does not know whether she had been targeted because of her gender or whether this was a random criminal act. As I met with her a few days later in front of the Jadriyah Party office of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), a Shiite political party supported by Iran, she had abandoned all hopes of running this meeting. She had just been ignored by the office’s doormen as she was clearly not welcome in this traditional Iranian-supported Shiite environment, a sad situation that she had faced while calling on most political parties in Baghdad that same morning. She told me that she had had enough, that there was no space for women in New Iraq. She said that fear and a sense of imminent failure had gotten the best of her and many of her colleagues. When I returned to my hotel, determined to report on this, I was told that this story would not be of any interest: no one had been savagely killed or maimed, no bomb had exploded, and no mass grave had been discovered. Sadly, those were
the stories that mattered at the time, mass graves being the number-one
delicacy. This story was just not “serious” enough. What was left of the
Iraqi feminist movement had just vanished before my eyes, and I had no
one to share it with. Sahar has confined herself and her daughters to her
al-Mansur home since this incident happened. Her story shows that ru-
mors had become facts, and once again, women like her were left to pay
the price. Was she personally targeted or was she the victim of a random
attack? Can random attacks become political and gender focused? Can
they become a self-fulfilling prophecy against a specific part of a given
population?

ENGENDERING VIOLENCE AND COLLECTIVE
HUMILIATION

The Croatian sociologist Silva Meznaric answers that yes, random at-
tacks can be made to become political and gender focused; violence
can be engendered. Meznaric takes as an example the process dur-
ing which rape in 1990 Kosovo became identified along ethnic lines.15
For years, Serbs and Albanians had populated Kosovo. In the 1980s,
however, as a result of modernization, population growth, and migra-
tion, many Serbs emigrated toward Belgrade and what was considered
Serbia proper, while most Albanians stayed in Kosovo. This greatly up-
set the ethnic balance of the Kosovo population overall. In 1990, at a
time when Yugoslavia was preparing to disintegrate, Serbian nationalism
saw in the province of Kosovo an opportunity to foster its ethnic nar-
rative, thus paving the way for a potential Yugoslav conflict alongside
ethnic lines that would bring nationalist parties to power once Serbia
became a sovereign state. Overnight, women who had hitherto exerted
a role of social stability in the Kosovo public sphere, building bridges
between the two ethnic communities of Kosovo Serbs and Albanians,
became relegated to mere objects of ethnic hatred. Through an amend-
ment of Serbian criminal law that recognized ethnic rape, that is to say,
that of a perpetrator and victim of different ethnic origins, this differ-
ence would be recognized by law as an aggravating fact; women who
were hitherto functional members of the Kosovo public sphere found
themselves victimized along ethnic lines. This social crime, sadly per-
petrated in every society, became a politicized crime. Crimes became
political statements. Because Kosovo had more Albanians than Serbs in
its overall population, it was obvious that statistics would find more
Serbian women raped by Albanian men than the contrary. Once these
statistics were made public, the Serbian government launched a media
campaign that portrayed Albanian men as rapists. This engineered ethnic
division created a rift in a society whose coexistence was hitherto greatly upheld by the equal standing of women in all sectors of society. Meznaric argues that gender became an ethno-marker in this conflict. Soon, Yugoslavia disintegrated into ethnic turmoil, in which ethnically motivated rape took on an important role. Gender as an ethno-marker in a fictitious state of ethnic division between Serbs and Albanians had paved the way for the self-fulfilling prophecy of rape as a weapon of war in the Bosnian war. Only a few months after the campaign launched against Albanian men, rape became a central feature in the atrocities perpetrated by ethnic groups against others. Among many horrific deeds, rape camps were built where men impregnated women from another ethnic group to attack the collective identity of the targeted group. Gender and ethnic divisions had been used as a catalyst to widen the gap between different groups. In this case, the mechanisms of nationalist hatred instrumentalized gender roles and particularly women into political objects, a process in which different groups polarized against one another, while the narrative of this hatred, rape, set the agenda for a future confrontation among all ethnic groups. It is in this way that the setting of an agenda in terms of fiction becoming reality can be referred to as a self-fulfilling prophecy. If the rape of women was not an instrument of ethnic hatred at first, its public validation as such made it become a potential instrument of ethnic hatred. Once again, reality does not count as much as the result, hence the importance of hyperreality when deconstructing the narratives of post-Saddam Iraq.

Was Sahar targeted for her car or because she was a woman, let alone a politically active one? No one knows for sure. However, the result of her attack, her political muzzling, illustrates the hyperreality of this situation. She might not have been attacked because she was a woman, but the result was the same, her public voice was annihilated. If one is to transpose this to the situation of women in post-Saddam Iraq, the engendering of random violence had the effect of setting the agenda for a pushing back of women to the Iraq private sphere. In other words, it chained them back to the Iraqi kitchen floor. In this process, because women have always been the object of the Iraqi honor system, as individuals whose intrinsically devious sexuality has to be controlled at all costs, as individuals who hold within them the ultimate power to cast shame on the Iraqi family, this engendering of violence felt collectively by Iraqi society would no doubt be translated into a collective feeling of humiliation: the engendering of humiliation in post-Saddam Iraq. To clarify, and to get back to our original illustration, Sahar’s car-jacking became gender based—regardless of the real motives of her assailants, she was said to have been targeted as a woman. This became the
rumored “proof” that women in general were not safe in post-Saddam Iraq, which became the rumored proof that the Coalition did not care about the safety of Iraqis, as they were publicly seen protecting “only” the Iraqi Ministry of Oil at a time when lootings were taking place, hence not showing enough care for the well-being of Iraqi women, who were the embodiment of the Iraqi collective honor. This in turn became the rumored proof that the Coalition was set to humiliate Iraq as a whole.19 No matter what the truth actually was in the case of Sahar’s carjacking or other random acts of violence involving Iraqi women, the result was found in Iraqi newspapers perpetrating rumors of humiliation. Add to this a sprinkle of Coalition troops’ sexual interest in Iraqi women, and this becomes very dangerous in terms of potential civil unrest.

Of course, no one in the Pentagon had a clue as to the gravity of what was unfolding, because there were many more serious subjects to address, such as de-Baathification.20 With time, and very little time in this particular case, these rumors became inflated and distorted. Iraqi collective attention was set on this very subject, and any emerging story fitting the narrative of the collective humiliation of Iraq through the medium of Iraqi women would add water to the rumor mill. This in turn would serve the interests of religious parties that wanted a return to traditional gender roles, as well as antiwar movements that sought to discredit U.S. efforts in the reconstruction of Iraq. Iraqi women became a win-win card to play for many, with only two losers: women, in the short term, and the Coalition, in the long term. In a few weeks, women were to be confined to the Iraqi private sphere, in the undoing of years of secular empowerment.

PAUL BREMER’S ORIGINAL SIN APPLIED TO IRAQI WOMEN

Paul Bremer’s original sin of de-Baathifying Iraq is yet again a theater of somber events, this time concerning women. Because de-Baathification meant the ousting of professionals with years of experience, the Iraqi police force was in effect stripped of its best elements. This unfortunate outcome, coupled with Saddam Hussein’s decision to give general amnesty to all Iraqi prisoners before the invasion, meant that literally thousands of criminals were out and about in Iraqi streets, without a capable police force to stop them from resuming their old activities.21 Since the amnesty had been awarded in October 2002, criminals had been given ample time to organize themselves in case of a regime change. April 2003 and its subsequent de-Baathification was a godsend to these criminals. Even though Saddam Hussein imprisoned many Iraqis on
political grounds, prisons were also the home of hardened criminals, just as in any other type of society. Therefore, it would have made sense to ensure a strict maintaining of law and order in the aftermath of the invasion. In this light, disbanding the army and police was the worse thing that anyone could have done in post-Saddam Iraq. Regardless of the victim’s gender, the streets of Baghdad were unsafe, as organized crime had regrouped and was operating in full freedom.

As I began to chase rumors of rape and abductions of women, my first port of call was the al-Kindi Hospital in Baghdad. As I arrived there, we were greeted at the gate by a guard who did not want to let us in. His reason was that the CPA had ordered the hospital not to allow journalists in without a special permit. There is nothing better than a media muzzle order to wet the appetite of a journalist, albeit an apprentice. I knew the CPA had something to hide and became determined to find out what it was. After this initial refusal, my team—Haida the Shiite fixer, Mohammed the Sunni driver—and myself—turned back to weigh our options. At this moment, the concept of district asabiyya opened an unexpected door for us. Haida realized that a relative of his was doing his medical residency in this hospital. After one telephone call from the front gate, Dr. Ahmad Assafi let us in. He discreetly led us to the residents’ lounge. It had a frat-house feel to it, albeit an Iraqi one. It was a crummy room filled with half-eaten pasta dishes, exhausted medical staff crashed out on dingy sofas, and above all a foul smell. Assafi apologized for the heat; there was no electricity—not that it mattered; the air-conditioning unit had been looted a few weeks before. When I asked him about rumors of rape, Assafi answered that he had treated five assaulted women in the space of six weeks: from mid-April to the end of May 2003. He said that these women had been assaulted in the streets of Baghdad, sometimes sequestered, and that all had been raped. One of them, who had had a knife slit through her throat, died shortly after she had reached the hospital. She had tried to escape the house where she was being sequestered and raped repeatedly. Another woman had had acid thrown at her face so that she would not recognize her attackers as they raped her for two hours in the back of a car. When I asked Assafi how this compared to before the invasion, he said that there was not much difference in numbers, that the increase in rape and sequester victims coming to him was maybe one-third. He explained that this number could be because victims came to him directly, instead of the “special place” where they would normally go. Assafi explained that he had become the first and last port of call, as the police force was no longer operating in full capacity. I inquired where the special place for forensic treatment was, and was sent to the Baghdad Medicolegal Institute.
The next day, I interviewed the director of the institute, Dr. Faik Amin Baker, who would become a trusted interlocutor as to the level of security in post-Saddam Iraq in the following years. The institute was the most logical venue to start research on sexual violence against women, as it was the only institution in Iraq that carried out forensic examinations of rape victims. The location itself was emblematic of the stigma attached to rape in an honor-based society such as Iraq, whereby a victim systematically becomes dead to society. The answers given by Baker with regard to sexual violence were overwhelming. He asserted that his institution was only able to carry out examinations on individuals who had been referred to him by the police or a judge. Taking into account the inexistence of such legal institutions in the aftermath of the war, due to the de-Baathification process, this requirement meant that no rape victim could ever prosecute her attacker on forensic grounds. “We are only receivers,” he asserted several times, blaming the nonfunctioning legal system for his institution’s inability to assist rape victims. He also admitted that bodies brought to his morgue without a court or police order could still be examined, hence the following chilling conclusion: in New Iraq, a rape victim had a better chance to be examined if she had died in her attack. This unfortunate situation meant that more victims were reporting directly to hospitals for treatment, thus inflating statistical figures and, of course, feeding the media rumor mill. While the number of rapes may have indeed increased, perhaps as a result of the extraordinary amount of criminals roaming the streets of Baghdad, many newspapers played the sensational card in not questioning the origins of these numbers. Had they done so, they might have found that the statistics were, sadly, just above those of Saddam Hussein’s Iraq.

Before I had left Assafi at the al-Kindi Hospital, he had given me a poster of a missing teenage girl. The poster showed her photograph with a telephone number and a note below: “in the name of honor, please come forward.” As we left Dr. Baker’s institute, we arranged to meet with her family in a Shiite neighborhood on the edge of Sadr City. She was sixteen years old at the time of her abduction. Her name is Baida Juffur Sadick. She has not been seen since May 22, 2003, when she was abducted at gunpoint in broad daylight on her way to school, in the neighborhood of al-Shahab City. As I met with her family, her father and eldest brother were infuriated by what had happened. Her father said that he did not care for democracy, that honor was more important than anything. The family blamed the Coalition for not ensuring the safety of Iraqi women, the nation’s “most prized resource.” I asked what would happen to her if she were found. Her brother said that he “would take care of her.” By this he meant that he would kill her for
her sake and more important for that of her family. Comments made by Baida’s family on her disappearance were astoundingly clear. In their eyes, the Coalition was the sole responsible, not Iraqi organized crime networks, not Saddam Hussein for his amnesty of thousands of criminals before the invasion of the country.

Under years of dictatorship, Iraqis had relied on Saddam Hussein for every aspect of their daily lives. He was their omnipotent father more than their ruler. Saddam gave Iraqis food, shelter, education, and security, and he took it away as he pleased if they became bad citizens, defied his authority, and so on. It is in this frame of mind that the Coalition found Iraq and Iraqis when it decided to invade the country in the spring of 2003. As Saddam was gone, Iraqis were looking to the Coalition to replace him in the same capacity of an omnipotent provider, caretaker, and parent. When this failed, in terms of security, and later electricity, water and food supply, and much more, many Iraqis turned against the Coalition. The CPA original sin of disbanding the Iraqi police and army stripped Iraq of its sense of security and helped fulfill the prophecy that women, hence Iraqi collective honor, were at stake, because they were becoming targeted. In everyday reality, this created a lose-lose situation for Iraqi women, who became confined to their homes and the private sphere.

In the weeks that followed the invasion of Iraq, as rumors of rape and abductions increased because of unverified and inflated media coverage of the issue, fewer and fewer women chose to leave their houses unaccompanied, and more resorted to wearing a hijab, or scarf, over their heads when they ventured outside their homes. This situation created two losers, the Coalition, which was seen as impotent and careless, and of course, Iraqi women. The media-inflated fiction of an increase in rape and abduction cases met with the reality of the disbanding of the Iraqi police force, creating a hyperreality of collective insecurity felt by the Iraqi population. As years of feminist struggle were annihilated in the space of a few weeks, the public image of the Iraqi woman had reverted back to that of a creature to be protected from herself for the sake of family and of collective honor.

A gender lens applied to other aspects of the Iraq War and its aftermath shows that Iraqi women are not the only casualties of this conflict.

THE PORNOGRAPHY TROMPE L’OEIL

Baker’s Baghdad Medicolegal Institute specialized in all sorts of forensic examinations. In the months following our first meeting, I developed a privileged rapport with Baker, as he had graduated from a Turkish
institution and I was then based in Turkey. In March 2004, before the Abu Ghraib scandal was made public, Baker spoke to me about the increasing amount of torture victims, men and women, who came to his institute for examination and treatment. The wounds comported an unusual amount of anal fissures and electricity scars on sensitive body parts. He was bewildered, as most of these people had been in U.S. custody. He asked me how this could be possible. He believed in the West as being a beacon of democracy and human rights. Some of his questions were answered as the Abu Ghraib scandal broke out; others were not.

A gender lens applied to the scandal revolving around torture in the Abu Ghraib prison, hereafter referred to as the Abu Ghraib scandal, leads one to perplexity as to how the scandal is remembered by and toward whom the world’s attention focused on when it broke and subsequently unfolded. What images of Abu Ghraib does the world remember? Chapter 3 describes all the pictures initially released. It also places them in a context of what was released in comparison to what was not. We already know that the pictures released contained a highly sexual overall theme, and therefore prompted public agenda setting toward a torture versus abuse debate. In the days that followed the release of the pictures, and after an initial few rants against the Iraq War, media pundits from all political sides shifted their focus away from international law and torture to the personality realm of the incriminated soldiers.

The Wall Street Journal, through its columnist Victor Davis Hansen, incriminated the delusion of American feminism for prompting a “smiling female guard” to be “acting out the desires of her superiors in the fatuous belief that her equality is now complete.” Fox News columnist Ann Coulter accused “girl soldiers,” while the conservative James Taranto blamed “a bunch of losers.” On the Fox News show Hannity & Colmes, the former U.S. Army sergeant and interrogation instructor Rush Limbaugh exonerated his government by comparing what happened at Abu Ghraib with a “Skull and Bones initiation . . . people having a good time . . . blow[ing] some steam off,” and he concluded that, after all, “nobody got hurt.” A few days later, he went further in personalizing the scandal, in directly incriminating, as many had before him, women. His argument went as follows: “Have you noticed who the torturers are? Women! The babes! . . . It looks just like anything you’d see Madonna or Britney Spears do on stage.” Then, on the homosexual nature of the pictures, he set a narrative trap into which many left-wing thinkers, philosophers, and columnists gladly fell. Limbaugh invoked pornography: “We have these pictures of homoeroticism that look like standard good-old American pornography.”
Indeed, pornography, a cliché approach to intellectualizing torture, since at times of blatant human rights abuses and dereliction of democratic ideals for the world’s leading nation, what the world seems to need to redeem itself is more intellectualizing. The U.S. columnist Susan Sontag, in the *New York Times Magazine*, claimed that the pictures were “inspired by the vast repertory of pornographic imagery available on the Internet—and which ordinary people, by sending out Web casts of themselves, try to emulate.” The Slovenian philosopher Slavoj...iŽek wrote that the United States has given Iraqi prisoners “a taste of the obscenity that counterpoints the public values of personal dignity, democracy and freedom.” The U.S. columnist Rochelle Gurstein stated in the *New Republic* that “pornography could be the proximate cause of the torture at Abu Ghraib.” She also argued that Lynndie England was a “victim of pornography and therefore should not be found culpable of prisoner abuse.” She called Lynndie England the “Linda Lovelace of our times.”

While pornography had its place in a public discourse revolving around the Abu Ghraib scandal, it should not have become its focal point. In effect, pornography swept away all sides of the U.S. pro- and antiwar movement, as well as its intellectual elite. The art historian Stephen Eisenman, in his brilliant essay on the collective pathological expression of Western art in Abu Ghraib pictures, draws a line on the pornography discourse. He reminds us about the pictures that “[a]lthough their subject is often sex...there is nothing sexy about them.” Hence the trompe l’oeil nature of a pornography narrative focusing the Abu Ghraib scandal away from a much-needed public debate on torture in the context of the war on terror, or what Eisenman calls “the auto-demolition of the ideal of democracy.” Therefore, not only did the public debate around Abu Ghraib not focus on the pictures that were not released, but also the conservative debate that shifted public attention away from human rights issues was followed by a liberal debate on pornography, intellectualizing the scandal to the extreme, all while Iraqis continued to be abused daily in detention centers throughout Iraq, Afghanistan, secret prisons around the world as part of the rendition program, Guantánamo Bay in Cuba, and so on. The narrative of pornography perpetrated by a few bad apples, what Rajiva refers to as “the pulp drama” revolving around the personalities of a few individuals, focused attention away from “the forensic drama” of what, when, and why was torture allowed, and in which the individual personalities of the higher ranks of the Bush administration are completely ignored. One can ask, Why would the sexuality of a few bad apples be emphasized, and not that of U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, or that of Major General
Geoffrey Miller, the artisan of what is referred to as the “Gitmoization” of the Abu Ghraib prison, literally, applying interrogation procedures based on those used in the infamous Guantánamo detention center, known as Gitmo in U.S. Army slang. The feminization of the Abu Ghraib scandal helped shift public attention away from real issues. This does not mean that Rochelle Gurstein was not accurate in focusing on the victimization of Lynndie England. A victim she was, indirectly of pornography, and more important, directly of media attacks and humiliation from all sides of the pro- and antiwar debate.

ENGENDERING ABU GHRAIB AS A MEANS OF COLLECTIVE EXPIATION

Following right-wing attacks on feminism and left-wing attacks on the pornographic industry, Lynndie England, and her relationship with alleged ringleader Charles Graner, were fed to the media as the face of the Abu Ghraib scandal, the protagonist of the pulp drama attached to it. Was this engineered by the Bush administration or by the media? The zealously shown by media outlets from all sides of the pro- and antiwar divide tends to point toward a de facto media engineering of Lynndie England’s public humiliation. As the Canadian scholar Melissa Brittain remarks, “Soon, we began to see fewer and fewer photographs of male soldiers torturing Iraqi men, and began seeing and hearing more and more about the photographs that depicted Lyn[n]die England sexually humiliating male prisoners.” As the picture of her holding a prisoner on a dog leash was seen as the self-fulfilling prophecy of the relationship between pornography and torture, she became its most emblematic figure. The media emphasized her “trailer park” origins. She was reported to be intellectually slow, uncultured, abnormal, depraved, and sadistic. She was called “the star of the Abu Ghaib horror picture show” and the “sex sadist of Baghdad.” She was crowned “Iraq’s Queen of Mean” by the Boston Herald, while the Sun of London called her a “witch.” No insult was spared for Lynndie England in the days and weeks that followed the release of the Abu Ghaib images.

The media and the intellectual elite not only looked away from the unreleased pictures, and took the Bush administration’s bad-apples story at face value, but also superseded the official spin in publicly humiliating Lynndie England. From right to left, her character, name, and future were assassinated while she was burnt at the public stake of U.S. inquisition. Her conduct, unquestionably shameful, was all that was left in the collective narrative of the Abu Ghraib crisis. While it served the interests of the conservative discourse against gender equality, as exposed
previously, it also validated the feminist assertion that women should not find themselves in an overmasculinized military setting. No matter when, how, or whether they are the sole part of a dramatized scandal, women, it seems, are always wrong. The public humiliation of Lynndie England can be compared to the shorning of women in the aftermath of World War II in France. As a collective means to deny years of massive collaboration with Nazi Germany as it occupied France, a collective sense of guilt was transposed onto the French women who were thought to have had sexual relations with German occupiers, this while conveniently denying their own involvement in the occupation.49 As anti-Semitism has been, and still is, perversely and shamefully rampant in France, the population actively participated in the deportation of its Jewish countrymen and women, denounced its neighbors who took part in the insurgency, and actively took part in the German administration of its country.50 As a result of this collective expiation, more than twenty thousand women were publicly shorn, lynched, and summarily executed by angry mobs, this with little or no proof at all.51 In this sense, the public humiliation of Lynndie England stands as the U.S. collective denial of its direct involvement in the war for some, or its shared failure to monitor, expose, and question human rights abuses for others. All in all, a public shaming of Lynndie England served as a collective redemption: not only did we not do it; she is not one of us. She is depraved, sadistic; she is an aberration of our society, an elephant woman who belongs to the circus of the U.S. media. This public humiliation accounts for the engendering of the Abu Ghraib scandal, in which gender led the public away from crucial issues of human rights abuses and institutionalized violence in the war on terror.

The paroxysm of all this was to find a Broadway show that produced entertainment out of the public humiliation of Lynndie England. In the spring of 2005, the Culture Project, on Bleecker Street, featured a play written by Peter Morris on the Abu Ghraib scandal. After having taken students to their fascinating, dignified, and skillfully interpreted Guantánamo: Honor Bound to Defend Freedom play in the fall of 2003, I was looking forward to seeing Guardians. To my dismay, the play revolved around the personalities of two main characters in the Abu Ghraib scandal, those of American Girl, clearly Lynndie England, and English Boy, presumably U.K. Daily Mirror editor Piers Morgan, who was sacked for publishing fake pictures of British soldiers abusing Iraqi prisoners a few days after the Abu Ghraib scandal broke out.52 While English Boy is portrayed in the play as an opportunist sadomasochist homosexual, American Girl reflects on “what’s happened to her with a crude, Appalachian-tongued ignorance.”53 While the play tries to
emphasize that she was made to pay for a “whole ’nother big mistake,” it achieves it while relying on the very clichés that placed Lynndie England at the forefront of the scandal. American Girl is dubbed a simpleton from the Appalachian equivalent of *Deliverance*, who reflects only on her very limited understanding of issues at stake in the Abu Ghraib scandal. By providing intellectual entertainment with the overexploited cultural and cerebral limitations of Lynndie England, Morris, once again, reinforces the public narratives of the scandal. Humiliation then becomes entertainment, as we are all left to find satisfaction and expiation in this truncated vision of reality.

**THE FALL GUY**

While Lynndie England was the entertainment figure at the center of the Abu Ghraib pulp drama, Brigadier General Janis Karpinski was its forensic drama fall guy. As the highest-ranking officer to receive sanctions as a result of the Abu Ghraib scandal, she was relieved of her command of the 800th Military Police Brigade and later demoted to the rank of colonel on an unrelated shoplifting allegation. Karpinski was the first female general officer to command troops in a war zone. She was also the last, conveniently so. While Brigadier General Taguba showed courage in fully reporting the nature of the abuses that took place at the prison, he clearly blamed Karpinski’s lack of leadership for setting the conditions that led to the abuse. She was accused of not having properly trained her soldiers on the Geneva Conventions regarding detainee treatment, not running the prison suitably, and being lax as a commanding officer. She was found to be “extremely emotional during much of her testimony” to General Taguba, who wrote that what he “found particularly disturbing in her testimony was her complete unwillingness to either understand or accept that many of the problems inherent in the 800th Military Police Brigade were caused or exacerbated by poor leadership.” In her book, Karpinski vehemently denies the claim that she was overly emotional at the hearing and writes, “He was not reflecting reality; he was merely using code language for his unspoken sub-theme: that discipline at Abu Ghraib had deteriorated under the command of an excitable woman who had lost control.” Concerning her “unwillingness to either understand or accept” that her leadership style might have contributed to the situation, she responds that her “style is to communicate in an adult way, clearly and reasonably, making sure that subordinates understand...
their responsibilities and the consequences of any failure, and that they can respond appropriately.”59 Her answers are very far from Taguba’s assertions, which resonate as a clear incrimination of not only a leader but also a female leader. She is made to look hysterical, not in control, weak. In the same way that Lynndie England was said to be intellectually challenged, her “unwillingness” to understand insidiously insinuates that maybe she did not possess the necessary intellectual capabilities to be in a commanding position. However, numerous are the occasions in her book where she takes responsibility for what occurred: “I should have anticipated what was coming,” “my approach was hopelessly naive,” “I didn’t have to take no for an answer so often.”60 She now understands that she should have kept control of the entire Abu Ghraib facility.61 Rather, on the suggestion of General Miller, military intelligence took control of the parts of the prison where the torture took place, blocks 1A and 1B.62 While Karpinski’s military police were used to set the conditions for prisoner abuse, it is now clear that they were obeying orders of military intelligence.63 Allowing her chain of command to be blurred was Karpinski’s main mistake.64 However, the origins of the blurring of this chain of command were never questioned, and as he now has become one of the scandal’s casualties, after being “told” to retire at the end of a dutiful army career, Taguba now claims that “he was to investigate only the military police at Abu Ghraib, and not those above them in the chain of command.”65 All throughout his investigation, he now asserts that he was convinced that someone was giving the troops guidance into what type of torture should be used against Iraqis, and he claims that he could not include it in its report.66 Instead, and knowing full well that Karpinski’s leadership was not where the abuse originated, he knowingly sidelined her as the sole responsible in a management position. Once again, the engendering of the Abu Ghraib scandal ensured that no one higher than Karpinski, such as Generals Miller, Sanchez, or Fast, or Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, was ever incriminated in this scandal. Blaming it on a hysterical commander got the public what it wanted, a high-ranking scapegoat, which was felt to be enough. The fact that she may have become the fall guy because she was a woman cannot be proved; the Taguba Report, however, clearly illustrates the opportunity that her gender represented, an opportunity that was grabbed.

So far, a gender lens applied to the Iraq War shows that all sides to the conflict have used humiliation in their instrumentalization of gender roles for a political aim. In the same way that the Kosovo rape campaign placed rape at the center of the Bosnian war, the invocation of pornography in relation to Abu Ghraib gave rise to a fake e-mail and media campaign geared to widen the gap between the Coalition and Arabs in general.
ENGENDERING IMAGES OF HUMILIATION: THE MEDIA PERPETRATING RUMORS

The modernization of communication has given a voice to populations of Middle Eastern countries otherwise oppressed by authoritarian regimes. Especially since the beginning of the second intifada in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, in September 2000, e-mail campaigns have flourished as a means of expression, virtual public debate, and unfortunately as a means of spreading conspiracy theories. Conspiracy theories in the Middle East could be an Olympic discipline and revolve mostly around anti-Semitism and anti-Americanism. Some of the most ludicrous alleged conspiracies have infiltrated as far as some countries’ parliamentary debates. In Egypt, in the 1990s, a rumor that Israel had disseminated poisoned chewing gum all over the country as a means to render Egyptian men impotent was debated as a fact in the Egyptian parliament.67 A feature film was even made on the basis of this topic of male impotency. In the 1996 Egyptian-made movie Al Nom fi al assal (Sleeping with Honey), starring the local version of action-hero actor Arnold Schwarzenegger, Adil Imam, a police detective, also investigates a national case of male impotency.68 While this highly popular movie holds state institutions and authoritarianism as responsible for this national plague, the agenda was set by the anti-Israeli rumor mentioned previously. To this day, this conspiracy is believed to be true in many parts of the Middle East, resurfacing once in a while in a different form, such as the government of Israel intentionally polluting Palestinian water supplies to make women sterile.69 A Syrian contact once joked that if a water pipe broke in the city center of Damascus or a snowstorm paralyzed Lebanon, it would be seen as the doing of Israel or the United States. Given this context, it is not difficult to realize the impact that one e-mail might have on an entire region already extremely suspicious of Western powers and allies.

A few days after the public release of the Abu Ghraib pictures, I received an angry e-mail from an Egyptian contact. The e-mail showed several pictures of a woman wearing an abayah, the black cloak that women traditionally wear in Iraq when they go out of their houses, and several men in camouflage uniform wearing masks. One of the men is penetrating the woman while the two others hold her on the ground or standing up. In another picture, the woman performs oral sex on her aggressor. The comments made by my contact were extreme, ranging from “one more proof of American abuse in Iraq” to “the U.S. needs to be castrated.” Those pictures seemed suspicious to me as soon as I received them. The uniforms were not those of U.S. soldiers in Iraq, the men were wearing masks, while they had not done so in the Abu Ghraib
pictures, one of the men’s hair was too long to be that of an active service member, and the window frame appearing in the background of one picture was not the type of window frame that I remembered from Iraq, let alone of an Iraqi prison. It appeared to be a plastic double-glazed frame found in cold climates, not the type of frame one would find after years of UN-imposed sanctions. In summary, I was not convinced and chose to reply to my contact and everyone he had written to in this mail. I voiced concerns on the veracity of this mail and on the impact that these types of lies would have in the region. I received many enraged and abusive replies, asking me whose side I was on, calling me a Zionist and a traitor, and explaining that because the Taguba Report had mentioned the rape of a woman by a male military police soldier, these pictures must have been true. The damage is difficult to ascertain, but as BBC defense correspondent Paul Wood remarked, “Perhaps, in the backroom of a mosque in Saudi Arabia, in Yemen, or in Iraq itself, a young Muslim is being shown these photographs—and is recruited for jihad.” A few days later, after the U.S. Boston Globe itself published these pictures, it was proved that the pictures were fabricated by the pornographic industry. The hoax was confirmed, but the damage was irrevocably done. By failing to check sources, the media became complacent in the instrumentalization of women as part of the Iraqi conflict. Again, the hyperreality of the engendering of the Iraq conflict, this time in the media battle for hearts and minds, should not be neglected.

GRASSROOTS REALITIES IN AN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

Throughout these times of rumors, scandals, and instrumentalization of women by the different sides of the Iraq conflict, what was the reality of women’s lives in post-Saddam Iraq? Because all parties to the conflict invoked the well-being of women in one way or another to fabricate evidence, dissimulate exactions, promote conflict escalation, oppose the occupation of Iraq, and so on, it would seem that women themselves would be well looked after by all these seemingly champions of women’s rights. However, using something does not necessarily equate to caring for it, as proved by the fact that the situation of Iraqi women on the ground deteriorated rapidly after the fall of Saddam Hussein.

Under international humanitarian law, the Coalition, as an occupying power, is required to guarantee the safety of the population of the country it occupies: the population of Iraq. Additionally, the Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Times of War of August 12, 1949, ensures the protection of women against sexual
abuse. Under this treaty, occupying authorities have an obligation to provide assistance, security, and relief to all sectors of the population under occupation. Specifically, Article 27 of the aforementioned treaty stipulates that “women shall be especially protected against any attack on their honor, in particular against rape, forced prostitution, or any form of indecent assault.” Moreover, the United States and all Coalition forces are signatories to the UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which reiterates women’s protection in armed conflict as well as post-conflict situations. In the case of Baida Juffir Sadick, the Coalition failed to fulfill its duties as an occupying power. It did not ensure her protection as an Iraqi citizen, let alone a woman.

During the first year of the U.S. occupation of Iraq and despite pressures from Iraqi women’s groups to raise awareness with regards to kidnappings, the CPA and Iraqi authorities have minimized the extent to which kidnappings had become a daily routine. In its efforts to rebuild the Iraqi police force after disbanding it, the CPA took no provisions to fund the Anti-Kidnapping Unit of the Organized Crime Department. Colonel Faisal, in charge of the unit, blamed his inability to curtail the wave of kidnappings on the lack of financial means allocated to the problem. Asked if such occurrences took place under the previous regime, he asserted that they were not as frequent. No official figures can be brought to either confirm or deny this claim. Although the lack of means invoked by Faisal to crack down on abductions seems a valid explanation to the lack of action on the part of authorities (e.g., only two cars for the whole Baghdad area are at the disposal of the unit), it seems that the CPA’s refusal to take this issue seriously may have contributed to an aggravation of the situation. According to a CPA official, this disinterest lies in the assumption that an antikidnapping policy would validate the extent of the problem; nevertheless, the Coalition did not view abductions as a priority in the restoration of law and order in New Iraq.

However, this was not the only reason for a lack of intervention on part of Iraqi police. Incompetence and prejudices against women are also part of the problem. In Iraq, each case of abduction is treated as isolated, and police stations are not required to systematically report all cases to the Antikidnapping Unit. Thus, only a few doors away from Colonel Faisal, in the same building, Major Sofiane, from another unrelated unit, disclosed to me the case of a fourteen-year-old girl named Imam, who had been abducted and raped only a few days before the interview took place. Colonel Faisal was not aware of that particular case when I returned to his office to ask about it, even though the culprits who had been arrested in connection to this case were being questioned in
the same medium-sized building that I was interviewing him in. Had these captors been interrogated by Colonel Faisal’s unit, they might have provided answers as to their motivations, their modus operandi, and the possibility of their belonging to an organized crime network. However, some motivations in terms of abductions seemed to be already known by the police.

THE PLAYFUL ONES

Why are Iraqi women being abducted? Major Sofiane’s answer to this question illustrates the extent of the problem. He asserts, “Two kinds of girls are being abducted, those with a bad reputation, and ordinary ones. For the first type, the playful ones, they are taken, raped for a few days and returned to their parents. The other ones, they might be returned or just sold to become prostitutes.” Asked which type of girl fourteen-year-old Iman was, Major Sofiane replied that she had just been unlucky, to which I concluded that she must have been one of the “unlucky ones.” Major Sofiane’s comments with regard to those who seem to have deserved to be taken, “the playful ones,” as well as the others, are not uncommon. This type of complacency toward abducted women is shown at all levels of the medical, legal, and social system in Iraq. As explained earlier, a woman who has been raped will be blamed for having enticed her aggressor into losing his self-control and raping her. As such, the victim, and not her aggressor, principally holds the blame in case of abduction or a rape. Such a patriarchal system based on honor should not be assimilated with any type of religion. Rather, the French anthropologist Germaine Tillion characterized patriarchy, honor, and shame in Mediterranean societies as transcending religion. She conceptualized the extent of their prevalence as the control and protection of women by their men, as a legacy from pagan prehistory, transcending religion to the benefit of a Mediterranean setting of honor. Within this system, retribution for a rape will principally fall onto the victim. According to Article 427 of the Iraqi Penal Code, which is still in place one year after the end of the war, a rapist will not be prosecuted if he accepts to marry the victim. Under such social and subsequently legal grounds, the banality of Major Sofiane’s comments becomes clearer. This prejudiced complacency is found in all sectors of the legal and medical institutions that should care for rape victims.

One young woman survived long enough to tell her story, and her fate illustrates the lack of respect that both the Coalition and the Iraqi police forces show the women they vowed to protect. The name of this woman was Bedur Ibrahim; she was nineteen years old. In January 2004, she was
kidnapped by a gang of men, raped for sixteen days, shot, and left for dead on the side of a road. She was picked up by the police and brought to the al-Kindi Hospital in Baghdad. There, she told her ordeal to the orthopedic ward’s Sister Hannah Abdullah, who later told me her story in a busy corridor of the same hospital. Her family refused to come and comfort Bedur, as they felt she had dishonored them. After two days of relentlessly asking for her mother, Hannah Abdullah says Bedur “let herself die.” Her family did not collect her body, and although, according to standard procedure, her remains should have been transferred to the morgue for a legal delay of three months, she was not transferred to the morgue and was buried hastily, with no ceremony, in a common grave on municipal grounds. Asked why Bedur was not granted the right to be inhumed with dignity, Dr. Faik Amin Baker of the Baghdad Medicolegal Institute replied that because she was a rape victim, her body would never have been collected, and that to not waste time and space, she was buried as soon as she died. Bedur is one of the forgotten by the New Iraq legal and administrative system; she was not granted her basic human rights to security and decency and was, above all, stripped of dignity even in death. She was failed by a Coalition that had vowed to liberate and defend her. She was failed by her people whose prejudices let her to die and be buried alone. Each and every level of the Iraqi legal system set up to protect women has failed in New Iraq, even as the humiliation and safety of Iraqi women has been at the center of all debates surrounding the Iraq War. While the Arab street was vowing to uphold the dignity of Arab women in general as the e-mail episode illustrates, albeit more important its collective dignity, women such as Bedur were left to die alone by their own families. A few days later I asked Major Sofiane about her case. He replied, “She must have been one of the playful ones.” Had her story been recuperated by the media, there is no doubt that she would have been sacrificed on the altar of collective dignity. Because this was not the case, she was left to die alone.

**ORGANIZED CRIME, SEXUAL SLAVERY, AND MORE MEN IN SHORT ROBES**

What happens to abducted women? Some die like Bedur; others are never found like Baida. With both girls in mind, I embarked on a search to understand the extent of human trafficking under Coalition and Iraqi supervision of New Iraq. I sought to interview numerous CPA officials and was always given the same answer: other pressing matters needed to be addressed before the CPA could look at the details of women’s issues. I was told that security is paramount to the long-term sustainability of
the country, and, unsurprisingly, that cases of abductions are very few. The fate of Iraqi women was considered a secondary matter in light of serious other affairs, such as politics, the economy, and terrorism. This type of comment was not only offensive but also shortsighted and misinformed. This shortsighted prioritization failed to realize the potential that women’s abductions can have in the strengthening of organized crime networks in and out of Iraq or any postconflict environment, the same networks that can be considered to take part in the political destabilization of such an environment.80

I was soon to discover what happens to the majority of women who do not return to testify about their ordeal. On March 6, the mother and mother-in-law of two girls who were abducted contacted the Middle East correspondent of my newspaper, The Independent of London. We were in Baghdad and decided to investigate. Because I was by then the ad hoc gender correspondent of the paper’s Baghdad operation, my colleague gracefully gave me the story (and I am grateful to him for this!). I was to interview a courageous woman named Sabiha Hamid. Struck by her grief, Sabiha appeared much older than her fifty-six years. She spoke to me while sitting on the ground of the living room in a Baghdad townhouse. Her black abayia and her determined eyes gave her a unique look of dignity and resilience. I spent the next few hours listening to her plea for help.

On September 15, 2003, her daughter Heba and daughter-in-law Shema Hamid, respectively, sixteen and twenty-four years old, disappeared from her house in Baghdad. They were taken away at gunpoint while cleaning the front porch. A few days later, their captors contacted their family and demanded a large sum of money for their release. Because the family could not find enough money to “buy them back” from their captors, the captors ended contact with the Hamid family. A few weeks later, Shema, who had been married to Sabiha’s son only five weeks before being abducted, managed to call her from Yemen. The girls were pleading for Sabiha to rescue them. Shema said that they were working as cleaners in an Aden hotel. As rumors had been paramount to the normalization of abductions in Baghdad since the end of the war, when fiction had become reality in many instances, the interview with Sabiha Hamid was carried out under close scrutiny. She had come to us to help her travel to Yemen to go and rescue her daughters. She said that she did not want any international agency to be involved, as the Yemeni embassy in Baghdad had repeatedly denied her any assistance, and she was afraid that harm would come to her daughters. Sabiha had also turned to the Coalition for help. She showed me a letter from Sergeant First Class Troy E. Stewart from the 1st Armored Artillery Division in
Baghdad. This letter urged the Yemeni Embassy to help Sabiha by giving her a visa to be able to travel to Yemen. We left each other after a few hours, and my colleague and I decided to contact Amnesty International for help. The next day, someone from the Amnesty office in Yemen went to enquire in the al-Diafe Hotel. There was no sign of Heba or Shema. In the meantime, I paid a visit to Colonel Faisal at the Antikidnapping Unit in Baghdad. The story that I heard from him was quite different. It went as follows: Heba and Shema were not abducted; they simply ran away with two men who promised to marry them. Silly me for believing Sabiha! In light of this “reliable evidence,” the story was “killed” by my newspaper. I was not going to write about it this time: because Heba and Shema had agreed to “elope,” they were not victims anymore, and there was too much contradictory evidence in this particular case. According to information gathered by the Iraqi police, the two girls had been taken by land from Baghdad to Jordan, there, as Shema later told her mother in a telephone call, Heba was sold for $6,000. Heba and Shema were taken by their new owners, or lovers, according to which side of the story one chooses to believe. They allegedly were given new Iraqi passports under the names of Haura abdel-Hamid and Rent Laith and flown from Jordan to Yemen.

As I returned to Turkey, I kept in touch with Sabiha and learned that the pressure that had been placed on the Yemeni government by a dutiful Sergeant Stewart had bore its fruits. Heba and Shema had returned home. I waited a few weeks before returning to Baghdad in July 2004 to interview them. On a sizzling July afternoon, I put on an abayia and was driven by Sabiha and a relative of hers to their humble family home in Mahmudiya, south of Baghdad. In retrospect, this was a reckless thing to do, but because I naively thought that my interview with Heba and Shema would help expose the plight of abducted of Iraqi women, I had decided that this story was worth taking a risk for. A couple of weeks later, two French colleagues, Chesnot and Malbruno, were abducted by the Islamic Army in Iraq on the same stretch of road.

I therefore met with Heba and Shema, and all my questions were answered. They were abducted while cleaning their front porch, sedated with chloroform, and woke up in the house of a madam called Um Ahmed. They were beaten several times, taken to different safe houses across Baghdad, and sold to an Egyptian man called Mohammed Hassan Khalil. The women’s new “owner” drove them to Syria and crossed the border with no checks. They said they saw many men in short robes at that border, but that no one listened to them when they were trying to make contact and escape. They said they saw Mohammed Khalil delivering something to them. Was it money, passports, contact details? They
have no idea. Although this constitutes only a snippet of information as
to possible links between organized crime and al-Qaeda, this topic ought
to be thoroughly investigated. At the Damascus airport, before boarding
a flight to Yemen, Heba and Shema told their story to a customs officer.
They thought that their ordeal was over when they saw their Egyptian
captor being led away and beaten by the border police. A couple of hours
later, he was released from custody and picked up the girls, who were
anxiously waiting to know what would happen to them. He took the
girls away, and gave Shema such a beating that she was unable to walk
for several days. When Shema was finally better, they flew to Yemen,
and were waived good-bye to by the same Syrian official to whom they
had spoken just a few days before. Shema believes that he was given
financial compensation to let them pass. Umm Issam, the Iraqi wife of
Mohammed Khalil, met the girls and took them to the al-Diafe Hotel in
the coastal town of Aden. As Shema was too injured after her Damas-
cus beating and subsequent beatings in Yemen, her “market value” was
spoiled, and both girls said they ended up working as cleaners in the
hotel. Given the priceless value of honor in Iraqi society, it is likely that
both women were too ashamed to admit to their families or even me
that they had worked as prostitutes. Both say that there were about 180
Iraqi women working as prostitutes in this hotel. All of them were Iraqi.
The youngest was only eleven years old. The clients were men from the
Gulf States, Yemen, and also the United States.

In the meantime, the pressure that the Coalition and the Iraqi Gov-
erning Council were putting on the Yemeni embassy in Baghdad bore
fruit. Shema recalls, “One day in April, they raided the hotel and put
us all on a bus to Sanaa.” They were saved, or so they thought: “when
we arrived at the airport, the police said that women who could afford
a plane ticket could go back to Iraq, and that the others would have
to marry and stay in Yemen.” How could 180 women who had been
sequestered for months have any savings, or even passports? This ques-
tion was not of concern to Yemeni authorities, who had honored their
promise to address this particular case. Heba and Shema were free to go
home, albeit without passports or money. Many of these women, includ-
ing the two sisters, had no choice but to beg their “madam” for help.
Umm Issam took many under her wing, married some off to Yemeni
men, and made a pact with others. This is what she did with Heba and
Shema, who agreed to be flown back to Iraq to work there as prostitutes.
Once they were in Baghdad, they contacted their family. Sabiha was so
glad to have them home that they were not killed. Heba will spend the
rest of her life under lock and key, caring for her aging parents. She will
never lead a normal life but explains that she will “at least be alive and
close to her mother.” At the time of the interview, Shema’s future was uncertain. Her brother had threatened to kill her if she did not divorce her husband—Sabiha’s son—and return home to live a life similar to that of Heba, under lock and key. Sabiha was more inclined to think that Shema would be killed, no matter what. As explained in Chapter 1, women in Iraq primarily belong to their original family, which is why immediately family members, not their husbands, predominantly commit honor crimes. This coincides with the fact that through her ird, sexual purity, she is the depository of her family’s honor. To this day, I do not know if Shema’s brother acted on his threat. Unfortunately, there are good chances that he did.

Before I left the Hamid family house in Mahmudiya, I asked them what I could do for them. Sabiha asked that I write about their ordeal so that all the Iraqi women held against their will in Yemen could return home. As I wrote about them in my newspaper, the only reactions that I got, apart from one that was concerned about the well-being of the two sisters, were angry reactions at having published the good deed of the U.S. army Good Samaritan. I was asked whose side I was on in the Iraq War. I was asked how much money I had received by the Pentagon to write this story. Once again, the actual plight of two Iraqi women, and the 178 others who were in the same hotel, was not of any interest to a public debate that most certainly knew how to invoke the plight of women to make a political point but did not actually care about them directly.

In October 2005, as I met with representatives of U.S. Congress who were part of the Iraqi Women’s Caucus, I made sure to raise the issue of human trafficking in and out of Iraq. To my surprise, the members of the caucus, who had been in the Middle East region and had met with representatives of Iraqi women’s nongovernmental organizations on several occasions, had never heard of such cases. They were sponges listening to my field experience, eager for whatever information they could get on the actual situation of Iraqi women. They acted like they had been imprisoned for years and had just gotten out, asking what year we were in. It was an awkward moment during which I realized that it would take much more than one story to raise awareness, it would take the public debate to recenter itself away from politics and in tune with reality.

**TAKING GENDER SERIOUSLY**

What gruesome reality does the story of 180 Iraqi women in the small hotel of a coastal town of Yemen hide? How many hundreds of Iraqi
women have been abducted, beaten, and sold into prostitution by their fellow countrymen and women? Sadly, the issue of human trafficking is one that revolves around organized crime and can be found in every country of the world. True, women are often targeted by organized crime, but their religion, identity, and morals are not always a primal motivation. Often, women are a mere commodity to be sold and used in the same way that weapons or foreign fighters come in and out of conflict zones. The fact that their situation is instrumentalized politically for all sides of the occupier-occupied divide does not help them on the ground; it serves only the interests of parties engaging in the escalation of violence and prospering in polarizations. Conflict is a lucrative business, and an unstable Iraq does above all serve the interests of organized crime networks.

The engendering of perceived humiliation should be addressed as early as possible in a given conflict or postconflict setting. While gender should be taken seriously, it should be done so for the sake of the individuals involved, not that of political discourse. Had the Coalition taken gender issues seriously in March 2003, it might not have lost Fallujah. Had the Iraqi media not perpetrated gender-based rumors, those might not have become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Had the public humiliation of Lynndie England not been perpetrated, widespread human rights abuses throughout Iraq, the same abuses that recruit people both to al-Qaeda and the nationalist insurgency, might have been corrected in time. Had General Karpinski not been incriminated as a woman, the U.S. army might now have more females serving in its ranks.

Above all, the hypocrisy of engendered humiliation not only escalates violence but also disserves the very people all actors in the post-Saddam conflict once vowed to protect against one another’s ruthlessness. It is in this light that it needs to be unmasked and prevented. Giving gender back to the people it belongs to, society, might help prevent conflict escalation. True, gender is about roles, but the instrumentalization of those roles is what was at stake in post-Saddam Iraq. The next and last chapter of this book will use gender as a departure point for another crucial aspect of humiliation in the Iraq War, that of ethno-centered humiliation.
You aren’t going to Iraq to change the Iraqis. Just the opposite. We are fighting this war to preserve the principles of “live and let live.” —U.S. Army, *Instructions for American Servicemen in Iraq during World War II*

There are also political differences in Iraq that have puzzled diplomats and statesmen. You won’t help matters by getting mixed up in them. . . . Your move is to stay out of political and religious arguments altogether.

—U.S. Army, *Instructions for American Servicemen in Iraq during World War II*

In October 2005, after two and a half years of traveling to and living in Iraq, both as a freelance journalist and as an academic, I was given the unique opportunity to gauge the Iraq situation from a different stand, that of the Coalition. A bizarre turn of fate made me part of a team that was to evaluate the post-Saddam Iraq election cycle. This cycle comprised the period before and after the January 2005 general elections, which resulted in the election of a transitional national assembly (TNA) that was to draft a constitution, as well as the October 2005 referendum, designed to adopt or reject this newly established constitution. As the evaluation was being carried out, a new representative body was to be elected in December 2005 to replace the transitional leadership. Our team of only two people was to evaluate everything from the U.S. assistance to the Iraqi government and the development of the new constitution, to voter
outreach and education activities, and electoral technical assistance to
the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq. The U.S. Agency for In-
ternational Development (USAID) was funding the evaluation of these
activities.\(^1\)

The overall budget allocated for these activities was $155,580,000. Our job was to make sure that this substantial amount of U.S. taxpayers’ money had been well spent, and that expected results in terms of running the elections, reaching out for voters, and assisting the constitution-
drafting process had been met. After eleven days of desk research and
interviews in Washington, DC, we were sent to Iraq for twenty-five days
to interview an array of professionals involved in these vast projects.
There was just one slight problem with our assignment: we were not
able to travel freely inside Iraq and were able to leave the International
Zone, the four-square-mile protected area in the center of Baghdad where
most foreigners can live in safety, only with a heavily armed escort.\(^2\)

Each trip to the Red Zone, unsafe Baghdad where average Iraqis live
and work, would have to be planned days in advance and would cost
our company a flat rate of $6,500 that would comprise travel anywhere
in Baghdad with personal security details (PSDs), an armored vehicle
and the wearing of a flak jacket and Kevlar helmet—not exactly the
easiest in terms of approachability and keeping a low profile. We had
to evaluate an outreach toward the entire country while being confined
to four walls, in the same way that an anthropologist would study the
people of a country without ever meeting them. That was the extent of
our problem and sums up the U.S. predicament in Iraq.

On our last day in Baghdad, we presented our preliminary findings to
the USAID mission director. While the overall theme of our presentation
was that Iraq was on the mend, by a strike of synchronicity, a mortar
fell close to the office, shaking its walls and setting off an alarm and
an automated voice ordering us to “duck and cover, duck and cover!”
To our relief, our meeting room was the designated bunker inside the
prefabricated building. We could therefore resume our presentation after
a few minutes. As we carried on in a mix of business as usual and an
attitude of defiance, I thought, dedicated women and men are working
day and night under such hard conditions to make things work here in
Iraq, but did anyone ever stop and ask whether the people actually want
our help?

The next day, the Hamra Hotel, where I used to escape the Inter-
national Zone at night to meet with “real” Iraqis for the sake of my
report, was attacked by two suicide trucks, killing at least eight peo-
ple and wounding many.\(^3\) The attack was said to come as retaliation
for the grim discovery, a few days before, of 169 tortured and starved
Sunni prisoners being held in a Ministry of Interior bunker by the Shiite
The Post-Saddam Elections and How They Paved the Way for Civil War

Badr Brigades militia. Because Iraqi Sunnis felt that the international community had surrendered Iraq to its Shiite majority, in the name of past humiliations and a forcefully newly established democracy, some of them had decided to counter this perceived collective humiliation through terror. Was there no end in sight?

This chapter analyzes the electoral cycle in post-Saddam Iraq, and the consequences on its population, both in terms of favoring one part of the population at the expense of the other, hence fostering the establishment of long-term divisions, and in terms of fostering a collective perception of humiliation alongside an Iraqi-based insurgent-collaborator divide that soon took the form of a Sunni-Shiite divide, paving the way for a low-intensity civil war. Of importance in this chapter will be assessing this cycle as the result of neocolonial humiliation that led the country to massive political unrest, and as a perpetrator of religious and political humiliation. The chapter also examines how the collective humiliation of the Sunni minority, both self-inflicted and perpetrated by the newly established Shiite majority, has left the country on the verge of an ethnopolitical abyss that might take much more than a Sunni Awakening to fix.

GENERAL UPRISING

Chapter 3 ended with an Iraqi-wide uprising that started with the first battle of Fallujah in April 2004. Throughout the weeks that followed this battle, part of the Iraqi Shiite community started to become more and more antagonistic toward Paul Bremer’s CPA. The origin of this was Bremer’s order to close radical Shiite cleric Muqtada Sadr’s Hawza newspaper on March 28, on the grounds that it was inciting violence against U.S. troops. Indeed it was. Over the months, the paper had been comparing Paul Bremer to Saddam Hussein as well as denouncing the U.S. occupation of Iraq and Proconsul Bremer as enemies of Islam and Iraq. This was infuriating to a Coalition that had placed all its hopes on strong support from the Iraqi Shiite community. After all, the de-Baathification process had aimed to empower a hitherto-oppressed Shiite community. It therefore was not conceivable for the United States not to obtain massive political support from within that community, let alone to be vilified in a Shiite newspaper, albeit one of a circulation of roughly ten thousand in a population of twenty-six million. Should these expectations be legitimate, this favoring did not exonerate the Coalition from sustaining its victory for the hearts and minds of the Iraqi Shiites. Indeed, while most Iraqi Shiites received with enthusiasm the Coalition’s initiative to remove Saddam Hussein from power, this initial approval soon faded as the Coalition moved from being a liberator to an occupier in the minds of inhabitants. The Bradley tank squashing...
of Sheikh Abdul Razak al-Lamy and his car, as described in Chapter 1, and the subsequent Coalition refusal to acknowledge fault or grant financial compensation to his family, illustrates the Coalition’s daily failures to capitalize on the gratitude of many Iraqi Shiites toward their U.S. liberators. This type of mishap, along with the spreading of many unfounded rumors, represented the bread and butter of newspapers such as Muqtada Sadr’s *Hawza*. More important, they legitimized the radical discourse of political opportunist Muqtada Sadr, whose primary aim was to conquer the popular support base of his deceased father at the expense of other religious leaders. While Muqtada Sadr did not have the religious credentials of his father, he hoped to receive political legitimacy through the spreading of a populist message. This message was not difficult to capitalize on given the daily mistakes made by Coalition troops on the ground.

While the closing down of *Hawza* came from the accurate realization that most media outlets encouraged the spreading of rumors against the Coalition, this realization came far too late into the occupation, and the measures taken by Bremer were, as the *Columbia Journalism Review* stated, “questionable” and “counterproductive.” Had the CPA addressed the issue of media ethics earlier on in the occupation, it would not have had to resort to closing the paper, which became more popular as a result. The result of this move was the alienation of part of the Shiite population toward the Coalition, an alienation that culminated in the summer of 2004 siege of Najaf, in which U.S. troops engaged in fierce battle with Sadr’s militiamen known as the Mehdi Army, who were benefiting from the armed support of Fallujah residents who had come to provide assistance in urban warfare. It is also worth mentioning that, by then, Fallujah had once again become a stronghold against Coalition troops. While the CPA had transferred its authority over to the interim government (IG), whose prime minister was Shiite Ayad Allawi, a former Baathist exile focused on restoring security in Iraq as a whole, this government made a point to start holding discussions with all Iraqi sides of the insurgency. In effect, this meant separating the “nationalists” from the foreigners controlled by al-Qaeda. This was a controversial move, in the eyes of the Coalition, which intended to foster unity in post-Saddam Iraq. It also was a clear signal that Iraq was claiming its sovereignty back.

**DIVIDE AND CONQUER: THE NUMBER ONE RULE OF COLONIALISM**

In relation to the crippling situation in Najaf, Muqtada Sadr made it known that he would surrender the keys to its holy shrine, where his
followers were besieged by Coalition troops, only to Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani. Sistani is considered the most senior Shiite cleric in Iraq, the prime marja, or religious reference, and has followers in other parts of the Shiite umma. While the Iraqi Shiite community has been divided by power struggles since April 2003, Sistani has managed to remain above these struggles, which has earned him immense grassroots support and respect that other leaders such as Sadr have been striving for since the beginning of the Coalition’s occupation. While Coalition authorities praised Sistani for his moderate views early on in the conflict, he became increasingly critical of the Coalition in October and November 2003, which, in light of his unique position as the most trusted religious figure among Iraqi Shiites, forced him to take on an unwanted political role in the following months as the Shiite prime interlocutor for the international community in post-Saddam Iraq.

In surrendering the keys to the shrine to Sistani, Sadr made sure that he would not lose face in his struggle against the United States, while at the same time gaining the approval of Sistani and his followers in light of his voluntary submission to him. With this move, Sadr sought to gain recognition from the Shiite religious establishment as a submissive, yet unavoidable, power broker. Sistani, who had been advocating for elections to be held as the only way to legitimize the Iraqi government and return to state sovereignty, had to be granted his wish in exchange for a peaceful settlement of the Najaf crisis.

Therefore, Sadr’s move was also very timely to Sistani, as it gave him leverage in future political negotiations with the international community over the issue of the elections. In fact, the settlement of the Najaf crisis was a win-win scenario for all concerned: Sadr, Sistani, Iraqi Shiites in general, and the Coalition. In the eyes of the Coalition, using the influence of Sistani to secure the support of the Shiite population would allow them to focus only on defeating the Sunni insurgency. Sistani’s support meant one front instead of two, which was of crucial importance if the Coalition was to secure Iraq as a whole. In effect, this meant that the Coalition could finally tame Fallujah. Despite Prime Minister Allawi’s efforts to hold talks with the Sunni insurgency, the Coalition, which had to make a serious point to the taxpayer at home, decided not to support this Iraqi government initiative and to hold a second offensive in Fallujah.

The second battle of Fallujah lasted from November 7 to December 23, 2004. It was carried out as a joint venture between Coalition troops and the newly formed Iraqi Army, especially the 36th Commando Battalion of the Iraqi National Guard. The Iraqi civilian death toll of this particular offensive is difficult to ascertain: a Google Internet search on casualties from the battle predominantly lists only Coalition deaths. However, the U.S. journalist Bing West, who enthusiastically lists the
might of the firepower used on the city, might give a clue as to the hu-
man toll suffered as a result of the battle. He recounts, “There were 540
air strikes and 14,000 artillery and mortar shells fired, as well as 2,500
tank main gun rounds. Eighteen thousand of Fallujah’s 39,000 buildings
were damaged or destroyed.” The vastness of the firepower used on
the city is the only indication of what the human toll of this battle, death
and displacement alike, might have been. An estimated three hundred
thousand people are reported to have been displaced. Worse, the Pen-
tagon has confirmed the use of the chemical weapon white phosphorus,
euphemistically called an “incendiary” weapon used for military pur-
poses, thus exonerating its user from persecution under Protocol III of
the 1980 UN Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.

This particular battle, in which a majority of Shiites and Kurds fought
alongside Coalition troops, was felt by many in the Iraqi Sunni pop-
ulation as a declaration of war against them. Regardless of the exact
ethnic composition of the 36th Commando Battalion of the Iraqi Na-
tional Guard that took part in hostilities in Fallujah, the population of
Fallujah felt attacked by Shiites and Kurds, sidelined in a battle against
the occupation of a country that had gone to its former Shiite minority.
The majority presence of Shiites in the ranks of this battalion can be
explained by the de-Baathification process, which resulted in de facto
discrimination against the representation of Sunni Iraqis in the new Iraqi
Army. However, the impact that the ethno-religious composition of the
battalion left on the population of Fallujah and Sunnis in Iraq as a whole
was tremendous. They felt attacked and victimized by their co-nationals.

While many cite the bombing of the Samarra Shiite shrine as the
beginning of interreligious hostilities in post-Saddam Iraq, the impact of
the second battle of Fallujah on Sunni Iraqi hearts and minds ought to
be taken into account. As a consequence, a majority of Sunni political
parties denounced the elections, “whose results ‘were settled in advance
in favor of the collaborators’ and which were ‘imposed’ by the Coalition
forces,” and decided to tell their supporters to boycott them.

WHAT IS DEMOCRACY?

As the evaluation in which I took part was geared toward assessing
the results of technical assistance to the Iraqi electoral process, voter out-
reach and education was a large part of the overall project that included
other election-related activities. An excess of $45 million was granted to
the International Republican Institute (IRI) for its implementation. The
International Republican Institute is a U.S. government–funded organi-
zation related to the U.S. Republican Party that conducts international
“democratization” programs. Its Democrat counterpart is the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, also funded by the U.S. government. From the perspective of a foreigner both to the Iraqi and to the U.S. political systems, I found it amazing that two-thirds of the overall budget allocated to the Iraqi electoral cycle was granted to two Washington, DC–based institutes connected, respectively, to the Republican and the Democratic parties. This appeared to be the illustration of a simplistic view of a new Iraqi democracy, which was assumed to establish itself in a fashion similar to the U.S. bipartisan system. Indeed, if the United States was to spread democracy around the Muslim world, what better model to disseminate than its own?

Something that also struck me when reading the evaluation’s scope of work was the emphasis that was placed on the technical side of the assistance provided to the Iraqi electoral cycle, that is to say, the quantitative aspect of the assistance given. It read, “We bought an election, did we get our taxpayers’ money’s worth?” when it should have read, “We bought an election, was it a success for democracy in New Iraq? Did it help Iraqis?” While our evaluation report highlighted some qualitative reservations in relation to the shaping of a democratic future for Iraq, it could not fully address this as we were bound to a highly technical scope of work.

One very telling example to illustrate this quality versus quantity outlook is in relation to voter education and outreach. Voter education and outreach was geared toward educating voters on how to cast their ballots and on their democratic right to be part of Iraq’s future, in the context of free and fair elections. Outreach was carried out through radio and television spots, workshops, and the distribution of written information material throughout the country. It also heavily encouraged women to come out and vote alongside men. It aspired to move people to exert a right that they hitherto did not have, the right to vote freely. In itself, this campaign was cast from the best of intentions; dedicated individuals worked on it relentlessly, amid daily challenges like the ones faced by our evaluation team (e.g., the inability to travel freely to many politically sensitive parts of Iraq). Of a $45 million budget, of which more than half went directly to the private security company ensuring the safety of the IRI staff and activities, what really motivated people to exercise their democratic right and duty as Iraqi citizens?

The answer lies in an order given by Sistani’s aide, Sayyid Ahmad al-Safi, in a Friday sermon in Karbala on October 22, 2004. This order called for a massive Shiite turnout and was less than ambiguous: it labeled abstention from voting as a form of high treason. Participation in the elections, he said, ‘has religious sanctity and abstention [from voting]
As a result of being threatened to burn in the eternal fires of hell if they did not cast their ballot, the Iraqi Shiite community voted en masse, while in some Sunni parts of the country, polling stations did not even open. As a result of being threatened to burn in the eternal fires of hell if they did not cast their ballot, the Iraqi Shiite community voted en masse, while in some Sunni parts of the country, polling stations did not even open.29 Ali, a Shiite man from Jadriyah, explains his main motivation for voting: “We were told by the Grand Marja [Sistani] that it was our religious duty to come and vote last January. We did it to be good Muslims, in the same way that before we did this to be good to Saddam, because we knew that otherwise, we would end up in Abu Ghraib.”

Is democracy voting in large numbers, or is it voting freely and being able to choose not to vote? Does coercion to vote represent democracy? One might say that at least Iraqis were not told whom to vote for, as opposed to under Saddam’s rule. True, al-Safi did not tell people whom to vote for. However, Sistani did endorse a list, that of the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), also known as list 169, its official number, which won more than 3 million votes out of 8.5 million. If a man tells you that you will go to hell if you do not vote, and that, by the way, this particular list is one fine bunch of people to vote for; who will you end up voting for? Is that democracy? Because the CPA had dictated that Iraq was to be treated as one electoral district, because of time constraints in organizing the elections as well as the fear that a constituency-based system would favor Islamists from both sides of the Shiite-Sunni divide, the political endorsement of one list over another was paramount to its success.31 In effect, most Shiites voted for the UIA. In the days that followed the elections, that list placed Bayan Jabr as Iraqi Minister of Interior. Jabr is the man who allowed Shiite militias to begin the ethnic cleansing of some streets of Baghdad.32 We will return to this later in this chapter.

Is democracy imposing on a people what electoral system they will be subjected to, as a means to ensure that elections take place for the sake of the taxpayer back home? Is democracy still, despite all these questions, being able to vote freely for one or the other candidate? When Ali’s wife, Baida, was asked whom she voted for, she replied, “My husband’s candidate, of course!”

EMPOWERED WOMEN?

Not only did many Shiites vote to escape the flames of hell, many women were told whom to vote for by their husbands. As the evaluation did not allow us to travel throughout Iraq to extensively interview people on the impact of IRI’s voter outreach programs, we dispatched six “field monitors” whom we trained to be our ears and eyes and to recuperate as much information as they could. Because I trained them, I made sure that
they were trained in gender awareness. The methodological limitations attached to this were extensive, ranging from our uncertainty that they actually did travel to remote places such as Basra to whether they had really interviewed a varied sample of people. Indeed, in some instances, they were received with much suspicion and distrust, even though we had all agreed that they would not disclose that they were working for the Coalition, as this also constituted a one-way ticket to hell in many places.

As gender represented a very important component in the Coalition discourse in relation to the elections, and every third candidate on each electoral list was supposed to be a woman, our field monitors were told to focus their attention on women.

The results were edifying. In rural areas, while many women were told what list to vote for by their husbands, others were simply forbidden to go and vote. In some cases, those who did defy their husbands’ wishes and came out to vote did so without knowing of the indelible ink stain that was to be left on their right index finger, to ensure no one voted twice. Those ink stains provoked the violent ire of their husbands when they returned home.

In the case of one Iraqi woman, it cost her baby’s life. Naghab, from Najaf, told the story to one of our female field monitors on the condition of anonymity. She said that because her husband wanted to force her to vote for a list of his choice, which according to her was not representative of her needs as an Iraqi woman, she had faked an illness to not have to go out and queue for hours in front of the voting station. Instead, she told her husband that she would spend the day with her sister-in-law, Huda, who was six months pregnant and unable to get out of her house for this type of occasion. Naghab spent the night before the elections at Huda’s house. But then, both women decided to go out and vote behind their husbands’ backs as early as they could on polling day. They did not need to queue because Huda was pregnant. After they cast their ballots, their fingers were stained with ink that they could not remove. This was the proof that they had voted, but more important, that they had deceived their husbands. When Huda’s husband got home later that day, he saw her ink-stained finger and flew into an uncontrollable rage. He beat her so violently that she went into premature labor. Her baby did not survive.

Is gender awareness in democracy imposing women on voting lists? Or is it making sure that women can cast their ballots freely, as well as making sure that they do not suffer from reprisals if they dare to vote?

Unfortunately, Iraqi women were not the only individuals to encounter problems with being marked like cattle at the voting booths.
INKED!

The ink-stained finger! A photo op made to become the symbol of Iraqi freedom, photographed and used in vain throughout Bush administration speeches and propaganda material. Let us remember that it was still invoked in President Bush’s 2008 State of the Union address: “We’ve seen jubilant Iraqis holding up ink-stained fingers and celebrating their freedom. These images of liberty have inspired us.”35 They have indeed.

Those stains, while carrying a strong political message to the U.S. taxpayer that the elections worked, that their invasion money was well spent, came as a strong deterrent to vote in areas where the elections were officially boycotted. Our report found that it actually deterred Sunni voters from casting their ballots in defiance of local insurgent leaders, who had started to terrorize them, as will be explained later in this chapter.36 In some areas of Salaheddin Province, in which a boycott of the elections was the norm, defiant voters found their ink-stained finger cut off in reprisal by al-Qaeda. Others were killed.37 This significant problem was highlighted in our report, and identified as a high-priority assistance need for the upcoming December 2005 general election.38 Because the report was to be made public in mid-December, hence too late for our recommendations to be implemented, we alerted some members of the U.S. Congress, to no avail. Because ink-stained fingers were one of the only remaining markers of success of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, they had to stay, even though it was technically possible to use colorless indelible ink, as had been used by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in the Kosovo municipal elections of October 2000.39

This episode illustrates the dichotomy between fiction and reality, between the wishful thinking in Washington, DC, to bring democracy to Iraq and the reality of what this particular brand of democracy (i.e., not taking into account the Iraqi people) might achieve.

Whom did the voter outreach program actually benefit? The U.S. taxpayer who financed it? The private security companies? The Washington, DC, political institutes that ran it? The Iraqi people as a whole?

THE CONSTITUTION-WRITING PROCESS: VALIDATING SELF-INFLICTED HUMILIATION

As stated earlier, the January 2005 elections were geared to elect the 275 members of the TNA, who would form a transitional government, which was in turn to select the Constitutional Committee (ConComm) that would write, debate, and put to vote the new Iraqi constitution.
Because of the Sunni boycott of the election, with a 2 percent turnout in Anbar Province, 17 percent in Ninewa, and 33 percent in Diyala, no Sunni list was elected to the TNA.\textsuperscript{40} This represented a challenge for the constitution-writing process, as it was supposed to represent all parts of the Iraqi population. Moreover, the transitional administrative law (TAL), which ensured the maintenance of U.S.-dictated standards in terms of timetable and principles that would be followed by the transitional government, was very strict. It stipulated that after the January elections, a period of six months would be allocated to the constitution-writing process, which would be followed by a referendum accepting or rejecting the constitution on October 15, followed by new elections for a permanent government on December 15.\textsuperscript{41} While the TAL gave a possible six-month extension to the entire process, its most pressing caveat was the clause that even if the majority of the Iraqi population voted in favor of the constitution in the October referendum, if two-thirds of at least three provinces voted against, then it would have to go back to the drawing board.\textsuperscript{42}

This in effect meant that Sunni representatives had to be given a chance to contribute to the writing of the constitution for it to have a chance of existing beyond the coming referendum. The problem with this was that no one knew whom to invite to the negotiating table of the ConComm, as no significant Sunni political figure had risen or even campaigned for the January elections.\textsuperscript{43} The Sunnis who were invited had no voting rights, because they had not been elected to the TNA. They were selected amid strong U.S. embassy pressure.\textsuperscript{44} While the embassy had been warned by international observers to the process, such as the Congress-funded U.S. Institute for Peace, that the representatives that had been chosen by ConComm were not representative of the Iraqi Sunni community, a quick decision had to be made. According to a U.S. official, they were all former Baathist elite members, deemed as potential “spoilers” of the entire process, and yet were favored by the U.S. embassy due to strict timelines.\textsuperscript{45} In effect, the few Sunni prominent figures in Iraqi political life were called to take part in ConComm but ended up polarizing the constitutional debate; not that it mattered, as the debate was eventually carried out behind closed doors, as will be seen shortly.

The Sunni issue was not the only factor delaying the writing of the constitution. It also took months for the transitional Iraqi government to finally form. Because it was up to the newly established transitional cabinet, headed by Prime Minister Ibrahim Jaafari, to set up ConComm according to political party alliances that would reflect the makeup of this new government, the establishment of ConComm had to wait until the cabinet was formed. Because it was formed only on April 28, 2005,
Sheikh Humam Hamoudi was not appointed chair of ConComm until late May 2003. That meant ConComm had a mere six weeks to draft the constitution.

This short time frame made it very difficult for a debate based on public participation and transparency to actually occur. Still, the Iraqi public was encouraged to take part in the debate, at least on paper. After a vast UN campaign was launched, informing the Iraqi population that they would be able to enter their suggestions in a blue box, the United Nations realized that it had failed to actually order the blue boxes on time. A solution was found in the last-minute purchase of hundreds of blue garbage cans. However, after being informed that the Iraqi population would feel insulted at the sight of a constitutional suggestion box that was no more than a garbage can, brown wooden boxes were made on order. This logistical nightmare meant that boxes were finally made available with little time to spare before the August 15 deadline.

This episode is emblematic of the international community gone awry in Iraq, with many good intentions hampered by a mix of unprofessionalism, short-term thinking, lack of cultural awareness, and sheer bad luck.

This episode would not have been a major problem if the international community had not promised the Iraqi people that because democracy had finally come to them, their opinions would be paramount to ConComm debates. The lucky few who found the brown boxes and their seven-question forms, faced questions that were inappropriate to a population that had never been made aware of the tenets of liberal democracy. Being asked to give an opinion between a parliamentary and a presidential system did not mean much to most Iraqis. Another disillusion that lost Sunni support in the constitution was the fact that in the six weeks that were left, a group solely formed of Shiites and Kurds, named “The Kitchen,” hijacked the entire process. This group, stirred by the Sistani-backed UIA list, met and wrote the constitution behind closed doors. Not only were Sunnis invited to their first ConComm meeting only on July 8, less than five weeks before the deadline, they were well aware that their presence did not really matter.

Sunnis were not the only Iraqis missing in the process—women were evinced too.

Zakia Hakki, the first female to be nominated as judge in both Iraq and the Middle East, a Kurdish Shiite, says that toward the end of the writing process, she had to resort to sleeping in front of “The Kitchen’s door” to be able to catch a glimpse of what had been discussed behind these doors at night. A tenacious woman who has survived many assassination attempts since the fall of Saddam, Hakki stated that secular women were
completely dismissed from the constitution-writing process, while a few token women who barely knew how to read were used to give an impression of gender awareness in the process. This type of dichotomy between actual and token female parliamentarian is unfortunately common to electoral quotas requiring a certain number of women on electoral lists. Hakki said that ConComm chairman and UIA prominent figure Sheikh Hamoudi ensured that as part of the constitution, women’s rights should be in accordance to Islam. At no point was she or other secular women able to participate in the drafting process, debate the constitution publicly, or even review it before its final draft became public.\(^{50}\) It was only after intense public pressure that a U.S.-sponsored women’s coalition, the Rafadeen Women’s Coalition, was granted a meeting with Sheikh Hamoudi (a privilege that I was not granted after he stood me up at a scheduled meeting in November 2005). After millions of U.S. taxpayers’ dollars were spent on gender outreach, the constitution-drafting process was a clear indicator that secular and educated women had no place in New Iraq. The constitution itself, however, made sure to put them back in their place after years of Baathist secular rule. In New Iraq and under its new constitution, they were to be subjected to Islamic law.

The great losers of the constitution drafting were the Sunnis and Iraqi women, not only because they were not fully included, but also because, in the case of the Sunni population, regional oil control was one of its main provisions, which meant that Sunni areas, which had little or no oil resources, would find themselves struggling economically.\(^{51}\) In fact, while there are barely any oil resources in Iraqi Sunni areas, other areas such as the Shiite south or the Kurdish north have important oil revenues and extracting capacities. Under Saddam’s rule, these disparities were resented by both Shiite and Kurdish populations because, in effect, “their” resources were thought to be exploited and to benefit only the Sunni Baathist elite of Iraq. As seen in Chapter 1 in terms of the religious composition of the Iraqi Baath Party, nothing could be further from the truth, as Saddam’s Baath Party counted more Shiite than Sunni adherents. Nevertheless, this resentment of Shiites and Kurdish resources paying for a perceived Sunni domination prevailed in post-Saddam Iraq and, more important, in the drafting of the Iraqi constitution, which was to ensure that all areas would benefit from their own resources. Because the Sunni areas had no great resources, under this new rule, they were not to benefit from the resources of other parts of the country. In effect, this was perceived as a condemnation to economic hardship, under a majority government that did not defend Sunni rights. While the establishment of the constitution might have raised valid concerns among some segments of the Iraqi population in terms of the sharing of
resources and the alienation of one part of the population against the other, the January 2005 elections, and their boycott, invalidated many of these fears.

BAYAN JABR

Bayan Jabr’s appointment as cabinet minister of the Jaafari government as a result of the January 2005 elections is a clear illustration of the mechanisms that heightened already-significant tensions between Sunnis and Shiites. While religious tensions were not part of the Iraqi political agenda only a year before, they quickly became so with the appointment of Bayan Jabr to the Ministry of Interior. A high-ranking member of the Iranian-backed Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), the party of Mohammed Bakr al-Hakim whose triumphant return to Iraq was mentioned in Chapter 1, Jabr had fled to Iran in the 1970s to escape persecution from the Iraqi government. He returned after the fall of Saddam, as did many SCIRI officials. Since his exile, he has been renowned as deeply distrustful of anyone he suspected of having ties with the former Iraqi Baathist regime, a suspicion that unfortunately expanded to the Iraqi Sunni community as a whole. While his visceral rejection of Saddam’s government is perfectly understandable, the association that he and many others have made between die-hard Saddam loyalists and Iraqi Sunnis, as well as the distinction between a secular Iraqi nation and an Iraqi federation, was extremely dangerous for a man in his position of power. However, because the confusion between high-ranking Baathists and the Iraqi Sunnis as a whole was also discernable in many CPA policies, including the now-controversial de-Baathification process, a devil’s advocate might retort that Jabr’s way of thinking had been indirectly encouraged by many U.S. officials in post-Saddam Iraq. In effect, this meant that many of the officials elected as part of the January 2005 ballot found their primary political loyalty in their own identity as opposed to that of a then-defunct Iraqi nation. A telling sign of the preponderance of Jabr’s Shiite identity over his Iraqi ministerial function is the fact that a few days after he was named minister of interior, the Iraqi flag normally flying over Iraqi government buildings had been replaced in some instances by banners raised in honor of the Imam Hussein, a revered religious figure in Shiite Islam. There is much more than a simple anecdote to this, as it became the illustration that the Ministry of Interior now belonged to Iraqi Shiites, many of whom, like Jabr, bore a heavy grudge against the former Baathist government, a grudge that over the years had been expanded to include the entire Iraqi Sunni community.
While CPA’s Order 91 had sought to initiate the demobilization and integration of nine Iraqi militias, representing approximately one hundred thousand men, into the Iraqi security forces, this order was not made a priority by Prime Minister Allawi or U.S. Ambassador John Negroponte, who had illustrated himself in Latin America under the Reagan administration. This had the effect of keeping all Shiite militias armed and active, including the Badr Brigades, the military arm of the SCIRI. Because the Badr Brigades and SCIRI were part of the same overall organization, the Badr Brigades became part of the Ministry of Interior. Meanwhile, many others not directly involved with the brigades but with other Shiite militias, such as Muqtada Sadr’s Mehdi Army, also found themselves in a position of power. This blurring of lines between militias and ministerial functions had the effect of also blurring the line between law enforcement, the hunt for insurgents, and ethnic vendettas.

Basic human rights became a distant requirement to democratic rule in New Iraq. With the appointment of Bayan Jabr to the Ministry of Interior, militias became death squads overnight, depending on what side of the ethnic division one found him- or herself on. As the U.S. reporter Ken Silverstein puts it: “The rise of death squads corresponds almost precisely to the April 2005 appointment of Bayan Jabr as interior minister in Iraq’s transitional government.” These death squads were approximately one hundred thousand strong during Jabr’s tenure.

What did the death squads do? In November 2005, they tortured and starved 169 alleged Sunni insurgents who were later found in the basement of a Ministry of Interior building in Jadriyah, a Shiite district of Baghdad. Where did those particular insurgents come from? Many were probably random motorists picked up at one of the many Ministry of Interior/militia-manned checkpoints found around Baghdad at that time—checkpoints that officially belonged to the Badr Brigades, Wolf Brigades, Mehdi Army, and Tiger and Scorpions brigades, among many other masculine-sounding names. What did these checkpoints look like? They were manned by juvenile-looking thugs wearing balaclavas, sunglasses, leather gloves with the fingers cut off, and holding a weapon ranging from an AK-47 to a shotgun. Ironically, they were obviously mimicking the staff of the high-profile U.S. private security companies that had been terrorizing the Iraqi population from the fall of Saddam onward.

When they were not manning checkpoints, these militia groups were making their way through Baghdad with big pickup trucks equipped with loud sirens, pointing their weapons at scared motorists as they were hurling along the road. They were Iraqi-looking mercenaries mimicking the colonial masters. It would have been a pathetic sight if they
had not been responsible for atrocities that escalated into what by many accounts was a civil war. These atrocities ranged from randomly arresting Sunni Muslims, sometimes on the basis that their names were Omar or Bakar, popular Sunni names originating from former caliphs hated by the Shiites, torturing them with electric drills, electricity, raping them when they looked “effeminate,” as mentioned in Chapter 3, and dumping them into waste dumps in the outskirts of Baghdad.

Death squads were also renowned for removing Sunni patients from hospital beds and subsequently killing them, so much in fact that many Sunnis preferred to stay sick than step foot in Baghdad hospitals. In light of this, the February 2006 bombing of the Samarra Shiite Shrine may have been only the trigger to an already deeply rooted sectarian conflict in post-Saddam Iraq. While it focused the world’s attention on a problem that could no longer be avoided, the rise of Bayan Jabr was instrumental in creating this problem. When I visited Baghdad in March 2006 and August 2006, it was a common sight to pass pickup trucks filled with bodies on their way to the Baghdad morgue. By July 2006, the Baghdad Medicolegal Institute was receiving between 50 and 125 dead per day.

While the Baghdad population was well aware of this, many seemed to be rather disconnected from this grim reality, as if it was too hard to bear. Because the war between Israel and Lebanon was taking place at the same time, hence diverting the world’s attention away from the daily horrors of Baghdad, many Iraqis remained glued to their television sets, watching images of the Lebanon war and suffering for their Lebanese friends. Yasser, from Fallujah, mentioned in Chapter 2, was deeply moved by images of destruction in Lebanon: “The poor people; we know what it is like to be bombarded. I wish there was something we could do for them.” At the same time, however, the death toll in Baghdad alone was tenfold higher than that of all Lebanon. Since the world’s attention was focused on Lebanon, Iraq’s attention was also diverted from the painful reality of its own daily predicament. This episode shows the power that the media has in setting the agenda for not only one perception of a given story, but also what story to choose from. Because pickup trucks filled with bodies were not as spectacular as air raids, Lebanon outweighed Iraq in the media for a while.

**OUTINGS**

What happened to the Iraqis picked up by death squads?

Among other unhappy endings, I have never seen so many gay outings as on Iraqi television. After years of state-run television shows, where,
sometimes, opponents of Saddam Hussein confessed their crimes on television before being executed. New Iraq adopted reality television. In the spring of 2005, the channel al-Iraqiya inaugurated its *Terrorism in the Hands of Justice* program, a show geared toward proving to the Iraqi public that Iraqi police did arrest insurgents and that these insurgents were nothing but petty criminals. Because Iraqi society is established on principles of honor to be kept at all costs, this show—whose aim was to discredit all aspects of the armed resistance, both national and al-Qaeda based—used humiliation as a primary vector to discredit the insurgency. Six days a week, self-confessed members of the Iraqi insurgency, displaying “bruised, swollen faces and hunched shoulders,” confessed to the most horrific crimes. Because the Iraqi government was aiming to debunk the myth of the benevolent and noble insurgent, these reluctant television stars were asked to confess their alleged greed, sexual deviousness, and complete lack of morals in front of millions. Night after night, prisoners answered the questions of an inquisitor on their evil deeds, before an audience both disgusted and scared at the thought of many more of these “insurgents” roaming the streets of Baghdad and the rest of Iraq.

My first encounter with this type of program was when its Kurdish counterpart hit the screens of Kurdish television in July 2005. One July afternoon, as I was trying to work through countless power outages in Erbil, a Kurdish city in northern Iraq, my friend Rowand rang me to tell me the story of Sheikh Zana. Sheikh Zana, a supermarket owner, had been arrested by Kurdish law enforcement officials a few days before and had confessed to running a gay/pedophile/Islamist/terrorist network. This was coming at a time when Erbil had just suffered an especially bloody suicide attack, and residents were demanding answers and more security. Because I had heard of similar homosexual accusations related to al-Qaeda before, my reaction was a mix of amusement and skepticism. A gay/pedophile/Islamist/terrorist network: how convenient to discredit any insurgent effort for years to come. I did not know whether to laugh or to cry, but my friend Rowand was not amused at my reaction; he was scared, disgusted, and petrified. He invited me to come to his parents’ place that night to watch the first part of the televised confession of Sheikh Zana’s network. The entire city was waiting for the confessions, which finally came in the most sordid of manners, interrupted with footage of gay sex, executions, and much gore. The fact that the confessions were intermittent, cut off abruptly at times, that the images of gay sex supposed to have been filmed by Sheikh Zana and his group could have been filmed by anyone even after the culprits’ arrest—in the same way that some were filmed in Abu Ghraib—was not relevant at all.
to the viewers of this show. My friend Rowand and his family were mesmerized and disgusted. When I expressed my skepticism, they politely dismissed it. This footage appealed to the deepest of Iraqi collective fears, the fear of being exposed as a homosexual. Because this fear had been invoked, no one could possibly ever publicly express any positive sentiment toward any side of the Iraqi insurgency ever again. This was a very powerful government tool against the insurgency.

The story of Sheikh Zana was not the only public gay outing in post-Saddam Iraq. All have had a tremendous impact in terms of public humiliation and conflict escalation. Indeed, because the Ministry of Interior was manned by Shiites, the culprits outed on television were Sunnis, hence reinforcing the Sunni Iraqi perception of being collectively persecuted, first through political humiliation, and then, again, through sexually related humiliation. Throughout 2005, many confessions of sodomy and rape were aired. One program even accused members of the most important Sunni tribes, the Jibouri, Janabi, and Dulaimi, of all being terrorists.64

While Sunni leaders called for this public shaming and humiliation to end, al-Qaeda took it upon itself to correct this outrage. An al-Qaeda video titled The Raid of Sheikh Omar Hadid, dated early 2006, denounced this practice of public shaming. In this video, a narrator tells the story of a Mosul sheikh who was forced to confess on Iraqi television that he had held sex orgies with men in his mosque. Then the narrator lets its audience know that some members of the team of the Wolf Brigades, Shiite Ministry of Interior Special Forces responsible for arresting this sheikh, were in turn arrested by al-Qaeda. One of them confesses on camera to the following: “Three officers raped the imam’s mother, sister, and daughter. They told him to say that he was a homosexual and that he was practicing this homosexuality in his mosque. . . . I remember the names of the soldiers who committed this crime: Lieutenant S. from Nasiryah, Lieutenant S. from Mosul, Lieutenant A. from Mosul as well. . . . I swear in the name of God that the imam was innocent and that our only goal was to tarnish the name of the mujahideens.” The video goes on to denounce Shiite Prime Minister Jaafari’s Operation Lightning, geared toward fighting the insurgency. It then quotes the Financial Times edition of June 29, 2005, in which the operation is criticized for being directed against Sunni Iraqis.65 Another voice, believed to be Abu Musab Zarqawi, head of al-Qaeda in Iraq, takes over and announces a retaliatory operation called the “Raid of Sheikh Omar Hadid,” referring to the leader of Fallujah’s al-Qaeda cell, killed during the second battle of Fallujah. Al-Zarqawi then says to his partisans, “When you receive my order, go! We don’t accept to live while our sisters are raped and our
dignity is violated by the slaves of the cross.” The video then lists the operations that took place as part of this, claiming responsibility for more than thirty suicide attacks throughout the country, targeting “enemies’ military camps, checkpoints, enemy patrols,” and so on. It finishes by saying, “We swear in the name of God that we cannot kill any Muslim, our mission is to defend Muslims, not to kill them.”

Despite posing as the public avenger of the humiliated Iraqi Sunni community, this last statement about being there to defend Muslims and not to kill them highlights a very important issue, that of al-Qaeda’s gradual loss of support among the Iraqi population. While al-Qaeda was set on capturing Sunni support after the damage done to them through these television shows, it eventually also lost the hearts and minds of former supporters.

FROM LIGHTNING TO AWAKENING: AL-QAEDA’S HUBRIS

Former Iraqi Air Force Brigadier General Nadhom M., mentioned in Chapter 1, is a resident of Doloyia, a city of approximately fifty thousand people located sixty miles north of Baghdad. Since the fall of Saddam Hussein, he has refused to join any armed group involved in the unfolding Iraqi conflict. This means he refused to join both the new Iraqi Army, after counter-de-Baathification orders were issued by the Iraqi government in early 2008; he also turned down several insurgent groups, and as a fervent secular, has rejected any involvement with al-Qaeda in his village. His cousin is a high-ranking member of the IAI. His eldest son used to be involved with al-Qaeda and is now fighting against them. His house has been raided and ransacked by U.S. soldiers many times. U.S. soldiers beat him in front of his family members. He has suffered poverty since the fall of Saddam, but somehow, he has always refused to engage in more violence. Because of this, he has been called a coward by some and has been threatened by others. Because of an “if you are not with us, you are against us” type of thinking, he has been targeted by al-Qaeda, Ansar al-Sunnah, and other groups for the past few years. He has escaped many assassination attempts.

Nadhom M. has desperately tried to find a better life for his family abroad, and he has even visited Costa Rica on a partial scholarship to study international peace studies, to contribute to rebuilding his country once peace “breaks out” in Iraq. His commitment to peace is all the more impressive because he once volunteered to be a suicide bomber, albeit a secular one. When he was a pilot in the Iraqi Air Force, he had volunteered to be part of a suicide squad that would fly fighter jets into Israeli targets. As he was making his way to his target, his mission was
aborted at the last minute because his plane was spotted by the Jordanian Air Traffic Control. In the years since the fall of Saddam, many occasions have presented themselves for him to engage in violence, but for him, the terror that he witnessed as a result of al-Qaeda’s presence in Doloyia meant that there had to be a different path for his country, and that he would contribute to it only in a nonviolent manner.

For approximately two years, from late 2005 to the summer of 2007, Nadhom’s “village,” as he refers to it, was partly ruled by al-Qaeda and partly by the IAI. Nadhom’s nemesis, who tried to kill him several times, was the local thug-sheikh Mollah Mahmoud, who started his operations in town with Ansar al-Sunnah and ended as an al-Qaeda brigade chief. Mollah Mahmoud had always been an Islamist, and before the fall of Saddam was involved in arms deals between Ansar al-Islam and Kurdish Peshmergas, the northern Iraq militias that were resisting Saddam Hussein’s rule. On the run during Saddam’s rule, he came out of hiding once Saddam was deposed, originally working with Ansar al-Islam’s avatar Ansar al-Sunnah. For a while, he was involved in the abduction of foreigners for ransom as well as standard insurgent activities such as the planning of IED attacks on U.S. convoys, ambushes, and so on. He made a lot of money in the abduction trade, albeit not enough, and soon separated from Ansar al-Sunnah because of financial issues. He wanted more money for himself, and the group needed more for the war effort. Mollah Mahmoud was not groupless for long. He soon became more radical and joined al-Qaeda as a brigade chief or gang chief. His al-Qaeda involvement came during the group’s golden rule of Doloyia, a period that was experienced by the local population as a time of sheer terror. Mollah Mahmoud and his group were responsible for creating and maintaining a state of terror in the city, a state of affairs called a caliphate, meaning a return to the golden age of Islam when Prophet’s Mohammed’s teachings were strictly abided by and the political reach of Islam went beyond borders. A twenty-first-century version of the caliphate meant that everything from some types of haircuts to music, smoking in public, and women showing their eyes in public were forbidden. It was more or less a Taliban-like state of affairs in which Nadhom once joked that soon electricity and running water would also be banished, as they did not exist during the Prophet’s time.

Under the Doloyia caliphate, or what can be referred to as the “other” occupation of Iraq, no one knew whether they might be targeted by al-Qaeda because of a rumor, a denunciation, or a simple suspicion over one’s character, one’s potential involvement with the Coalition or foreigners, and so on. No one knew whether they would wake up to a car
bomb placed in front of their houses. No one knew when or even whether their relatives who had been taken by al-Qaeda’s brigades would return home. The people of Doloyia were literally living in terror of their new masters; they were being humiliated by them; they were stripped of their monopoly of physical force, or ihtiram. This situation, replicated in Anbar Province and other parts of Iraq, was al-Qaeda’s most crucial mistake in Iraq. Al-Qaedaism, as explained in Chapter 2, had been hijacked by people who interpreted it in its most radical manner, a manner that denies al-Qaedaism’s cardinal self-proclaimed fight against foreign aggression. The self-proclaimed humiliated savior had become the humiliating aggressor. Al-Qaedaism’s reliance on decentralized chaos to further its philosophy had been placed in the hands of thugs such as Mollah Mahmoud, hardly the educated elite that took part in the September 11, 2001, terror attacks against the United States. I realized this when I met with an al-Qaeda representative in Baghdad in the summer of 2006. The man who came to see me for an interview in my hotel was a dim-witted, uneducated youth who had no idea about the core philosophy of al-Qaedaism or why he was part of this group as opposed to another. Our meeting took only a few minutes, because he was no more than a thug clinging to a name that was meant to give him status, a little money, and something to do. He told me, when I asked about his main motivations, that al-Qaeda was “a job”—no more, no less than a job. Under this light, one can understand how local populations grew tired of this humiliating de facto occupation and decided to take their fate into their own hands. While Osama bin Laden’s alleged number two, Egyptian Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, tried to interfere in publicly asking for al-Qaeda in Iraq not to alienate local populations, as seen in Chapter 3, the damage was done. This feeling was cleverly taken advantage of by the United States, which went on to orchestrate the so-called Sunni Awakening, analyzed in the next chapter.

HUMILIATION AWARENESS

Mollah Mahmoud was arrested in Tikrit in the summer of 2007. He was detained for a while and later released. He has not been seen in Doloyia since and is believed to be in Egypt. His arrest came at a time when the U.S.-led Coalition had come to realize that it needed the support of local tribesmen to defeat the presence of al-Qaeda in Iraq. This reckoning marked the formation of the Awakening councils geared toward ousting al-Qaeda from all parts of Iraq that it hitherto controlled. In this initiative, yesterday’s enemies, such as the IAI, the Abu
Ghraib–based 1920 Brigades or Mohammed’s Army, became integrated into the Coalition, a move that placed an estimated eighty thousand Sunni militiamen on the U.S. payroll.67

The lesson that surfaces from this chapter, for all perceived occupiers in post-Saddam Iraq—the U.S.-led Coalition and al-Qaeda—is that political humiliation and interference work only in the short term. In the growing context of a potential Sunni-Shiite civil war, the religious victimization that ensued the rushed electoral process in post-Saddam Iraq will take years to correct, if it is possible to correct at all. The different religious segments of the Iraqi population now interact at a contentious level, when the only positive legacy that Saddam Hussein had left Iraq with was a sense of national identity. This identity, however, did not survive the imposition of a Western style of liberal democracy. Of importance to the peaceful future of Iraq will be for this sense of national identity to be restored, upon realization of all communities that they need to share political power, regardless of the immediate past.

Humiliation awareness and a collective ownership of the same social identity could lead Iraq down a resilient path of national healing. On the part of the United States, an understanding of the insurgency, its motivations and raison d’être, can help find a way in which to build a sustainable peaceful future for Iraq and its neighbors. While Iraq is not necessarily lost, humiliation awareness may be one of its last hopes.

Do Iraqis have time for humiliation awareness amid daily power cuts, food shortages, and a crippling economy? Maybe not, but we, as Western observers and players who took the decision to invade—or allow the invasion of—Iraq, must. Should we choose, and only if asked, to continue assisting Iraq in its nation building, humiliation awareness might be as good as any alternative path to bring sustainable peace to the country.

Can the U.S.-led Sunni Awakening initiative help take advantage of al-Qaeda’s mistakes to bring peace in post-Saddam Iraq? This will depend on whether humiliation awareness can be merged with the understanding that the United States cannot defeat al-Qaeda in Iraq without the help of Iraqis. A more effective role for the United States in Iraq depends on a switch in the perception that the United States has toward the population of Iraq. This perception must shift from that of political pawns and potential terrorists to a people with the right to defend itself against all foreign invaders. Should the Sunni Awakening be understood under this light the future role of the United States in Iraq might be a resiliently positive one.
You have been ordered to Iraq (i—RAKH) as part of the worldwide offensive to beat Hitler.

You will enter Iraq both as a soldier and as an individual, because on our side a man can be both a soldier and an individual. This can be our strength—if we are smart enough to use it. It can be our weakness if we aren’t.

—U.S. Army, Instructions for American Servicemen in Iraq during World War II

In March 1991, Colonel “Mohammed Fallujah” was on his way to drop two heavy bombs onto civilian populations in the southern town of Karbala. Because his MI-8 helicopter was not equipped to carry those bombs, made for airplanes only, a special system had been put in place for him to be able to carry out Saddam Hussein’s vengeance against the Shiite population of Iraq. Their sin: to have taken advantage of his momentary lapse of central authority in the immediate aftermath of the Gulf War to rebel against his rule. This rebellion was originally instigated and supported by the administration of U.S. President George H. W. Bush, whose tactic was to favor an Iraqi-based regime implosion instead of an outright regime change.

As Mohammed was about to reach his target, he looked up and saw a U.S. Air Force F-16 above him. As the plane approached, the pilot waived at him. Panic-stricken, Mohammed called his base to ask permission to abort the mission. He was certain that the F-16 would shoot him down if he continued. To his astonishment, his commander ordered him to carry
on and fulfill his mission. As the F-16 pilot flew idly by, Mohammed dropped his two bombs, killing scores of unarmed civilians attempting to flee the city as Saddam’s Revolutionary Guard was carrying out ground attacks against all Iraqi Shiite cities. While the death toll of Mohammed’s actions is impossible to know, the estimated toll of the 1991 repression against the Shiites of Iraq ranges between 100,000 and 180,000 souls.⁵

Why would the U.S. government favor this rebellion on one hand and let Mohammed Fallujah and his colleagues crush it on the other? The response lies with Iran, whose influence in the rebellion was feared to have become too great.⁶ While the Iraqi Shiites were supposed to rebel, they were not supposed to have welcomed the help of their eastern neighbor, Iran—not after years of U.S. financial support of the Saddam Hussein regime against Iran during the Iran-Iraq War.⁷ On this March 1991 day, Mohammed Fallujah owed his life to realpolitik. The population of Karbala, among others, lost theirs because of their Iranian cousins’ support for the rebellion. On May 29, 2003, as I was witnessing the opening of a mass grave in the Iraqi desert, near the town of Jufur-Safa, bordering Karbala, I heard Iraqi Shiites cursing the man they believed responsible for this tragedy, not Saddam Hussein as most of us were led to think by the Western media, but U.S. President George H. W. Bush, who, according to most, badly let down the Iraqi Shiites.⁸ This is what a woman who had lost family members buried in this mass grave told me that day. She stressed that after this tragedy, it was now her people’s turn to use the United States for their political benefit. According to her, despite the fact that the United States had gotten rid of Saddam, the Shiite population would never trust the United States again for anything.⁹

Was this political interference and subsequent abandonment of the Iraqi Shiites worth the long-term political damage? Can the United States have a political future in Iraq, or should it just leave the country alone? Is any effort to redress the political situation in Iraq doomed to fail? Or can the United States learn from its past mistakes and leave a positive and sustainable legacy to its Middle Eastern ally? More than seventeen years after the 1991 disaster, Iran’s and Iraq’s future are more intertwined than ever. Is this unavoidable? After looking into perceptions of humiliation as a catalyst to sectarian and religious violence, this chapter will examine current U.S. efforts to bring sustainable civil peace in post-Saddam Iraq. It will examine how the United States could apply the lessons described in this book to the future of Iraq.

First, the mechanisms and impacts of the Sunni Awakening initiative, also known as the Sahwa movement, must be assessed. As the preceding chapters have illustrated, the administration of U.S. President George W. Bush has made many mistakes in relation to its occupation of Iraq,
mostly due to a lack of sociopolitical and economic vision, both in the short term and in the long term. An analysis of the Sahwa movement will show how much the United States has learned from its past mistakes in Iraq. It will also enable us to look toward the future to ascertain whether the United States has a role in the future of Iraq, and whether this role can be more effective for the sake of the Iraqi people. We will also examine how this book’s findings and conclusions can contribute to a more effective and positive role. From being part of the problem to becoming part of the solution, a new role for the United States is envisioned. Can and will it be up to the challenge?

THE SAHWA INITIATIVE: A WIN-WIN SOLUTION

In the fall of 2007, upon realization that the security predicament of post-Saddam Iraq could not be solved unless Iraqis themselves took part in the rebuilding of their own country, the U.S.-led Coalition formed groups of mostly former Sunni insurgents. Soon, these groups, comprising local tribe leaders, Sunni clerics, former nationalist insurgents such as the 1920 Brigades, former al-Qaeda militants, and so on, became active in eight provinces, including Baghdad. The motivations for people to join these groups varied greatly, although most people involved agree that they joined for three main reasons: money, the desire to crush a stifling al-Qaeda, and the prospect of being able to integrate into Iraqi security forces in a near future. As of December 10, 2007, an unexpected 73,397 men had signed up, 65,000 of whom were receiving a $300 monthly salary directly from the U.S. military. Among these men were also Shiites, an estimated six thousand, mostly from religiously mixed areas of Baghdad and Diyala Province. These groups, referred to as Sunni Awakening Councils, or Sahwa, were in charge of maintaining law and order, and, more important, rooting out al-Qaeda from Iraq. Overnight, Iraqi insurgents became allied to the United States for the sake of a common cause: to annihilate al-Qaeda. Were they successful? It seems that they were. At the time of this writing in mid-2008, the influence of al-Qaeda in Iraq seems to have been severely hampered. Violence in all of Iraq is reportedly at its lowest since 2004. In comparison to optimistic past reports, these seem to match the reality on the ground: al-Qaeda has been successfully booted out of all major cities in Sunni areas of Iraq, including former caliphates such as Fallujah and Doloyia.

The question remains, Did the councils win over al-Qaeda, or did al-Qaeda lose the battle on its own? While the immediate results of the Sahwa initiative are undoubtedly impressive, an analysis of its
mechanisms will shed light as to how to design a more effective future for the United States in post-Saddam Iraq.

MOLLAH NADHOM, THE HUMAN FACE OF AL-SAHWA

Mollah Nadhom is a thirty-year-old imam from Doloyia, north of Baghdad. Born into a very influential religious family, he has managed over the years to earn the respect of his peers through his personal charisma as well as his sharp tongue against injustices of all kinds. A devout religious figure, he is also a gregarious and amusing character. He holds a passion for history, politics, and philosophy, which has transformed him into an eloquent and electrifying orator whose listeners would follow to the gates of hell. When the U.S.-led Coalition invaded Iraq in March 2003, Mollah Nadhom claims that he did not imagine himself as a potential insurgent. However, as he was observing the United States in the early days of the invasion, he could not help but wonder why the troops were making so many mistakes on the ground, such as standing idly by during the looting of Baghdad or precipitating the collapse of all Iraqi state agencies through the de-Baathification process.

On June 9, 2003, his status switched from that of a bystander to that of an active player in the Iraqi insurgency. On that day, his town was swept by U.S. troops in, according to him, a most brutal and humiliating manner that “reminded” him “of the Crusades.” Approximately four hundred men, including many elderly men and well-respected village leaders, were arrested. Two men were killed, including his “dearest” uncle Jassim Rmayiid Mohammed, who was sixty years old. He recalls, “they kept kicking him until he died while the women [of my family] were imprisoned in the house…. They punished the town because they were looking for individuals they considered enemies. They killed many innocents in cold blood. They did not care about the families of their victims by saying ‘we are sorry,’ as if these victims were animals.”

As a result of this humiliating murder, Mollah Nadhom first joined the Islamic Army in Iraq. “As an imam of the biggest mosque in Doloyia, I began motivating people to fight the insurgency, and I began registering them. Within five months, there were about [nine hundred] fighters in Doloyia alone and twice as many supporters.” According to him, the reason for this large support was the humiliation felt by many as a direct consequence of the behavior of U.S. troops in town and the reckoning that because the Shiite community was being favored by the United States, this insurgency would hopefully give the Sunnis of Iraq
the necessary political leverage to be key stakeholders in the formation of a future Iraqi government.

About his Friday sermons, Mollah Nadhom states, “My declarations were based on what we had heard about U.S. democracy. We believed that a human was free to say what he thinks and free in what he believes in, otherwise, the 2003 liberation was no different than Saddam’s regime.” Freedom of speech was not to prevail in the immediate aftermath of the invasion, where vociferous public criticism of the U.S.-led Coalition was equated to inciting terrorist violence against the United States. As a result, Mollah Nadhom soon became a wanted man. After many unsuccessful attempts on the part of U.S. troops, he was finally arrested on February 27, 2005. Following a very rough first two weeks in which he was subjected to harsh treatment bordering on torture; he was taken to Abu Ghraib. There, he was reunited with one of his closest friends, Muharib al-Jibouri, who happened to be al-Qaeda’s spokesperson in Iraq. This meeting changed Mollah Nadhom’s outlook on his political struggle. He explains: “There was a foreigner with him, and he explained to me the ideology of al-Qaeda. He said that they were here to defend the country against the Crusades and the Iranian domination of Iraq, a domination represented by the Shiite militias. That would end with the establishment of an Islamic state, which would rule according to the Koran. Their project was heroically acceptable to me.” This meeting coincided with the aftermath of the January 2005 elections, which saw a majority of Shiites with ties to Iran elected to the Iraqi government. As soon as he was released from Abu Ghraib, Mollah Nadhom joined al-Qaeda in Iraq and became its chief information officer. During the following two and a half years, he produced videos aimed to recruit foreign fighters and secure ransom payments for hostage releases. In the fall of 2007, upon realizing that al-Qaeda in Iraq was terrorizing the population of Doloyia, he decided to join the Sahwa movement.

Mollah Nadhom’s reasons for joining Sahwa are the direct result of al-Qaeda’s actions in his town, and the subsequent loss of population support they provoked: “I joined al-Sahwa because after the crimes of al-Qaeda, many people asked me to find a solution to their unbearable daily lives.” In addition, he deplores the way in which al-Qaeda functioned internally: “their principles were implemented from the top-down only, and their repressive actions would never have created a platform from which people would feel empowered.” He also claims that when he traveled outside Iraq to Syria in 2006, he discovered some links between al-Qaeda and both Syria and Iran, strange bedfellows in his eye. While one, Syria, had always had notorious links with al-Qaeda, the other, Iran, was ideologically and religiously remote, especially in light of
al-Qaeda’s anti-Shiite bombings in Iraq aimed at stirring civil tensions. To his dismay, Mollah Nadhom believes that Iran was also allegedly providing tactical and financial support to al-Qaeda in Iraq. This was too much to bear for Mollah Nadhom, who realized that the fate of his country was being played at the expense of his own people, Sunni and Shiites alike. On his return from this 2006 trip, the final blow to his alliance with al-Qaeda came when he realized that “foreign fighters were overwhelmingly in charge of every detail of daily operations, while Iraqi members were marginalized.” On a more intellectual level, and with hindsight, Mollah Nadhom came to realize that the Sunni community of Iraq had made a tactical mistake. It had, on one hand, given its allegiance to a group led by foreigners whose interests were not necessarily those of the Iraqi people, and, on the other hand, it had chosen a violent path that did not bring it the legitimacy and leverage that it expected, this mostly due to al-Qaeda’s dishonesty and many mistakes over time. He explains: “the battle through the poll centers is more effective than the battles to which we persuaded our people to join.” After all, he continues: “the politicians plan the wars while the brave men fight, and the cowards cultivate the outcome.” He concludes: “the most important battle which the Sunnis have lost was the battle that took place in polling stations in January 2005.” For Mollah Nadhom, the Sahwa initiative represents an opportunity for redemption for the Sunni community of Iraq in terms of obtaining recognition as well as political equality. He advocates for all the Sahwa men to be absorbed by the Iraqi security forces, both army and police, and for its leadership to become key political players in the future of Iraq. His question is, “Are the security institutions able to provide jobs for about [one hundred thousand] recruits, most of them without any acute professional training?” Then there is another problem: What is the real goal of the government? It is obvious that the government is against such a project simply because the Iranians are against it.” After the 2005 self-imposed marginalization of the Iraqi Sunni community, now is the time for the Sunni community to become an integral part of the Iraqi political system. Is the United States ready to take on this challenge with the government of Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki?

Are Mollah Nadhom’s concerns shared by others? It seems to be the case. The Irish journalist Patrick Cockburn, in an account of his interview of Abu Marouf, commander of thirteen thousand warriors who once were fighting Coalition troops, relates that if his troops do not eventually join government security forces, they will turn against the Coalition again, this within three months. Unfortunately, at present, this potential move is highly contested by the Iraqi government, whose Shiite and Kurd dominance would be jeopardized by any such initiative.
Once again, this case illustrates the fact that what is of interest to one segment of the Iraqi population, as well as to the Coalition, does not necessarily represent the interests of the ruling government, democratically elected undoubtedly, but catering only to its own people. Should the Coalition press for an inclusion of these former insurgent groups into Iraqi security forces, the subsequent balance of power emanating from this initiative might ensure a short-term sustainable peace for Iraq as a whole, at least until the United States withdraws. What will happen afterward is anybody’s guess.

However, by allowing Sahwa men to become part of Iraqi government institutions, the United States would not only address the country’s immediate security issues but also restore an ethno-religious balance within the government, a balance that would invariably and considerably reduce the influence that the Iranian government enjoys in its relations with the Iraqi government at present. In light of a potential Israeli bombardment of Iran, this would at least reduce the risks of a regional escalation were this to happen. One must hope, of course, that such a potentially disastrous attack will not take place, as it would invariably destabilize the entire Middle East region.

ABANDON THE PRACTICE OF QUICK FIXES

Of importance in relation to the Sunni Awakening scheme is that its short-term success was built on two pillars that may well disappear in the long term.

A first pillar was the financial support given to former insurgents to join the Coalition ranks against al-Qaeda. On top of the $300 monthly salary given to Sahwa combatants, Mollah Nadhom admitted to having handed over more than $190,000 to recruiters alone. This Doloyia-based scenario was replicated in all major cities of the eight provinces where Sahwa is active: an amount of money much greater than the $300 monthly salaries reported in the U.S. media. In the long run, this type of lavish spending is not sustainable for a country whose taxpayers are increasingly uncomfortable about such large sums being handed out to a foreign country.

The second pillar, a precondition that could be reversed at any moment, was al-Qaeda’s loss of support among Sunni populations. Because the business of hearts and minds is quite a volatile one, one or two mistakes made by U.S. troops on the ground could be fatal to this initiative. While they used to happen on a daily basis, these mistakes are now few and far between, though still present. Omar B., mentioned in Chapter 3 in connection to his detention in Camp Fallujah in January 2004, died
in late 2007 as a result of one of these mistakes. As a Sahwa foot soldier, he was manning a checkpoint at the entrance of the town of Abu Ghraib for his group, the 1920 Brigades. In December 2007, a U.S. helicopter patrol did not recognize this checkpoint as being “friendly” but mistakenly took it for an al-Qaeda checkpoint. As a result, the gunship opened fire and killed Omar B. and all his other colleagues. While this was deplored as a regrettable mistake by both the 1920 Brigades and the U.S. Army, a bigger event of the same kind could become the proverbial straw on the camel’s back and lose the United States’ precious local support, perhaps to the benefit of al-Qaeda.

The story of Mollah Nadhom in relation to the loss of popular support for al-Qaeda is the crucial missing link when one refers to the al-Sahwa success in post-Saddam Iraq. Al-Sahwa did not win over al-Qaeda; al-Qaeda shot itself in the foot in relation to its gradual loss of support among the Iraqi population. Sahwa did not win Sunni hearts and minds; al-Qaeda lost them and left a void that Sahwa filled. Seen through the lens of Mollah Nadhom’s testimony, the Sahwa initiative does not represent the success of U.S. forces; it represents only the failure of al-Qaeda in Iraq. It is a short-term U.S. victory by default; this time with the potential to alienate the Shiite population of Iraq.

The next tour de force for the U.S.-led Coalition in Iraq will therefore be to convince the Shiite-dominated government to integrate all Sunni Sahwa militiamen into Iraqi security forces.

Similarly, as seen in Chapter 5, the voter turnout for the January 2005 elections does not represent the triumph of democracy in New Iraq; it simply illustrates the strong popular following of Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani. While the international media focuses on only one side of the coin, a holistic view of the Iraqi situation affords a different perspective of what constitutes Coalition success or failure in post-Saddam Iraq. Above all, such an outlook demonstrates that humiliation and alienation do not pay off in the long term.

From favoring the Shiite majority at the expense of the Sunni minority to favoring the Sunni minority to capitalize on al-Qaeda’s mistakes to prepare for withdrawal, the human impact of U.S. policy shifts in the region will make itself known for years to come.

One big question remains. In light of the 1991 fiasco that led to the death of thousands of Iraqi civilians, as well as the eventual surrendering of Iraqi sovereignty to the strong influence of its eastern neighbor in the 2005 elections, isn’t U.S. interference in Iraqi affairs always doomed to backfire? Although it is difficult to ascertain how much understanding exists on the part of the U.S. administration in relation to the actual dynamics that led to the success of the Sahwa initiative, one can safely
conclude that the favoring of one side of a population against the other is not a healthy, sustainable, or long-term solution to a given political problem. In hindsight, and over the past five years, it seems that the U.S. administration has had to come to terms with and overrule many of its inaccurate decisions. It has done so in relation to its disastrous de-Baathification policy, in relation to the alienation of local populations in the Sunni populations of Iraq, and so on. However, it seems to have often acted rather late, and through the creation of potentially problematic situations in the long term. The 2005 elections and the Sahwa initiative are examples of two long-term solutions that could, and have, become very awkward in the long term. Therefore, one first step toward a more effective role for the United States in Iraq will be realizing that one cannot play God or be a sorcerer’s apprentice with a people. One cannot divide, conquer, and leave. This type of policy will only heighten the risk of having people annihilate one another in the short or long term.

The Sahwa initiative is not necessarily doomed, as it is now an obvious success. The next challenge for the United States will be to transform this short-term success into a long-term one. How could it achieve this? Through understanding the real motivations that led people to join Sahwa initiative: money, popular contempt for al-Qaeda, and the prospect of an integrated future for all Iraqis as part of one just, equitable, and sovereign government.

REMEMBER THAT ON THEIR SIDE, A MAN CAN BE BOTH A SOLDIER AND AN INDIVIDUAL

A recurring theme in this book has been how the perceived humiliation of a self-perceived occupied people has led them to take up arms to defend themselves. Given the plethora of Hollywood movies and popular novels relating to this theme, it would seem that the testimonies of Iraqi people collected in this book should fall into the same category. The basic right of a people to sovereignty, integrity, and dignity ought to be a universal human right. The problem lies, of course, in the perception aspect of an occupation. While some people in post-Saddam Iraq have seen themselves as having been liberated, others have interiorized a feeling of being occupied and oppressed.

Can the U.S.-led Coalition move beyond the perception of occupation felt by a large part of the population of Iraq? In doing so, can it transcend the unnecessary truism that claims that “one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter?”

The 1943 U.S. Army quote placed at the beginning of this chapter seems to provide an answer to this question. It states, “A man can be
both a soldier and an individual” but only “on our side.” This is the fundamental mistake that the U.S.-led Coalition has made in making itself both judge and jury of the Sunni population of Iraq when it invaded the country in 2003. On one hand, it empathized with the hitherto oppressed Shiite and Kurdish populations of Iraq to the point of sympathizing with them, their political interests, and their desire to take revenge on their Sunni brothers; on the other hand, it vilified the Sunni community, as if humanity could be found only in the chosen few.

As the Sahwa initiative shows, former terrorists have become soldiers and individuals. Because the U.S. government claims it does not negotiate with terrorists, why is it now allied to the 1920 Brigades, the Islamic Army in Iraq, and former al-Qaeda operatives such as Mollah Nadhom? Sahwa is the living proof that the U.S. government does negotiate with terrorists. Moreover, it illustrates the idea that people who are labeled terrorists can later be understood as soldiers and individuals. This distinction is crucial, as it eliminates all notion of terrorism as an evil and irreconcilable ideology.

Could this have been possible all along? If yes, how many Coalition soldiers’ lives, limbs, and spines could have been saved? Could the United States have understood the plight of the Sunni community of Iraq before some of them felt no option but to turn to al-Qaeda? Could Mollah Nadhom have been prevented from joining al-Qaeda? Is there a distinction to be made between terrorism and insurgency, and can this distinction bring clues as to a more effective role for the United States in post-Saddam Iraq? Could an acknowledgment of this distinction turn the short-term aspect of the Sahwa initiative into a long-term success?

DO NOT CONFUSE PROPAGANDA WITH REALITY

Is the labeling of terrorism as a weapon instead of an ideology or the way of life of people who “hate our freedom” only the radical belief of a few Eurocentric opinionated scholars? No, it is also common knowledge for parts of the U.S. government. In the same way that the Iraqi honor system was well known to the U.S. Army as early as 1943, and presumably earlier than that, the distinction between terrorism as an ideology and the use of terrorism as an insurgency weapon has also been mainstreamed in U.S. Army training since at least the 1960s. It is Commanding General David H. Petraeus, a Princeton Ph.D. graduate in international relations, who managed to revive the integrality of French veterans Roger Trinquier and David Galula’s theories on counterinsurgency warfare. Trinquier and Galula, among others, developed and refined a counterinsurgency theory euphemistically called “modern
Moving beyond Humiliation

warfare,” based on their experience in Algeria and Indochina, the name for Vietnam under French rule. These precepts were used by the U.S. Army as early as the 1960s and all throughout the glory years of the School of the Americas.

Modern warfare is defined as “an interlocking system of actions—political, economic, psychological, military—that aims at the overthrowing of the established authority in a country and its replacement by another regime.” This definition of an insurgency, the basis onto which the U.S. Army has worked since the 1960s, has unambiguous ramifications in relation to terrorism. It clearly states that terrorism is a weapon of “clandestine organization devoted to manipulating the population” toward “draw[ing it] to the side of terrorists, who alone are able to protect [it].” Thus, the insinuation that terrorism is the evil deed of a few psychopaths who hate freedom, a few renegades using these tactics as a desperate means to make them heard, is not a vision that is shared by at least part of the U.S. government. In this light, vilifying terrorism as an irrational ideology can be viewed as nothing more than a state propaganda tool. In the same way that the insurgent group is arguing to be protecting the population from state repression, the state is also arguing to be the guarantor of freedom, democracy, and security. No one should expect any less of a state. However, no one, especially the media, should take this propaganda at face value either. More important, the state ought to also make sure that it does not internalize this propaganda to its own understanding of a given situation. It should ensure that it does not make it factual, and risk, according to basic principles of hyper-reality, making it real to a point that it can never deviate from it without losing face, in which case soldiers’ and civilians’ lives are needlessly lost.

True, moral righteousness and legitimacy is a role of the state, as a contender of “new warfare”—no more, no less. In the play that opposes the state to the insurgent, each contender will seek for the public to rally to its cause through the news media, using different labels as communication tools. Thus, the state—or Coalition, in Iraq—becomes the oppressor while the insurgent becomes the terrorist. There is nothing radical about acknowledging this plot, as this is in fact what U.S. counterinsurgency practice has been based on since the 1960s. However, when the state confuses its own public propaganda with reality, then it becomes its aggressor, which in turn is placed in a strong position to win the contest.

DO NOT BECOME YOUR AGGRESSOR

While the Bush administration has assumed the public role of guarantor of freedom and values since the inception of its war on terror, one
very important lesson of new warfare seems to have been overlooked by this administration, hence its past failure in Iraq. In his analysis of terrorism applied to counterinsurgency, Trinquier established a cardinal rule: as soldiers are not held accountable for murder when they kill in war, it is immoral to treat terrorists as criminals and to hold them criminally liable for their acts. Because terrorism is a weapon, insurgents labeled by the state as terrorists ought to be treated as soldiers, he explains. The terrorist “fights within the framework of his own organization, without a personal interest, for a cause he considers noble and for a respectable ideal, the same as the soldiers in the armies confronting him,” in other words, the same as any U.S. soldier.26

In other words, the state ought to stay fully aware of the difference between its own propaganda and reality in terms of terrorism and insurgency. While the state can very well use terrorism terminology as a propaganda tool of psychological counterinsurgency, it should never forget reality: that on the other side of the fence, it is facing soldiers who deserve to be treated as such. With its blatant disregard of the Geneva Conventions and its treatment of insurgents both in Iraq and elsewhere as “enemy combatants” or basic enemies, the Bush administration confused its public role in the Iraq new warfare theater with reality: it has become the oppressor that the insurgents have been denouncing. It therefore has lost peace in Iraq.

While public humiliation can be expected in terms of the state’s labeling insurgents as terrorists, the colonial humiliation of suspected insurgents and populations in post-Saddam Iraq is the main reason the Bush administration squandered its victory there. While the Bush administration has “gone native” in its own confusion between myth (propaganda) and reality, it has taken with it thousands of soldiers who took this terrorism myth at face value.

Jim O., the senior Special Forces officer referred to in Chapter 2, was a complete stranger to Trinquier’s precepts in our conversations. Not once did he come to realize that the people he had faced in Afghanistan and Iraq were insurgents rather than bloodthirsty evil terrorists. This is a frightening realization. The fact that many senior Bush administration officials, and even President Bush himself, failed to make this distinction is crucial in explaining the initial failure of the United States in post-Saddam Iraq.

For one, it illustrates the main reason that Mollah Nadhom originally switched from a nationalist insurgency group to al-Qaeda as soon as he was released from the Abu Ghrabi prison. Had he not been arrested, treated inhumanely, and tortured, would he have defected to al-Qaeda? Had he been subjected to due process in his interrogations, treated
humanely, listened to, and apologized to for the brutal death of his uncle, would he have turned to the dark side?

In its blatant denial of the basic human rights principles of the Geneva Conventions, the Bush administration has turned U.S. service members into henchmen at the expense of their personal morals, dignity, and souls. The distinction between terrorism and insurgency does not exonerate insurgents from the rule of law of the state or international law and covenants; it simply disarms the self-fulfilling prophecy that turns authority into what its aggressor claims it is. By treating an insurgent as a terrorist undeserving of basic human rights, the state debases itself to the level of those it claims to combat. In a context of occupation, perhaps the state does not have the capacity to ensure law and order, but the occupying power should.

As the U.S. and al-Qaeda experience in post-Saddam Iraq shows, hearts and minds are at the heart of terrorism. While the constant referral to terrorism becomes a media weapon to elicit popular support toward a cause on part of an insurgency, it can also be used by the state or Coalition to retain unconditional support. By referring to all insurgent activity in post-Saddam Iraq as terrorism, through the humiliation of nationalist political aspirations, the Bush administration ensured that U.S. soldiers and much of the population of the United States at the beginning of the Iraq War and beyond supported the war effort unconditionally. In doing so, however, it lost the support of the Sunni population of Iraq. In effect, the United States became its own worst enemy in terrorizing the local Iraqi populations, holding their sons and daughters in the Abu Ghraib detention facility, and sexually and physically humiliating them. It organized rendition flights into destinations where torture was widely practiced; it used water boarding in Guantánamo.

Throughout this time, the U.S. news media did not dare speak out for the rights of both Iraqi citizens and human rights in general. It was only in the middle of 2005 that a shift occurred in U.S. media language in relation to the Iraqi insurgency, referring to nationalist groups as insurgent groups, while keeping its terrorist terminology when referring to al-Qaeda. In not distancing itself from the terrorism rhetoric, the U.S. mainstream news media indirectly participated in the humiliation of the Iraqi nationalist insurgency and all the individuals who dared refer to it as such.

A more effective role for the United States in post-Saddam Iraq will therefore come from the reestablishment of a healthy separation
between propaganda, politics, and warfare. More important, it will need to abide by the rules that it itself invoked in its invasion of the country, that is, the promotion of democracy and the upholding of basic human rights for all. Humiliation awareness can help in this regard at grassroots levels. By respecting the people as individuals who deserve due process at all times and under all circumstances, U.S.-led Coalition soldiers can prevent heart and minds from being lost to other groups. While al-Qaeda is now suffering from a distinct disadvantage in relation to the hearts and minds of Sunni Iraqis, Coalition soldiers must be made to realize that they are only evolving in a relatively calm environment because al-Qaeda lost people’s support—in the same way the Coalition too had lost support in the early stages of the invasion. Not reverting to the same pattern of victimization will be one of the most difficult challenges that the Coalition will face in the next few months and possibly years. Are U.S. soldiers and their government ready to face this challenge?

**DO NOT ABANDON IRAQ**

It is very difficult, from a peace studies perspective, to acknowledge that an effective future for the United States in Iraq will be to actually maintain its presence in the country until the Iraqi government is running to the basic satisfaction of all Iraqis. This book has demonstrated that in the early years of the occupation of Iraq, the Bush administration created many of the problems now seen in the country. Its callousness, hubris, and misinformed policies are undeniably the primary cause of Iraq’s current insecurity, economic hardship, and political instability.

Many observers are now advocating for a prompt withdrawal. After all, if the United States was part of the problem, then it seems natural that its immediate withdrawal would enable Iraq to rebuild itself. Such thinking, however, highlights the root of the issue, that is, the lack of a holistic understanding of the Iraq conflict, the swift jump to conclusions without even measuring potential adverse consequences in the long term, the need to please a public opinion at all costs.

As much as an extreme makeover of Iraq was foolish and unrealistic, despite any good intentions that might have motivated it, leaving it to face its current situation on its own is just as unviable and could well be criminal, once again. Indeed, in light of the ethno-religious tensions existing in the country, the dormant presence of al-Qaeda, and Iran’s heavy influence on the Iraqi government, a prompt United States withdrawal might trigger an instantaneous civil war.
What type of presence could the United States sustain in Iraq in the long term? Because the Iraq conflict has already cost U.S. taxpayers an estimated $3 trillion, are these taxpayers ready to sustain a long-term occupation of Iraq? This is highly unlikely, given the present unpopularity of the Iraq War among U.S. citizens. Is there a way out of this dilemma?

Apart from the need for humiliation awareness, a crucial finding of this book is the realization that time and again, the Bush administration played its own taxpayers’ perceptions against the reality of the Iraqi situation on the ground. To put it simply, while the January 2005 elections were organized to show the U.S. population that their administration had brought democracy to Iraq, hence demonstrating the validity of the invasion, this was done at the expense of the Sunni population, because they did not consider the process legitimate. In a similar fashion, the rushing of the constitution-drafting process created havoc in the Iraqi political sphere.

In this light, could a U.S. Iraq policy centered on the needs of the Iraqi people as a whole be of benefit to them in the long run? To this question, Mollah Nadhom replies: “I will never put my money on the U.S. horse, because they consider their interests and their interests only.” Can Mollah Nadhom be proved wrong? Will the United States do what is best for Iraq as a nation? Only time will tell.

While it is understandable that the Iraq issue has invited itself to the 2008 U.S. presidential race, the future of Iraq should not be played on a demagogic stunt. The United States owes Iraq much more than another quick fix to honor a populist campaign promise. Should the United States wash its hands of the Iraq problem without helping to create a sustainable solution, then the level of confidence in the United States that is left in Middle East region, already very meager and in places almost nonexistent, will vanish for years to come. As a consequence, relatively moderate political and clerical figures such as Mollah Nadhom, who after all disavowed himself from al-Qaeda, will be left exposed to the benefit of extremists whose appeal will derive from the disenchanted. While al-Qaeda in Iraq has been driven out of major cities, it is far from being eradicated and could well return in force should the United States continue to betray, disappoint, and alienate one segment of the Iraqi people after the other. So far, the United States has alienated the Sunnis and part of the Shiite population. Who is next? More important, will Iran take advantage of this?

What do Iraqis think of this? According to Mollah Nadhom, “The U.S. existence in Iraq depends on many factors: the first is a successful reconstruction effort and the abolition of double standards in carrying
it out; a second one is the real and strict U.S. policy against Iranian intervention in Iraq, not only a media-conveyed one; the third is to force the Iraqi government to attain an ethnic and sectarian balance in the government. It is unacceptable that the number one superpower on the planet cannot implement the necessary rule to stop the financial and governmental deterioration of a country that is now one of the worst to live in worldwide.”

REFLECTING ON A MORE EFFECTIVE ROLE FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

In light of the considerations developed in this chapter, a more effective role for the United States in Iraq can be found in employing a principled and systemic approach to all aspects relating to its Iraq policy, whether it be on the ground while running its day-to-day operations, in its relations with the Iraqi government, while making policy decisions back home across the Atlantic, and so on. Of importance here is the realization that if certain principles and lessons learned are to be mainstreamed in the U.S. policy in Iraq for the forthcoming years, then this policy will have a better chance to succeed. These principles are not new. One can even say that they represent the idea that most U.S. citizens have of their own nation: ideals of a nation striving for universal freedom, democracy, and economic prosperity; an overall ideal of justice, equality, and strong moral values.

While most U.S. citizens are convinced that their nation represents these ideals, many in the rest of the world beg to differ, and contend that since the inception of its war on terror, the United States has lost most of these values, and worse, that it is applying double standards in its upholding of those values. It is now up to the post-Bush president and his administration to restore these great American values and principles. In Iraq, the new administration must do so using humiliation awareness in its day-to-day activities as well as policy planning. It must also avoid playing part of the Iraqi population against the other, thus planting the seeds for future political problems.

Above all, and in its worldwide war on terror, it must reestablish basic human rights and the Geneva Conventions at the center of its policies. Despite national political interests, it must learn to place the needs of Iraq above those of Washington, DC–based squabbles. Because it came into Iraq, it must finish the job it started. Above all, it must never allow itself to be swept away by its own propaganda. It is only when guided by these very basic, although crucial principles, that the president of the United States and his administration will succeed in post-Saddam Iraq, as well
as the region as a whole. As a dignified, equitable and just commander in
chief, the president of the United States must act according to the ideals
that his country represents.

Incredible damage has been done to the Iraqi people, and the United
States owes it to them to put things right. After all, as Mollah Nadhom
stressed in his account of the June 2003 raid of Doloyia, all the local
population wanted was a “We are sorry.” In the U.S. Army’s own words:
“It may not be that simple. But then again it could.”32
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Hajji Mahmoud is a Baghdad-based Sunni Muslim in his late forties. He is a hard worker who tries to sustain his family of four despite the economic hardships Iraq is now facing. He owns a house, has two cars, and a reasonably well-paid job. He is very religious in a nonfundamentalist way, which means that he lives and lets the people around him live according to the way they prefer. Although he is a devout Muslim, he does not impose his religion on others. On two occasions, he bought me a hijab because he said I would look more beautiful wearing it, but he never threw acid on my face or refused to shake my hand. He has a caustic sense of humor and never loses the opportunity to joke with anyone. Apart from religion, there is something else he takes very seriously: the occupation of his country. He aches at the thought of the many occupations that Iraq is now facing from the United States, Iran, and al-Qaeda.

Hajji Mahmoud has chosen to do something about it—he registered himself at his local mosque to become a suicide bomber. He says he wants to kill Americans for what they do to his country on a daily basis. In a series of interviews in which the mood oscillated between laughter and tears, he told me about his sense of personal humiliation due to the occupation, his view of world politics, and his absolute conviction that his death would help his people and his country. He told me about the day that he saw a documentary on the Al Jazeera news station about a suicide bomber from Syria who had explained to his mother that he would never return. He had tears in his eyes when he remembered that his young son was watching this documentary with him. He said he
wanted to kill invaders for the sake of Iraqi children who get killed on a
daily basis in collateral damage, through cold-blooded murders such as
in Haditha, or for the sake of the girls who are raped as in Mahmudiya.²
He said he has nothing against Americans per se, he just wants to kill
“imperialist Americans.” He emphasized, “Really, I don’t hate them; I
just want them to leave us alone, to leave the Middle East alone.” He
said that he was not armed as well as the invaders; his body is his only
weapon.

This was not the first time that I heard this apology of suicide opera-
tions in the Middle East region. Despite fast-food media industry clichés
regarding suicide terrorism, not once in our conversation did he seriously
mention the awarding of virgins as a reason for his future act. In light of
this, is it fair to ask, had this conversation taken place in North America
in 1776, could Hajji Mahmoud have been called a patriot, as he was
ready to make the ultimate sacrifice for his nation? I doubt he will ever
be called to carry out his mission. Nationalist insurgent groups are now
part of the Sunni Awakening, collaborating with the United States to
rid Iraq of al-Qaeda, and even if suicide operations resume, priority is
always given to nonestablished young men who do not have a wife and
children. Nevertheless, he lives with the hope that he might be called
one day.

In September 2004, on Labor Day weekend, I visited the Walter Reed
Army Medical Center in Washington, DC. That particular weekend, I
was acting as a fixer for Irish Times correspondent Lara Marlowe. The
people we met at Walter Reed could have been the victims of Hajji
Mahmoud’s desperate attempt to better the lives of Iraqi children, in his
perception at least. As we reached the cafeteria on the main building’s
third floor, we were confronted with the heartbreaking sight of a dozen
maimed and wounded soldiers meeting with their families. Some had
missing limbs; others were disfigured or blinded. We saw grieving fami-
lies who regrouped over coffee before finally getting to visit their loved
ones.

One cheerful young man approached us. He introduced himself as
Sergeant Luke Wilson of the First Cavalry Division.³ His hair was
bleached blond; he was twenty-four years old and in a wheelchair. He
had left his artificial left leg “charging up” in his room. He said that he
lost his leg in an ambush on the night of April 8, 2004, as his convoy
was making its way back to Baghdad’s Green Zone. He recalled that
his convoy stood no chance as it was making its way toward the 14th
of July Bridge over the Tigris River. As a rocket-propelled grenade had
severed his leg and his men were panicking, he remembers vividly how
he told them how to make a tourniquet to prevent him from losing too
much blood. As he told us his story, he used the same tone of voice with which he could have been narrating an unforgettable holiday at a resort somewhere in the Caribbean. He was still pumped with the excitement of his unforgettable, though rather short, stay in Iraq. He said that he was sad not to have been there for more than two days. He wished that he had fought there, not to kill Iraqis but to defend his nation and help the Iraqi people. He had joined the military at age seventeen and said that he hoped that somehow he could be reinstated one day. He also said that if it could help President Bush get reelected, he was ready to go back to Iraq to lose his other leg. This was not bravado talk; this was a genuine oath of faith toward his commander in chief, whose reelection was pending.

These two stories from each side of the occupier-occupied divide in post-Saddam Iraq illustrate the plight of ordinary men and women embracing values and principles that fail to place human dignity at the center of any political action.

One could argue that both Sergeant Wilson and Hajji Mahmoud are decent human beings trying to serve their respective nations and peoples in whatever means made available to them. Both ways are distinctive—one is nationalist and underground, while the other is condoned by a sovereign state—but both kill and maim human beings with intentions as innocent as they are lethal. Of importance is the realization that pitting both of these courageous individuals against each other will not help build peace in post-Saddam Iraq, the Middle East, or the rest of the world in the context of the so-called war on terror. Both Sergeant Wilson and Hajji Mahmoud can be respected for their idealism, but they must be challenged in relation to their being an accessory to violence between two ideals.

This book has tried to provide a different lens with which to look at the Iraq situation, a lens that does not originate from Washington, DC, or media reports rallying around the U.S. flag. This book attempts to give a voice to the people who have lived through the post-Saddam Iraq War, both Iraqi and American alike. It has used humiliation as a window into a post-Saddam Iraq divided militarily, socially, religiously, and politically. It has also used humiliation to analyze a few media-engineered face-saving exercises on part of the Bush administration, as well as an engendering of the conflict for the sake of all but the women whose security and well-being were said to be upheld. All in all, the study of humiliation that emanated from the voices of people’s experience on the ground can provide answers as to what has gone wrong in post-Saddam Iraq and why. The perception of the humiliation of world democracy and freedom ideals on September 11, 2001, led Sergeant Wilson to Iraq;
the perception of a humiliation of the Iraqi nation, its women and children, has motivated Hajji Mahmoud to offer to pay the ultimate price for the sake of restored honor. All in all, what does this window leave us with?

Humiliation awareness is much more than a window or a lens, it is both the realization that humiliation can serve as an early warning sign to prevent the escalation of sociopolitical violence in postconflict settings and the recognition that one needs not to let it corrupt any political process. In light of the different cases of humiliation exposed in this book, it is necessary to recognize that humiliation can be both intentional and unintentional. While it was unintentional in the events that led to an escalation of violence in Fallujah in April 2003, it is now undeniable that it was intentional in both the Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo detention facilities. The unintended humiliation generated by *Homo culpabilis* in his first meeting with *Homo dedecorus* had dreadful consequences in terms of conflict escalation but could also, if uncovered as unintended early on in the conflict, have led to an early de-escalation. Had Coalition forces been aware of the impact of their actions in Fallujah, they might not have pressed ahead with raids and hasty arrests against its population.

The fact that the U.S. Army is now acknowledging cultural awareness as a part of its reconstruction efforts, with the use of Culture Smart Cards, for instance, comes as a timely initiative that will no doubt reduce both Iraqi and Coalition casualty rates. However, the humiliation awareness displayed by al-Qaeda worldwide will need more than a Culture Smart Card to defeat rising insurgencies, because the sense of humiliation felt in light of the Abu Ghraib torture scandal and other public relations disasters in Iraq and Guantánamo has deepened since the beginning of the war on terror.

As reviewed in this book, the message Osama bin Laden gave to the Muslim world, or *umma*, relies heavily on a systemic use of the themes of humiliation and double standards, at many levels: religious, political, economic, cultural, and so on. While al-Qaeda in Iraq has lost many of the hearts and minds of previous sympathizers, its sympathizers in Afghanistan and worldwide are now surfing a collective wave of disappointment in terms of the occupation by NATO forces in their country that has not brought the economic revival that was expected. In spite of this, it is never too late for the United States to start doing the right thing.

If Hajji Mahmoud has placed his name on a suicide bombing waiting list, it is not to carry out a blind act of violence against Americans: it is to add to what he perceives to be his contribution to the fight against invaders in his country—no more, no less. Hajji Mahmoud is not a
cold-blooded psychopath; he is a man who has chosen to resort to this method to fight an invader. Because he is religious, this is serving a double purpose, as he believes he will ascend to heaven as soon as he dies a martyr. However, he is not resorting to suicide terrorism because he is religious. Hajji Mahmoud is an insurgent who is using terrorism as what the British scholar Paul Wilkinson refers to as “an auxiliary weapon” to his struggle. He is using suicide as a means to wage a conflict against a perceived invader, to make the point to Iraqi public opinion that anyone can act against this particular oppressor. While he is not necessarily aware of this, he is also planning to die so that the group that is using his body as a weapon can elicit a state—or Coalition, in the case of Iraq—response against it that will generate as much collateral damage as possible. While Hajji Mahmoud’s actions would put the ball in the U.S. court, lessons learned from Iraq would dictate that it only strike back within the limits established by international law and human rights covenants; in other words, that it keep its gloves on.

Indeed, despite being a violent weapon, terrorism is also a media weapon geared to generate popular support. Massacres such as the one in Haditha in November 2005, rapes of fourteen-year-old Iraqi girls such as the one that occurred in Mahmudiya in March 2006, or collateral damages from an operation aiming to take down terrorists are all free advertising for insurgent groups, their ideologies, their plight, and their raison d’être. These groups’ ultimate goal is to communicate to the population that the state, or Coalition, does not protect them, does not care for them as much as the insurgent group would. The more human rights are violated by the United States, the more this serves the plight of the insurgents. When the state or Coalition engages in violence, it often loses local population support as a result, hence the dilemma in responding to terrorist violence. This support, however, also has to be cultivated by the insurgent group, which needs popular support to win its fight against the state or the Coalition.

As this book demonstrates in the case of al-Qaeda in Iraq, its alienation against its former support base, the Sunni population of Iraq, led it to eventually lose its military domination over parts of the country. In this, both the United States and al-Qaeda share a poor track record in maintaining popular support as part of their daily activities. Can the United States learn from this and transform its methods before al-Qaeda does?

Beyond Iraq, it is never too late to implement systemic humiliation awareness in future times of conflict, for, while Iraq is by far not out of the woods yet, a protracted conflict is currently taking place between al-Qaeda and Western countries, with Afghanistan as its next theater of operations. In light of the definition of terrorism as a weapon as well
as the analysis of bin Laden speeches provided in Chapter 2, al-Qaeda is also an insurgency, albeit now a global insurgency. While the state is busy playing its role of defender of freedom in the counterinsurgency plot exposed earlier, there might not be another September 11, 2001, as we know it. The state must move on in realizing that. A second 9/11 has already begun, albeit a silent one, in the form of an economic 9/11.

As seen in this book, one of bin Laden’s aims was to defeat the West economically, for it to be forced to retreat to a policy of political isolationism. In luring the United States into Iraq, bin Laden has managed to serve part of this aim: the Iraq War has cost the United States more than $3 trillion and placed it precariously on the edge of an economic recession. Should a global recession occur, the result expected by bin Laden is for the U.S. public to call for a significant reduction of its interference into the affairs of foreign governments abroad, along with a potential decrease in its foreign aid. According to his plans, this would leave bin Laden free to impose his caliphate on the umma. While the disastrous al-Qaeda in Iraq experience leads one to optimism in relation to a potential al-Qaeda failure in a West-free umma, caution remains necessary.

In light of this, it is vital for the United States to return to a realistic foreign policy that departs from a terrorism plot that, because it is not real, cannot lead to success. Humiliation awareness in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere can play a significant role in the return to a world of human dignity for all, both for Hajji Mahmoud, Sergeant Wilson, and millions of faceless innocents.
NOTES

INTRODUCTION

2. Personal communication with Haider Asafi, Baghdad, April 2003.
6. Chandrasekaran, R. (2006). Imperial Life in the Emerald City: Inside Iraq’s Green Zone. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. The International Zone is a heavily protected four-square-mile area in the center of Baghdad that first served as the headquarters of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and is now the only relatively safe area for foreigners to live in Iraqi territory.
CHAPTER 1


2. U.S. President George W. Bush’s address to the American people on the eve of the Iraq War may be found at www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030319-17.html; for the rest of Donald Rumsfeld’s comments, see www.cnn.com/2003/US/04/11/sprj.irq.pentagon.

3. An introduction to this network can be found at www.humiliationstudies.org.


8. This example was shared with me at the first annual meeting of the Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies Network that took place in September 2003 at the Maison des Sciences de l’Homme in Paris.


10. Ibid.


13. Mohammed Fallujah claims to have participated in the chemical attack against the Kurdish town of Halabja on March 16, 1988, during which more than five thousand people were killed. A thorough account of the Anfal campaign can be found in Galbraith, P. (2006). The End of Iraq: How American
Notes 181


14. The black BMW was a prime choice for insurgents at the time because of its low profile and reliable mechanics. The Islamic Army is one of the insurgency groups that fought against the U.S. occupation.

15. Interview with Nadhom M., Baghdad, April 2006. During the interview, Nadhom M. complained about his farm not being able to operate in the outskirts of his town of Doloyia. Asked what the problem was, he replied that there were no longer any Shiite laborers from southern Iraq willing to work the land. Nadhom M. is now unemployed and surviving through his family network. At no time would he ever consider working his land himself.

16. As will be analyzed later, this is only relevant for crimes committed within the same social realm.


18. This particular case will be analyzed later in the book.


22. Saddam Hussein was born in Ouija, a village outside Tikrit.


26. Ibid., p. 7.


28. I am indebted to Dr. Aurelia Masson for her Latin translation.


30. Despite establishing myself in Iraqi Kurdistan and evolving in circles within the feudal Barzani family, I never met any female members of that extended family that were older than five years old.

31. This statement was recalled by Haida al-Safi, interviewed in Baghdad in May 2003. On the role of women in Iraqi society according to Saddam Hussein, see Hussein, S. (1979). On Social and Foreign Affairs in Iraq. London, Croom Helm. A word of caution is necessary, however, as Saddam Hussein significantly abandoned his secular ideas right after the 1991 Gulf War to reinforce his appeal to and support from the Iraqi population—this alongside, among other things, the construction of several gigantic mosques and the addition of “Allah Is Great” to the Iraqi flag. Consequently, the role of women in Iraqi society

32. Mohammed and Haida are their real names, however, for security reasons, surnames will not be disclosed. This is the case for many other names throughout this book, unless otherwise stated.

33. Other names captured that day on Highway 10 between Fallujah and Baghdad include “Another Round Anyone,” “Abusive Father,” “Alcoholics Anonymous,” “Camel Tow,” “And Hell’s Comin’ with Me,” and “Deadly Commemoration.”


37. Because in the Middle East the Coca-Cola Company is considered to support Israel, Coke has been widely replaced by Pepsi, which is deemed more politically correct. The fact that Pepsi is now being targeted is of significance in light of the rift between occupiers and occupied in the Iraqi public sphere.


40. Name withheld, interview carried out in Fallujah, December 16, 2003.


43. It is unclear who was behind the assassination of Mohammed Bakr al-Hakim. While the United States contends that he was killed by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi’s network, al-Hakim may have also been killed by political opponents from within his own sect, as in the case of Abdul Majid Khoei in April 2003.


45. Those orders can be found online at www.cpa-iraq.org/regulations/#Orders, consulted on August 1, 2007.

47. Chalabi was then reading a book on Germany’s reconstruction, and Packer asserts that this meeting sealed “the beginning of long mutual attraction,” which later led to strong lobbying for de-Baathification to take place, especially on Chalabi’s behalf. Packer, G. (2006). The Assassins’ Gate: America in Iraq. London, Faber and Faber, p. 76 of uncorrected proofs.

48. The theme of national reconciliation in a reversal of de-Baathification was invoked by Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki in June 2006, to no effect on the unfolding civil war; see www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200606/s1671380.htm.


50. Ibid.


52. The al-Motasen Air Base specialized in unmanned aerial vehicles, more commonly known as drones, considered of high strategic importance.


54. Interview with Mohammed H., June 1, 2003, al-Hamra Hotel, Jadriyah, Baghdad. Mohammed H. was subsequently killed alongside hundreds of his colleagues in execution-style assassinations that have targeted university professors since the fall of Saddam Hussein. His children and wife are now refugees in Amman, Jordan, and liken his assassination to the Khmer Rouge purge of Cambodia’s elite in the 1970s. A nonexhaustive list of assassinated Iraqi university professors can be found online at www.brusselstribunal.org/academicsList.htm, consulted on August 3, 2007.


56. Interview of Fats Inc. employee, on Royal Jordanian flight from Baghdad to Amman, July 19, 2004.

57. Interview with Nagham Juffur, Sadr City, Baghdad, May 29, 2003. Nagham’s sister Baida was abducted on her way to school earlier that month. At the time of writing, she was still missing.


61. Roston, A. (2007). “Federal Audit Rips Iraqi Reconstruction Work.” Available online: www.msnbc.msn.com/id/19962288/. Sadly, the only tangible help that major Baghdad hospitals received from the Coalition was the establishment of a series of white-tiled cubicles designed to welcome victims of bomb attacks. According to Dr. al-Safi, of al-Kindi Hospital, his hospital was only given the possibility of having six of these cubicles built in its Accident and Emergency Unit in the fall of 2003.


63. Interview with Nadhom M., al-Mansur Hotel, Baghdad, March 2006.

64. An English language press communiqué from the Islamic Army in Iraq can be found at www.informationclearinghouse.info/article7468.htm, consulted on August 7, 2007.


70. A copy of Coalition Provisional Authority Order 100 can be found at www.iraqcoalition.org/regulations/20040628_CPAORD_100_Transition_of_Laws_Regulations_Orders_and_Directives.pdf, consulted on August 7, 2007.


72. Interview with Buisha tribe member, al-Mansur Hotel, Baghdad, July 2006.


75. Interview with Chris Toey, November 14, 2004, Cresap Town, Maryland, United States.

76. The tribes in question are the Dulaimi, the Buisha (considered a local mafia-type tribe), the Jumela, the Halabsa, the Mahamuda, the Albu al-Wan, the Zuba’a, and the Buisha-Qais.


82. Al-Qa’id means “leader” in Arabic, and should not be confused with al-Qaeda, which means “the base.”

83. Interview with Yasser al-Dulaimi, Baghdad, March 2006.


85. Ibid.

86. Interview with Yasser al-Dulaimi, Baghdad, March 2006.


90. Ibid.

91. Ibid., p. 10.


CHAPTER 2

1. The succession of Prophet Muhammad in the year 632 created a split between his direct line, represented by his cousin and son-in-law Ali, and his political companions represented by the first caliph, Abu Bakr. The Shiites are the followers of Ali and the Sunnis of Abu Bakr.


10. Ibid.


21. Ibid., p. 5.


27. Ibid., p. 234.


39. Ibid., p. 137.


45. The Sabra and Shatila massacre took place in September 1982, when Christian militias were allowed to enter Palestinian camps and kill an estimated two thousand unarmed civilians, mostly women, children, and elders. Ariel Sharon, then the Israeli defense minister, was found “personally responsible” by the Israeli official Kanaan Commission. See Fisk, R. (2002). Pity the Nation: The Abduction of Lebanon. New York, Nation Books.


52. Interview with a Fallujah resident, name withheld, December 14, 2003.


54. Hendawi, H. (2004). “Fallujah Leaders Were Local, Not Foreign.” Associated Press, November 24, 2004; this source claims that Hadid was an electrician before heading al-Qaeda in Fallujah, but residents whom I have interviewed and who knew him personally all stress that he was an auto-body repair technician.

55. Ibid.

56. Interview with Yasser al-Dulaimi, Melia Mansur Hotel, Baghdad, July 2006.


58. Ibid., p. 69.


64. www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,83384,00.html, consulted on December 18, 2007.

65. This video was obtained in a video store in Fallujah in December 2003. The Web site in question is www.ogrish.com; it has since been disabled.


67. A deeper analysis of this particular ritual will be carried out in a subsequent chapter.

68. The conscientious Iraqi man who translated my video collection was absolutely disgusted by what he saw, no matter how much he also abhorred the U.S. occupation of his country.


70. Ibid., p. 234.


72. The concept of suicide is punishable in Islam. This is why Muslims feel very uneasy about people choosing to die as martyrs being referred to as suicide bombers, as martyrs do not see themselves as committing suicide when they, according to their perception, engage in defensive jihad. I have chosen to refer to commonly known “suicide bombers” as “self-appointed martyrs.”


75. news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/3522424.stm, consulted on December 19, 2007.

CHAPTER 3

1. All these names, except “Crusader 2,” were captured on Highway 10 between Fallujah and Baghdad on June 7, 2003. “Crusader 2” was spotted around the Jadriyah roundabout in late May 2003.


15. Ibid., p. 4.
17. Ibid.
18. The British journalist Robert Fisk was also present during this interview. He wrote a detailed account of Mustafa’s story, which is available online; see Fisk, R. (2005). “A Routine Tale of Our Times: Abuse, Beatings, Imprisonment, and Injustice.” _The Independent_, January 9, 2005. Available online: news.independent.co.uk/world/fisk/story.jsp?story=598792; see also www.selvesandothers.org/article7534.html, consulted on August 20, 2008.

22. Ibid.


25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.


33. Ibid., pp. 292, 293.


39. Ibid.

40. Ibid.

42. Ibid.


46. Interview with Bridget Nolan, near Cumberland, Maryland, September 4, 2004.


48. Ibid., p. 367.


54. Details on the former occupation of Private Lynndie England were gathered in an interview with WCBC reporter Bridget Nolan on September 4 and 5, 2004.


56. Interview with Ivan “Red” Frederick, Deerpark, Maryland, January 2005.


60. Ibid., p. 154.
65. Ibid.
69. According to Andrew Buncombe, of *The Independent*, Charles Graner was working at Greene Correctional Facility when the prison was at the center of an abuse scandal; news.independent.co.uk/low_res/story.jsp?story=518946&host=3&dir=75, consulted on May 7, 2004.
75. Ibid., p. 169.
77. Recorded interview of Omar B. in the Melia Mansur Hotel, Baghdad, July 2006.


82. Ibid.

83. Ibid.


85. Ibid.

86. Ibid.


88. A transcript of this interview is available online at transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0408/24/pzn.00.html, consulted on January 10, 2008.


94. I spoke at West Point, Colgate University, Columbia University, Wellesley College for Women, and Clark University.


97. Interview with Yasser al-Dulaimi, Melia Mansur Hotel, Baghdad, July 2006.

98. Letter faxed to me on October 11, 2004, by Thomas Hill, Center for International Conflict Resolution, Columbia University. The name of the author of this letter is withheld.

100. Interview with Yasser al-Dulaimi, Melia Mansur Hotel, Baghdad, July 2006.

101. Part of the video’s transcript is available online at www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,119615,00.html, consulted on January 11, 2008.


104. Ibid., plate 60 and p. 10.


109. Ibid., p. 6.

110. Ibid.


114. Ibid.


CHAPTER 4


2. Ibid.


16. Ibid.


18. Ibid.


22. Interview with Dr. Ahmad Assafi, May 26, 2003, al-Kindi Hospital, Baghdad.


27. Interview with the Sadick family, May 27, 2003, al-Shahab City, Baghdad.


31. Quoted in ibid., p. 25.

32. Quoted in ibid., p. 27.

33. Quoted in ibid., p. 28.


35. Quoted in ibid., p. 32.

36. Ibid., p. 31.

37. Linda Lovelace, the star of the pornographic film *Deep Throat* later became an antiporn activist. Ibid.

38. Ibid., p. 35.

39. Ibid., p. 19.


41. Ibid.


57. Ibid., p. 40.
60. Ibid., pp. 214, 221.
66. Ibid.
73. Interview with Colonel Faisal, March 2, 2004, Baghdad.
74. Interview with CPA official (name withheld upon request), March 2, 2004, Baghdad.
75. Interview with Major Sofiane, March 2, 2004, Baghdad.
77. “If the offender mentioned in this section then lawfully marries the victim, any action becomes void and any investigation or other procedure is discontinued and, if a sentence has already been passed in respect of such action, the sentence will be quashed.” Quoted in HRW (2003), *Climate of Fear: Sexual Violence and Abduction of Women and Girls in Baghdad*, Vol. 15, No. 8 (E).

78. Interview with Hannah Abdullah, March 4, 2004, al-Kindi Hospital, Baghdad.


81. The Iraqi Governing Council is the body that served as a transitional government between CPA rule and the January 2005 elections. The latter is analyzed in detail in Chapter 5.


83. The representatives at this meeting were Ellen Tauscher, D-CA; Tom Osborne, R-NE; Kay Granger, R-TX. The meeting took place in mid-October 2005, in Tauscher’s office in Washington, DC.

**CHAPTER 5**


6. Ibid.


8. Muqtada’s father, Grand Ayatollah Mohammed Sadiq Sadr, was assassinated in Najaf in 1999.


14. Ibid.


18. Ibid., pp. 315–316.


26. The scope of the work is publicly available in ibid., annex 1.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid., p. 342.


30. Interview with Ali and Baida, al-Hamra Hotel, Baghdad, November 6, 2005.


33. This interview was carried out in Najaf in early November 2005. The name of the field monitor is withheld.

34. It is unusual for pregnant women in conservative parts of Iraq to show themselves in public after a certain stage of their pregnancy.


37. Interview with Nadhom M., al-Hamra Hotel, Jadriyah, November 10, 2005.


39. I served as an OSCE observer in these elections.


42. Ibid., p. 5.
43. Interview with Zakia Hakki, member of the Iraqi Constitutional Committee (ConComm), Baghdad, March 25, 2006.

44. Interview with a U.S. official who had observed the constitution-drafting process, name withheld upon request. Interview carried out in Baghdad on October 30, 2005.

45. Interview with a U.S. official who had observed the constitution-drafting process, name withheld upon request. Interview carried out in El Rodeo, Costa Rica, in May 2006. Because I signed a confidentiality clause as part of the International Business & Technical Consultants (IBTC) evaluation for USAID, I carried out all interviews concerning the Iraqi constitution and electoral cycle mentioned in this book after I was no longer a consultant for IBTC. Moreover, all the information relating to the evaluation report is quoted directly from its official USAID version available to the public online at pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PDACH531.pdf.


47. Interview with a U.S. official who had observed the constitution-drafting process, name withheld upon request. Interview carried out in El Rodeo, Costa Rica, May 2006.


50. Interview with Zakia Hakki, member of the Iraqi Constitutional Committee (ConComm), Baghdad, March 25, 2006.


53. Ibid.

54. Ibid.


66. Interview with Mollah Nadhom conducted by Nadhom M., Doloyia, June 4, 2008.


CHAPTER 6

1. Interview with “Mohammed Fallujah,” November 2005, Melia Mansur Hotel, Baghdad. While Mohammed does not remember the exact date of this

2. As a result of the March 3, 1991, cease-fire agreement between the Coalition and the Iraqi government, no Iraqi fixed-wing aircrafts were allowed to fly in the Iraqi airspace. For a detailed report on the use of helicopters in the Iraqi government’s crushing of the Shiite rebellion in March 1991, see ibid. While the report mentions the use of Soviet-made H-18 helicopters, “Mohammed Fallujah” was adamant that his was an MI-8.


4. On February 15, 1991, the U.S. government–sponsored Voice of America aired the following declaration from President George H. W. Bush: “There is another way for the bloodshed to stop: And that is, for the Iraqi military and the Iraqi people to take matters into their own hands and force Saddam Hussein, the dictator, to step aside and then comply with the United Nations’ resolutions and rejoin the family of peace-loving nations”; quoted in Fisk, R. (2005). *The Great War for Civilization: The Conquest of the Middle East.* London, Fourth Estate Publishers, p. 646.


7. Ibid.

8. For the initial media coverage of this issue, see edition.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/meast/05/14/sprj.irq.main/index.html and news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/mid- dle_east/3024989.stm; www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,85932,00.html.

9. A couple of weeks later, I met with a taxi driver in Najaf who claims to have been part of a small group of Shiites who were evacuated by the United States to Saudi Arabia on the eve of the rebellion being crushed. This suggests that indeed the U.S. government knew of the tragedy about to unfold but did not have the political will, resources, or logistical preparedness to intervene to save everyone at risk.


14. The interview with Mollah Nadhom was done remotely, via e-mail and telephone, between June 4 and June 14, 2008. I am grateful to Nadhom M. for his translation and transcription of these valuable interviews carried out in Doloyia, Iraq.

15. He was first taken to Camp McKenzie, located outside Samarra. First, he was stripped naked, before being interrogated by Camp Commander Colonel Srigman. Then he was thrown into a hole in the ground filled with cold water (February is one of the coldest months in Iraq). The hole was protected by a fence equipped with barbed wire. The next day, he was placed in a grain silo, alongside fifty other prisoners. This silo was supposed to be the special area for difficult cases. In total, Mollah Nadhom spent twelve days there, in the worst of sanitary conditions. He was then taken to Saddam’s former school in Tikrit, which had been transformed into a detention center. There, he claims to have been insulted and humiliated and forced to clean soldiers’ latrines.


24. Ibid., p. 16.


**CONCLUSION**

1. I interviewed Hajji Mahmoud on three occasions: November 7, 2005, in al-Mansur Hotel, Baghdad; March 29, 2006, in a private residence in Arrasat, Baghdad; and July 24, 2006, in al-Mansur Hotel, Baghdad. Because my computer with all research notes and interviews was stolen in May 2006, I have only a video recording of our July 2006 interview.


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