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## SOCIAL BROKERS AND LEFTIST–SADRIST COOPERATION IN IRAQ’S REFORM PROTEST MOVEMENT: BEYOND INSTRUMENTAL ACTION

### Abstract

This article develops a concept of social brokerage to explain leftist–Sadrist cooperation during Iraq’s 2015 protest movement. Conventional understanding holds that Iraq’s secular-leftist civil trend and Shi’i Islamist factions have been mutually isolated, and at times fierce antagonists, in Iraq’s post-2003 politics. This view has been challenged by an emergent political alliance between a faction of the civil trend and the Shi’i Islamist Sadrist movement. By comparing this alliance with the failure of another Shi’i Islamist group, ‘Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq, to involve itself with and exploit the protest movement, this article isolates the conditions which determined the dynamics of leftist–Islamist interactions. Shifting the focus away from elite politics and structural-instrumental explanations favored by rational choice models, this article reveals a longer backstory of social and ideological interactions between less senior actors that transgressed leftist–Islamist social boundaries. From this context, potential brokers emerged, capable of skilfully mediating leftist–Sadrist interactions.

**Keywords:** Iraq; Iraqi Communist Party; Islamist movements; Sadrists; social movements

The victory of the Shi’i Islamist Sadrist trend (*al-tayyār al-ṣadrī*)<sup>1</sup> in Iraq’s May 2018 parliamentary elections stunned the Iraqi political establishment and outside observers alike.<sup>2</sup> More surprising still, the winning coalition, Marching Forward (Sa’irun), was constituted by an alliance between the Sadrists and an assortment of secular and leftist political groups amongst whom the Iraqi Communist Party (al-Hizb al-Shuyu’i al-‘Iraqi, ICP) was the most prominent. This unlikely electoral alliance emerged from a broader cross-ideological social movement coalition between the Sadrists and the so-called civil trend (*al-tayyār al-madanī*), a recently constituted political movement advocating for political reform within a secular ideological framework.<sup>3</sup> This coalition took shape in 2015 as demonstrations swept from the south to Baghdad. Protesters demanded fundamental reform: technocratic ministerial appointments to break the grip of sectarianism on the political system and measures to tackle corruption, improve public services, and strengthen the independence of the judiciary and electoral process.

Islamist movements and political actors moved quickly to try and join, or exploit, this “reform protest movement.”<sup>4</sup> However, among them, the Sadrists proved uniquely

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capable of integrating with the demonstrations despite their ideological differences with the civil trend and a recent history of mutual distrust and antagonism. Notwithstanding the Sadrists' leading role, the new movement appeared to eschew previously dominant forms of identity-based politics and to abandon Shi'i religious symbols and ideology. Instead, the Sadrists, and their leader, the cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, seemed to adopt the more moderate and secular practices of their newfound leftist allies. Muqtada even stated during a television interview: "I'll say this despite the *'amāma* [turban] on my head, we tried the Islamists and they failed miserably, it's time to try independent technocrats."<sup>5</sup> However, this convergence also exacerbated internal fractures within the civil and Sadrist trends. By the time of May's elections, the ICP had abandoned former leftist and liberal allies and entered an electoral alliance with the Sadrists, splintering the nascent civil trend and neutering its political power. Meanwhile, an intra-Sadrist struggle emerged as elements in the movement resisted political cooperation with what they perceived as secular and communistic forces.

The study of Iraqi politics has tended to focus on political elites and the strategic bargains they strike to divide the spoils of power.<sup>6</sup> A ubiquitous power politics model interprets this strategic politics in purely instrumental terms, with political elites manipulating material and symbolic resources in pursuit of raw power. Given this prevailing image of Iraqi politics, it is not surprising that the Sadrists' convergence with the Iraqi left from 2015 has been portrayed as a merely temporary or fleeting alignment, lacking substance and depth (social or ideological). For many, it was a quintessential case of elite manipulation by Muqtada, the "fake populism"<sup>7</sup> of a "demagogue with a gift for manipulating a national media and opportunistically capitalizing on national crises."<sup>8</sup> The cleric, in this view, was seeking to instrumentalize the left's symbolic resources in pursuit of political and social "relevance."<sup>9</sup> Thus, one scholar concludes that the alliance was merely an "instrumental coalition" in which "collaboration neither relies on, nor generates larger identities."<sup>10</sup> In other words, it lacked an accompanying cultural or ideological structure.

By contrast, I point to a longer backstory of social and communicative interactions between less senior civil trend and Sadrist individuals, sometimes operating outside official party and formal organizational structures. These actors would become social brokers, individuals with unusual configurations of social capital that enabled them to bridge otherwise autonomous social domains.<sup>11</sup> Brokers drew more senior figures into an expanding process of dialogue and joint activity once political cooperation became strategically viable in 2015. Thus, the strategic dimension of cooperation was downstream of interactions that generated shared ideas and perspectives framed, emotionally and cognitively, through active relationships.<sup>12</sup> One participant described this as a "unique psychological experience entailing an important adjustment to the frozen mental image which each side holds of the other."<sup>13</sup> The framework of instrumental power politics entirely misses the dynamic cultural context within which strategic political action was formulated.

To illustrate the importance of this background of social interactions and the role of brokers, I make a comparison with another Shi'i Islamist group that tried, but failed, to involve itself with the protest movement in 2015, *'Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq* (League of the Righteous, AAH). AAH shares some ideological territory with the Sadrists from whom they splintered in 2006,<sup>14</sup> claiming to be the true inheritors of Sadiq al-Sadr's legacy (Muqtada's father and progenitor of the Sadrist movement of the 1990s).<sup>15</sup> However,

because AAH is primarily an Iranian proxy militia, the group has, until quite recently, invested comparatively little in building out the social, cultural, and political modules of the organization. By contrast, the Sadrists’ heavier investment in these domains created a context of social interactions from which potential brokers eventually emerged. This context did not exist for AAH, which inhibited their ability to foster cooperation with the civil trend, despite strategic incentives to do so.

In this article, then, I show how under certain conditions actors on the periphery of social groups can transform into brokers who reconfigure social relations to foster cooperation between fairly autonomous social structures. Killian Clarke, in her analysis of secular–Islamist interactions during the Egyptian Revolution, highlights this relationship between brokers and the plasticity of structures. She argues that the function of brokers during the revolution points to the “potential instability of social structures, whose configurations can sometimes transform or shift quickly, based on the contingent actions of the players embedded within them.”<sup>16</sup> Like Clarke, I argue that the existence of brokers points to a latent potential for broad mobilization that draws on resources from multiple social sites. I also conceptualize brokerage not as a merely structural feature, but as a creative site of communicative interactions that can reconfigure cultural perceptions.

However, I also pay close attention to the limitations of brokerage and the contingency of new social patterns that emerge from the process. The social structures which brokers sought to affect proved enduring and sclerotic even under crisis conditions that produced powerful strategic incentives towards cross-ideological cooperation. Thus, most civil trend actors and groups withdrew from cooperation with the Sadrists and broke with the ICP by 2018. Moreover, brokers are often peripheral actors owing to their transgressive social practices. They are, therefore, vulnerable to elite manipulation or being targeted by more powerful individuals seeking to resist forms of cooperation that do not align with their interests. This targeting of the brokerage mechanism was a dimension of internal Sadrist resistance to cooperation with the civil trend.

In this instance, the conditions that determined the outcome of brokerage point to social and cultural factors irreducible to a structurally given instrumental logic. Consequently, I follow recent critiques of rational choice models that focus on strategic adaptation to political opportunity structures to explain leftist–Islamist cooperation.<sup>17</sup> Building on Jillian Schwedler’s approach, and subsequent scholarship by Janine Clark<sup>18</sup> and Michaëlle Browers,<sup>19</sup> I reveal how the practices of individuals who formed ties within and between political parties and movements produced shared ideological resources and discursive frames that presented opportunities and constraints for political actors. Meanwhile, as in Thomas Pierret’s account of secular–Islamist cooperation in Syria, I argue that transverse fault lines within both groups led to ideological divergences as a dimension of intra-movement social struggles, as well as creating strategic incentives for cross-ideological cooperation.<sup>20</sup>

Scholarship on social movement coalition formation also reflects this conceptual pivot. Nella Van Dyke and Holly McCammon, for example, emphasize the importance of pre-existing social ties and shared ideologies, recognizing that political opportunities are only a causal factor in combination with others.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, I reveal how certain Sadrist actors with a background in leftist political thought and praxis, and civil trend actors with a background in Islamist politics, thereby possessed latent social and ideological resources that would become strategically valuable as they transformed from potential into actual

brokers. However, despite this latent potential rooted in a small number of individuals, the civil trend and the Sadrists were not sociologically or ideologically primed for cooperation. Rather, social and ideological barriers had to be overcome by the active practice of individuals committed to the process of convergence. Finally, by highlighting the backstory of submerged social and ideological links between the civil and Sadrist trends, I take up the call made by Ellen Reese, Christine Petit, and David Meyer to take a longer time frame into consideration when investigating the emergence of social movement coalitions.<sup>22</sup>

This approach contrasts with conventional thinking on post-2003 Iraqi politics, which has tended to see a highly segmented and elite-dependent socio-political structure. Iraqi secular civil society is thought to be contained within its own autonomous space on the periphery of this system, unable to penetrate the political field. These groups have been primarily concerned with “guarding their autonomy,” constructing firewalls against the encroachment of sectarian elites and their nonstate allies.<sup>23</sup> What emerges from this view is an image of Iraqi societal weakness, i.e., a lack of capacity to mobilize in support of democracy or to resist political domination.<sup>24</sup> This weakness is understood as an inherent structural feature of societal fragmentation that precludes the possibility of broad, multisector mobilization.

The Sadrists have been viewed through a similar lens. Analyses tend to be elite-centric, focusing on Muqtada’s statements and actions to the exclusion of other Sadrist actors and forms of practice.<sup>25</sup> The movement has often been portrayed as a “sectarian phenomena,” in how it has employed a strategy of “difference, antagonism, and separation” from mainstream society,<sup>26</sup> or because it has sought to entrench Shi’i sectarian interests in the state and society.<sup>27</sup> The absence of a programmatic Sadrist political ideology, combined with a focus on Muqtada’s “power politics,” means that political ideas circulating within the movement have often been relegated to a secondary or derivative factor. The notion that Faleh Jabar first espoused in 2003, that the Sadrists are “not ideological,” thus remains the dominant view of the movement.<sup>28</sup> The top-down dependency that is supposed to characterize the relationship between Muqtada and his followers leaves little room for intra-Sadrist social and ideological struggle or bottom-up processes that might influence elite politics.<sup>29</sup>

Rather than focus on the instrumental logic of elite politics and a rigid segmented model of social structure, I suggest a more dynamic concept of Iraqi politics and society in three key respects: first, in how transverse group cleavages generate opportunities for complex strategies of cross-sector political cooperation, rendering group boundaries more permeable and transformable than previously recognized; second, in how such strategies are linked to a substrate of social practices by less senior actors who more commonly transgress social boundaries than previously thought; and third, in how these social practices occur within dynamic cultural contexts that are constitutive of social action, not simply reified structures of opportunities and resources that function as the tools of elite manipulation.

This approach offers a more nuanced understanding of the civil and Sadrist trends as social movements, uncovering the importance of the structural differentiation of Iraqi society, the internal structures and dynamics of social struggle within groups, and the role of ideas, norms, and ideological perspectives. It also challenges the notion of Iraq’s societal weakness, using the concept of brokerage to highlight an inherent

structural potential for multisector mobilization that is missed by analyses that focus only on elite-sectarian political dynamics.

The article is structured in three parts. The first part addresses the strategic dimension of leftist–Islamist interactions, showing how a reconfigured political opportunities structure interacted with transverse cleavages within secular and Islamist domains to produce incentives towards cross-ideological cooperation. The second part examines the longer backstory to this cooperation, uncovering the substrate of social and ideological links generated by transgressive social interactions out of which social brokers would eventually emerge. The third part examines the interaction of these elements as civil trend–Sadrist cooperation emerged. A comparison with civil trend–AAH interactions illustrates the importance of a social context of shared social and ideological ties. Here, the limitations on brokers’ capacity to transform social structures is also demonstrated by revealing how other actors worked against the cooperation to reproduce existing group boundaries and structures. This analysis draws on data gathered via interviews and discussions I conducted with key actors in both secular and Sadrist camps mainly during field work in Iraq in the summer of 2017. I have also used participants’ memoirs and other textual materials including social media.

#### THE POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES STRUCTURE AND TRANSVERSE CLEAVAGES

The strategies of both secular and Islamist participants in the reform protest movement were shaped by a nexus of interactions, which converged in early 2015, between broad political and economic conjunctures and transverse cleavages within civil trend and Shi’i Islamist camps. This restructuring of political space transformed the social capital of the previously marginal civil trend into a valued resource for actors in the political field. In turn, this prompted reciprocal strategic adaptations by civil trend actors seeking to transform their marginal social position into political power.

Since 2003, the failure to build infrastructural power, monopolize the use of force, and tackle corruption and sectarianism, has precipitated a growing legitimacy crisis for the Islamist-dominated political field. This was exacerbated by the fall of Mosul to the Islamic State (IS) in June 2014. Consequently, participation in the political field increasingly entailed a heavy cost in terms of prestige and legitimacy.<sup>30</sup> This coincided with a budget crisis as a result of war, corruption, and falling global oil prices.<sup>31</sup> Austerity and service cuts (in early 2015 the Iraqi government suspended or slowed payments to a significant number of public sector workers who account for 40 percent of the labor force),<sup>32</sup> meant the capacity of the political field to circumvent contentious political mobilization, and reproduce itself as a socially autonomous domain, was curtailed.

This crisis precipitated two strategic responses from political actors: first, a recognition of the need to find a new set of political ideas to revive the symbolic and, to a lesser extent, material value of the political field as a whole;<sup>33</sup> and second, attempts to restructure their own bases of legitimacy by drawing on legitimating resources from outside the political field. Both strategies directed political actors towards the civil trend and the protests that had erupted in Baghdad’s Tahrir Square and other parts of the country. The central political ideas articulated by demonstrators, ending sectarian and party quotas and technocratic ministerial appointments, became the dominant agenda for reform across much of the political spectrum. Responding directly to demonstrators, Prime Minister Haider

al-'Abadi made the idea of technocratic ministerial appointments a central component of his much-vaunted package of reforms.<sup>34</sup>

The protest movement itself became a powerful domain of symbolic legitimacy, its secular-nationalist framing contrasting with the sectarian and party factionalism of the Islamist-dominated political field. Political actors sought, directly or indirectly, to tap into this legitimacy. The commonality of this strategy was evident, for example, in Salim al-Jaburi's (a leading Sunni politician) March 2017 announcement of the formation of a new electoral coalition, the Civil Assembly for Reform (al-Tajammu' al-Madani li-l-Islah), a highly symbolic discursive shift. Jaburi, previously affiliated with the Iraqi Islamic Party (the Iraqi Muslim Brotherhood), stated that "the current conditions in the country are heading towards a civil state and not the ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood."<sup>35</sup> Civil trend leaders denounced the move as a cynical attempt to appropriate the political ideas and symbols of the protests as they gained popularity.<sup>36</sup>

The Sadrists and AAH also fit this pattern. Muqtada urged his followers to join the demonstrations and adopted their key demands.<sup>37</sup> A new Sadrist political project emerged, appearing to eschew Islamist ideological resources in favor of more secularized political practices. His strategy was not to displace the civil trend from the protests, but to integrate the Sadrists alongside the demonstrators. He made this explicit in a statement to his followers, explaining that while the Sadrists could mobilize much larger numbers, the protest movement must remain "pluralistic," with the Sadrists acting alongside the civil trend which "depicts the greatest meaning of nationality by their insistence on demonstrations for reform."<sup>38</sup>

AAH would also seek to participate in the demonstrations alongside the civil trend, albeit with less success. Trying to exploit the protests' symbolic resources, the group launched the so-called "Civil Mobilization" (al-Hashd al-Madani), a branding tool associating their participation in the Popular Mobilization (al-Hashd al-Sha'bi) of militias against IS with the political reform agenda of the protest movement. Images of the demonstrations also became a regular feature on their television station, al-'Ahd (The Covenant).

The same political and economic conjunctures described earlier also accentuated transverse cleavages within the Shi'i Islamist camp. These had reached a new peak in 2008 when then Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki confronted the Sadrist militia, Jaysh al-Mahdi (the Mahdi Army), in Basra, the so-called Charge of the Knights (Sawlat al-Fursan) operation. Maliki also sought to encourage, and build ties with, Sadrist splinter groups such as AAH. This placed Muqtada in an increasingly confrontational position vis-à-vis those Shi'i political and militia networks that were most closely aligned with Iran. Following the fall of Mosul to IS in 2014, Muqtada and Najaf-based Grand Ayatollah 'Ali al-Sistani worked in tandem to help push Maliki from power. After his displacement, Maliki's tilt to Iran became more acute. Muqtada, meanwhile, increasingly assumed antagonistic stances towards the Shi'i Islamist political power structure, and particularly its most pro-Iranian elements.

These cleavages were exacerbated by the expansion of Iranian penetration following the emergence of al-Hashd al-Sha'bi from June 2014. For the Sadrists, this entailed an expansion in the power of rivals within the Shi'i paramilitary field (Iranian-backed entities such as Badir, Kata'ib Hizbullah, AAH, and Harakat al-Nujaba'). Moreover, the expanding role of these militias further consolidated Iran's political penetration,

accentuating competition with the Sadrists on another front. AAH’s political activity expanded and in early 2018 they joined al-Fatih (Conquest), an electoral coalition headed by Badir’s Hadi al-‘Amiri and containing the other major Iranian-backed Shi‘i militia formations.<sup>39</sup> These groups made significant political gains in the 2018 elections by drawing on the prestige of battlefield victories against IS.<sup>40</sup>

In response to these pressures, Muqtada sought to differentiate his position and delegitimize his competitors. One aspect of this was a ramping up of his Iraqist-nationalist rhetoric, playing on the “insider–outsider” tension in Iraqi politics which the Sadrists have frequently exploited to discredit religious and political opponents.<sup>41</sup> At times this took on an anti-Iranian dimension, explaining why, during the storming of the Iraqi parliament on 30 April 2016, Sadrist protesters were chanting “Iran out out!” alongside slogans targeting Quds Force commander Qasim Sulaymani (the linchpin in Iran’s Iraqi militia networks).<sup>42</sup>

Muqtada also differentiated his militia from the Iranian-backed components of the Hashd. While all the militias draw legitimacy from Sistani’s 2014 fatwa, Sistani himself never uses the term “*al-hashd al-sha‘bī*,” preferring “volunteers,” an attempt to limit how his symbolic legitimacy can be appropriated by certain factions. Consequently, as Fanar Haddad has argued, a distinction emerged between “*al-hashd al-mārjī‘i*,” denoting formations linked to *al-‘ataba* (the shrines) and the Najafi religious hierarchy; and “*al-hashd al-wāla‘i*,” denoting formations such as AAH that are loyal to ‘Ali Khamenei as *faqīh*.<sup>43</sup> This carved out an Iraqist-nationalist space within which Muqtada positioned Jaysh al-Mahdi, now rebranded as the “Peace Companies” (Sarayya al-Salam). Like AAH, Muqtada sought to exploit the Hashd’s legitimating resources (appearing in military uniform in a series of election posters, for example).<sup>44</sup> However, his discourse was more fraught with ambiguity and often critical of particular (Iranian-backed) militias and the role of militias in general, particularly in political contexts.<sup>45</sup> He also refused to engage his forces alongside Iranian proxies in Syria and called for Syrian President Bashar al-Asad to step down,<sup>46</sup> positions that sought to stake out an Iraqist-nationalist orientation in contradistinction to Iranian interests.

Politically, Muqtada sought to give the appearance of divesting from the political field and the Shi‘i Islamist power structure. He withdrew the Sadrist party, al-Ahrar, from key political institutions and networks, leaving parliament temporarily,<sup>47</sup> and since March 2016 has suspended association with the Iraqi National Alliance (INA), the platform that had sought to unite Iraq’s main Shi‘i Islamist parties and enjoyed Iranian support.<sup>48</sup>

The Hashd and the protest movement became two distinct domains in which new Iraqi national mythologies were being fashioned. What these mythologies shared was an oppositional posture vis-à-vis a discredited political elite. Iranian-backed groups like AAH would ultimately utilize the Hashd to try and revivify Shi‘i Islamist politics. However, Muqtada’s orientation towards, and position within, the Hashd was more fraught and complex than many of the Sadrists’ rivals. The protest movement presented an alternative opportunity for Muqtada to recast his public image as a civil reformer in opposition to the political establishment.

The political opportunities structure for the civil trend was reconfigured by a similar interaction of political and economic conjunctures and transverse cleavages. This dynamic restructured the strategic calculation vis-à-vis violent repression from both the state and nonstate forces. Meanwhile, the transformation of their social capital into a

valued resource for political actors, and the exacerbation of transverse cleavages within the Shi'i Islamist camp, presented new strategic opportunities for the civil trend as it sought to translate its marginal social position into political power.

Many civil trend activists who assumed prominent positions in the reform protest movement had been active in the 2011 demonstrations during the Maliki premiership (sometimes referred to as the "Iraqi Spring").<sup>49</sup> This mobilization was met with severe state repression, the killing of protesters by security forces, and arrests targeting civic groups.<sup>50</sup> For example, Hadi al-Mahdi, the Iraqi playwright and activist, was assassinated in his home on 8 September 2011 by suspected Maliki loyalists, becoming a martyr for the protest movement.<sup>51</sup> Following on from the repression of protests in 2011, subsequent mobilizations from 2013 would be dominated by tribal groupings, some Ba'athist elements, and Sunni militants. The civil trend was thus rapidly displaced from what had initially been a prominent role in protest mobilization, and the "Iraqi Spring" would eventually morph into explicit sectarian violence (culminating with the rise of IS).<sup>52</sup>

This experience influenced the civil trend's strategic thinking in later years. The budget crisis, and Maliki's fall from power, fragmented the internal coherence of the political field. Consequently, in 2015, protesters faced a less unified apparatus of state repression. Their early experience showed the more pressing concern was the threat posed by Shi'i Islamist nonstate actors, not state security forces.<sup>53</sup> By seeking accommodation with these factions, the civil trend could neutralize this threat, or acquire protection by balancing one group against another. The exacerbation of cleavages within the Shi'i Islamist camp made this approach more strategically viable. This dynamic became explicit in May 2017. Following a series of attacks and kidnappings that targeted the civil trend (in which AAH was suspected of involvement), a joint civil trend-Sadrists press conference was held in which Muqtada announced that he would take responsibility for protecting the civil trend from other nonstate actors.<sup>54</sup>

In addition, a formal alliance with such groups might help secure a degree of influence, however limited, over the development of the protest movement by inserting civil trend actors into joint decision-making structures. Alliance with the Sadrists also acted as an important force multiplier for the civil trend who were conscious of their own lack of a comparably sized social base, a fact compounded by the absence of a functional trade union movement.<sup>55</sup> For civil trend actors who engaged in cross-ideological cooperation, the strategy reflected a recognition of the radical inequality of power between the civil trend and Shi'i Islamist forces, and sought to avoid a repeat of the "Iraqi Spring" where the civil trend was easily repressed and displaced by more powerful state and nonstate actors.

Iraq's civil trend is also characterized by transverse cleavages that are often personal and political rather than ideological. Perhaps the only sizable and well-organized political party within the civil trend is the ICP. However, this influence generates opposition from other actors, some of whom assert the importance of complete independence from political parties.<sup>56</sup> Outside the ICP, the political scene is fragmented. The Umma Party, for example, was a one-man platform for Mithal al-Alusi. My conversations with ICP and civil trend activists suggested a degree of ambivalence towards Alusi, perhaps arising from their perception that he has proven a highly pragmatic political operator. (He worked with Ahmad Chalabi and the Iraqi National Congress [INC], and, more recently, threw his support behind Masud Barzani and Kurdish independence.<sup>57</sup>)



The ICP itself was also deeply divided over cooperation with the Sadrists and this division often ran along a generational divide with younger members being more sceptical about the convergence. While some of those drawn into the civil trend–Sadrist cooperation at an early stage were ICP members, they initially operated, officially, independent of the party. It was not until March 2017 that this relationship was formalized and a Sadrist delegation met with ICP Secretary General Ra’id Fahmi in a meeting designed to “strengthen coordination and cooperation [between the two parties] and develop the peaceful protest movement.”<sup>58</sup>

The experience of violent repression and marginalization in 2011 had prompted civil trend actors to seek to overcome this fragmentation by adopting a strategy of internal unification and avoidance of direct confrontation with state and nonstate actors. Thus, between 2011 and 2015 the civil trend adopted a strategy of integration into the political field via an ideologically unified secularist political platform, the Civil Democratic Alliance (al-Tahaluf al-Madani al-Dimuqrati, CDA), which contested the 2014 parliamentary elections.

The CDA was an ICP-led initiative. However, to avoid the appearance of ICP dominance, an independent academic, ‘Ali Kadhim Aziz al-Rufa’i, was made the CDA’s nominal head. From the ICP’s perspective, the CDA strategy was a failure. In the 2014 elections, the alliance won only three seats: Alusi headed the list, followed by Fa’iq al-Shaykh ‘Ali (the People’s Party), while Shiruk al-‘Abayachi took the third seat through the female quota. Faris Jaju, who obtained his seat via the quota for religious minorities, joined the CDA postelection. The ICP’s candidate, Jassim al-Hilfi, came third with 17,000 votes in Baghdad, but lost his seat to ‘Abayachi because of the quota system. This outcome generated considerable animosity, particularly between the ICP, its allies, and ‘Abayachi. Later, rifts also opened up between the ICP and Fa’iq al-Shaykh ‘Ali.

Another effort was made to establish a united secular front following the disappointing 2014 election results. Taqaddum (Progress) was launched in October 2017 and included the ICP and former CDA members. However, this initiative quickly collapsed following the ICP’s withdrawal. It is worth noting that the CDA’s vote count was impressive, but its tactical distribution of votes cost the coalition seats. In my discussions with ICP representatives, tactical learning from the Sadrists, e.g., translating vote share into seats, was mentioned as a further benefit of cooperation.<sup>59</sup>

The failure of the CDA to unify the civil trend and deliver political representation for the ICP made cross-ideological cooperation with the Sadrists a more viable alternative. However, it was the Sadrists, not the ICP, who took the initiative in making the first overtures for an alliance. The ICP’s decision to explore this possibility was, in part, a strategic adaptation to the transformation of the civil trend’s social capital into a valued resource for political actors. This opened new political possibilities at a time when the CDA experiment had failed to deliver political power.

#### SOCIAL BROKERS AND CIVIL TREND–SADRIST SOCIAL AND IDEOLOGICAL TIES

The strategic-instrumental logic of adaptation to a reconfiguration of political space and intra-group cleavages is only part of the story of leftist–Sadrist convergence. The alliance emerged from a dynamic socio-cultural context in which key individuals worked to generate new social ties and ideological frameworks that preceded and facilitated a strategic

alignment of the two groups. Thus, countering the notion that the left and the Sadrists were always primed for cooperation, I shine a light on a range of actors whose social backgrounds left them ideally placed to function as brokers who actively mediated between the two movements that were otherwise fairly autonomous in social and cultural terms.

Social and ideological interactions between leftist and Islamist movements, both Sunni and Shi'i, are well-established phenomena.<sup>60</sup> This has not necessarily produced a context amenable to political cooperation. On the contrary, ideological and symbolic homologies, and competition over the similar social bases, have often proven factors for intense social and political struggle between leftist-Communist and Islamist movements. The history of such interactions in Iraq's modern history largely fits this pattern.<sup>61</sup>

A historical perspective on leftist-Sadrism interactions reveals similar dynamics at play. Ideologically, there has been considerable Marxist influence on Iraq's Shi'i Islamist movements, apparent, for example, in the seminal works of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr.<sup>62</sup> And, although never theoretically explicated in the manner of his cousin and teacher, Marxist theory and praxis was a component of Sadiq al-Sadr's Islamist movement of the 1990s. In the famous al-Hannana meeting, for example, Sadiq al-Sadr favorably compares the utopian essence of Marxism with his vision of Islam.<sup>63</sup> Sociologically, the Sadrism movement put down roots in former Communist strongholds, places such as Basra, Nasiriyah, and al-'Amara in the south, and al-Thawra (now Sadr) City in Baghdad.

Post-2003, however, these social and ideological links did not prove a basis for cooperation between the Sadrists and secular-leftist elements. On the contrary, the Sadrists' Islamism manifested most clearly as a popular religious messianism combined with a conservative cultural puritanism, both anathematized by secular-leftist and liberal elites.<sup>64</sup> The Sadrists were also at war with the returning exiled leadership and anyone who "collaborated" with the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) and occupying forces. This included Hamid Majid Musa, then secretary general of the ICP, who returned from exile in 2003 and took a seat on the IGC.<sup>65</sup> Secular intellectuals, journalists, and activists were also frequently targeted for intimidation and assassination by Islamist militias, among whom the Sadrism Jaysh al-Mahdi was the most powerful, at least pre-2008.<sup>66</sup>

It was in this context, wherein secular-leftist actors had been largely repressed and marginalized by dominant Islamist forces, that tentative steps towards cross-ideological interactions began. The Sadrists initiated these moves, which could be viewed as part of the movement's reorientation following their 2008 confrontation with Maliki. These interactions would reanimate latent shared social and ideological resources that later became the basis for civil trend-Sadrism cooperation. Potential social brokers emerged as the bearers of these resources. Here, I give examples to illustrate this process.

The story begins in 2010, when Sa'ib 'Abd al-Hamid, an independent Iraqi academic, was approached by Muqtada who asked him to take over the Sadrism cultural institution, the Center of the Two Martyred Sadrs (hereafter the Center).<sup>67</sup> By recruiting 'Abd al-Hamid, Muqtada proposed to transform the Center into a bridge between the Sadrists and Iraq's secular cultural domains. 'Abd al-Hamid told me about the following statement from Muqtada, made during an initial meeting between the two at the latter's Private Office in Najaf:

It is no secret to you that the name of the Sadrist trend is an unacceptable name from the cultural perspective, people call them barbarians and backwards, so at least if we had an institute of cultural activity, it would reflect a contrasting image, it would contribute to changing this negative image which infuriates me . . . At least they will say that they have people who can read and write.

Thus, as far back as 2010, following a period in which the Sadrists had suffered a series of military setbacks, Muqtada appeared to see strategic value in fostering interactions with Iraq’s secular-leftist and liberal cultural domains.

However, ‘Abd al-Hamid’s attempt to use the Center to build a communicative interaction between the two sides generated internal Sadrist opposition. For example, one project he implemented at the Center was a theater group involving musical performances and an annual theater festival. He told me that “it wasn’t only music that was strictly prohibited for them [the Sadrists], but also the entrance of women without hijab into the institute as actresses or in the audience of the plays.” These tensions led to resistance against ‘Abd al-Hamid’s leadership, despite Muqtada’s support and guarantees for his autonomy. He recalled a conversation between himself and Shaykh al-Jiyashi, then head of Muqtada’s Personal Office, in which he expressed his frustrations:

I told the Shaykh, “I have come to understand that Muqtada is boxed in between his followers, and not only the elders and those close to him, but also the wider body of followers. The man has a vision that he cannot implement against all this opposition.” Shaykh al-Jiyashi swore that Muqtada had said the same thing, word for word, in private counsel more than once.

Those Sadrists resisting ‘Abd al-Hamid’s leadership avoided direct confrontation with Muqtada and instead sought to squeeze the Center’s financial resources. Four years after taking over the role, these pressures rendered his continued leadership untenable and he signalled to Muqtada his intention to resign. A compromise was found whereby the Iraqi Scientific Center, a body for academic research and publishing which ‘Abd al-Hamid established within the Center, was made entirely independent and under his sole direction, albeit still funded by Muqtada.

Despite the frustration of initial efforts to build cross-ideological ties, the Iraqi Scientific Center proved a pivotal institution in the development of early civil trend–Sadrist interactions. Faris Kamal Nadhmi, a leftist academic who emerged from 2015 as a key ideologue of civil trend–Sadrist cooperation, regularly attended the Iraqi Scientific Center to give lectures.<sup>68</sup> Nadhmi comes from a Sunni aristocratic background, his grandfather was a minister during the 1930s and 1940s, and his father was a leftist judge who became a political prisoner. Nadhmi found that his analysis of the Sadrists as a “marginalized social trend, not a political Islamist group” resonated with his Sadrist audience. He told me: “I was keen to encourage their [Sadrists’] participation in cultural and academic activity . . . they greatly welcomed my presence, despite their knowledge that I was both a leftist and a secularist.”

In 2010, the Iraqi Scientific Center began a project that aimed to publish twenty-five books within the field of social sciences and invited well-known Iraqi academics, particularly from secular-leftist currents, to submit drafts. Nadhmi published two books through this project. At this time, Nadhmi also published a remarkably prescient article calling for a civil trend–Sadrist political alliance, not as a merely strategic manoeuvre, but as a deeper convergence presented in terms of South American liberation theology and Gramsci’s concept of a “historical bloc.” The article also called on the Sadrists to

prove their sincerity as a reformist force by committing to ending the system of sectarian and party quotas in ministerial appointments and promoting technocratic alternatives.<sup>69</sup>

Nadhmi believes that the initial response from the civil trend was minimal and uniformly critical.<sup>70</sup> However, his ideas garnered more significant and positive interest from Sadrist youth and cultural figures, who shared and discussed his article, initially through social media. After the outbreak of protests in 2015, Nadhmi recalls an encounter with a group of Sadrist youths who were familiar with his writings and had come to attend a talk he was giving on civil trend–Sadrist cooperation. This encounter occurred in the Ridha 'Alwan café in the Karrada neighbourhood of Baghdad, a center of activity for Iraq's secular intellectuals and activists. After Nadhmi's talk, the Sadrist youths were keen to have their photos taken with him, later sharing the pictures on social media. Not only were they attending a talk by a leftist intellectual in a secular domain, they were representing that fact within a Sadrist social space.

Through such interactions, Nadhmi acquired social capital which gave him prestige in Sadrist circles. However, this incurred a parallel cost within the civil trend. Nadhmi recalls that many leftists and communists questioned his intentions: "They claimed I was a Sadrist agent or, at best, a naïve person who did not understand politics." However, the transverse cleavages and shifting structural parameters in 2015 (described earlier) transformed the value of Nadhmi's social capital. Thenceforth, he was increasingly invited to give talks on civil trend–Sadrist cooperation in secular locales. The ideas of his 2010 article became an important ideological component underpinning civil trend–Sadrist cooperation. For example, Dhia' al-Asadi, leader of the Sadrist political bloc, explicitly stated during a symposium in Erbil on 11 April 2017 that the strategy of Gramsci's historical bloc was the core of Muqtada's political project.<sup>71</sup> Jassim al-Hilfi, the most prominent ICP figure promoting cooperation with the Sadrists, also cited Nadhmi's article as a major influence.<sup>72</sup> Nadhmi was integrated into the emerging institutional dimension of civil trend–Sadrist cooperation. In February 2016 Muqtada appointed him to his "independent" committee tasked with formulating recommendations for technocratic ministerial appointments.<sup>73</sup>

While Nadhmi was important in the construction of shared ideological frameworks, he was less involved in the practical formation of the civil trend–Sadrist alliance. Here, a range of other individuals came to the fore. I highlight three actors who form part of a diverse group in terms of their seniority, party affiliation/nonaffiliation, and social roles: Ahmad 'Abd al-Husayn, a civil trend poet and journalist; Shaykh Sadiq al-Hasnawi, a Sadrist cleric and a member of Muqtada's Shura Council; and 'Ala' al-Baghdadi, deputy of the Sadrist cultural institute. I show how each acquired an unusual configuration of social capital that enabled them to transform into brokers between the civil and Sadrist trends.

The poet and journalist Ahmad 'Abd al-Husayn is sometimes credited with initiating via social media the first demonstration in Tahrir Square, which sparked the reform protest movement. He came to prominence in the civil trend in 2009, when an article he wrote while an editor at al-Sabah sparked a confrontation with 'Ammar al-Hakim's Islamic Supreme Council in Iraq (ISCI). Threats and efforts to force his resignation sparked protests in Mutanabbi street (a hub of book selling and cultural activity) against religious censorship. Some see this as the first crystallization of the civil trend as a self-conscious entity. 'Abd al-Husayn's social background, however, reveals a continual traversing of

secular–religious boundaries. Born in 1966 in what is now Sadr City in Baghdad, he told me:

In 1990, I was forced to leave Iraq, fleeing from the Saddam regime. I traveled illegally to Iran where I undertook religious studies in the Hawza [under Kamal al-Haydari, a reformist cleric influenced by Baqir al-Sadr]. In truth, I was never far from religious study since I grew up in a religious family.<sup>74</sup>

In Iran, and later in Damascus, he worked as a journalist for Islamist opposition groups such as SCIRI, then under the leadership of Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim. However, his passion for poetry and literature meant that he never fully engaged in political Islam, embracing a more Sufi religiosity. A subsequent period of exile in Canada propelled him further down a secularizing path.

Nevertheless, this background gave him resources that later facilitated interaction with the Sadrists. For example, in a social media message posted in July 2016, he addressed “his Sadrist friends” in the following terms: “Most of you are sons of my city, Sadr city, which I cherish. Therefore, I know your good inner character, the clay from which you have been moulded. So, I address you as a brother.”<sup>75</sup> During the demonstrations in Tahrir Square, ‘Abd al-Husayn frequently delivered Muqtada’s statements, speaking to the crowds from the platform, a highly unusual move that most secular activists would not have countenanced. Although close to figures in the ICP, particularly Hilfi, ‘Abd al-Husayn is not a member of any political party and is, first and foremost, a poet and cultural figure. However, his history of interactions with Islamist factions made him suspect in the eyes of other civil trend actors who frequently used this fact against him once his support for cooperation with the Sadrists sparked internal divisions.<sup>76</sup>

As a member of Muqtada’s Shura Council, Shaykh Sadiq al-Hasnawi has been one of the most senior Sadrist religious figures, aside from Muqtada himself, to regularly meet with civil trend counterparts and engage in dialogue aimed at fostering trust and cooperation between the two sides. As with ‘Abd al-Husayn, my discussions with Shaykh Hasnawi revealed the extent to which his social trajectory had led to an accumulation of the latent leftist ideological resources that he later drew on as he transformed from a potential to an actual broker. He told me:

In truth, I grew up in Islam, my father was a member of the Islamic Movement of Iraq (al-Haraka al-Islamiyya), arrested in 1981 then sentenced to death and executed in 1982. I did not belong to any political organization, but I read almost all the literature of the revolutionary movements, both Islamist and non-Islamist. If I had not been an Islamist, I would have been a religious-leftist.<sup>77</sup>

He explained how he came to see his Shi’i Islamism as infused with the same spirit as leftist revolutionary praxis:

The 1980s were the time of the Iran–Iraq war and terrible internal repression. Islamic books were banned, so we read and circulated them in secret. The religious institutions were silent and quiescent in the face of repression and horrors experienced by the people. This prompted me to engage with the leftists, to understand the means of revolutionary organization. I was impressed by Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, ‘Abd al-Karim Qasim, Jamal ‘Abd al-Nasir, Ibrahim al-Hamdi in Yemen, and Dr. Mosaddegh in Iran. I understood later that Husayn is not restricted to the Muslims, or the Shi’a. It could be said that Guevara is like Husayn, in that he shares the goal of liberating mankind from injustice. Later, I was influenced by the ideas of the martyr Sayyid Muhammad Baqir

al-Sadr after I read his books, foremost of which was *Iqtisaduna* [Our Economics] from which I learned about Marxism as a philosophy and a method of interpreting history . . . This perspective helped me later in the dialogue and flexible rapprochement with the civil trend.

'Ala' al-Baghdadi is a less senior Sadrist who nevertheless played an important role in civil trend–Sadrist interactions. He has held several positions in the cultural and media branches of the movement since 2003. Initially, he worked for the Sadrist media center and was deputy editor of al-Hawza (the Sadrist publication famously shut down by Paul Bremer in 2004). Later, he worked as deputy of the Sadrist cultural institute (under 'Abd al-Jabar al-Hidjami) and is now editor of the Sadrist magazine *Rusul* (Messengers).

Unusually for a Sadrist, Baghdadi developed extensive social ties with many prominent civil trend activists. His work as a journalist embedded him in networks and institutions where he interacted with secular-liberal and leftist professional colleagues (e.g., the Union of Iraqi Journalists, the Union of Arab Journalists, the Iraqi Writers Union, and the Arab Writers Association). He developed friendships and professional relationships that were further cemented by interactions at the cafés and salons frequented by Iraq's intellectuals and artists in Mutanabbi street and al-Qishla gardens. Baghdadi exemplifies a small but growing organic intellectual stratum within the Sadrist movement whose socialization has been shaped by their participation in cultural fields characterized by an inherited secular-leftist intellectual tradition (not by the religious field).<sup>78</sup> Thus, Baghdadi's social capital made him a strategically valuable broker in the early stages of civil trend–Sadrist cooperation. He also used his position as editor of *Rusul* to publish articles from leftist authors in the Sadrist magazine. For example, the February 2017 edition reprinted Nadhmi's article on the civil trend-Sadrist convergence and the historical bloc.

#### SOCIAL BROKERS AND LEFTIST–SADRIST COOPERATION IN THE REFORM PROTEST MOVEMENT

From the social and ideological interactions explored above, brokers emerged who skilfully mediated interactions between the civil and Sadrist trends. They drew an expanding network of senior actors from political, intellectual, and religious contexts into a dialogue that established trust and a shared ideological framing which underpinned their activity. As the cooperation developed, the brokerage process was institutionalized through a series of joint committees that routinized shared practices dealing with pragmatic aspects of the protest movement. Other Islamist groups that could not draw on these resources were unable to establish a common basis for cooperation. Here, a comparison with AAH is used to further illustrate this contrast. The limitations on how far brokers could reconfigure social structures is also revealed. Cooperation with the Sadrists ultimately further fragmented the civil trend, while internal Sadrist resistance sought to target the brokerage mechanism and undermine cross-ideological interactions.

AAH sought to involve itself in the protest movement almost immediately after the first demonstration in Baghdad. This required building a cooperative relationship with the civil trend. However, while the two sides attempted, through secret negotiations, to reach an understanding on the basis for cooperation, these efforts quickly unravelled. The relationship ultimately degenerated into a violent confrontation that reinforced incentives for the civil trend to build ties with the Sadrists to counterbalance the threat posed by AAH and other Islamist factions.<sup>79</sup>

The immediate obstacle to AAH’s strategy was the deep suspicion and lack of trust between the two sides. Shortly after AAH announced its intention to join the demonstrations, civil trend activists met to discuss their response. The meeting was held in the office of ‘Ali al-Khalidi in the Kerrada district of Baghdad and was attended by ten civil trend leaders.<sup>80</sup> They agreed that AAH’s decision to join the demonstrations was an attempt by Maliki to fragment and erode the momentum of the movement, and ultimately displace the civil trend altogether. However, they were divided over how to best adapt to AAH’s strategy. Lengthy discussions resulted in a vote on two options: to persist in the protest as a distinct entity despite AAH’s presence; or to postpone the protest altogether. This debate was to no avail, however, as the outcome of the vote split the activists down the middle.<sup>81</sup> They understood the weakness of their position. If AAH inserted itself into the protests, they had no means to resist, nor to retain control over the movement.

In fact, these activists had misjudged AAH’s initial strategy, which sought not to displace the civil trend but to tap into its symbolic resources. Thus, even as the activists discussed their next move, an invitation arrived from a leading figure in AAH inviting them to a meeting at their headquarters in al-Jadriya, Baghdad. The activists agreed to meet with AAH and present them with a list of conditions designed to prevent the group from exploiting the protests for their own ends, while also neutralizing them as a potential threat. These conditions prohibited weapons and wearing clothes, singing chants, or holding signs that could be identified as sectarian or associated with a particular political group.

The secret meeting took place the following day at AAH’s offices. ‘Abd al-Husayn and Nabil Jassim spoke for the civil trend delegation. ‘Abd al-Husayn recalled the ensuing discussion, which revealed AAH’s strategy as seeking integration into the protests. This was exemplified by AAH’s desire to associate their branding of “al-Hashdal-Madani” with the protests:

We then put forward our conditions and were surprised that they agreed on all points, something which I still find shocking. They asked for one exception, the raising of a sign on which would be written a slogan demanding reform but signed in the name of “al-Hashd al-Madani.” This we refused, and after a short discussion they abandoned the idea as well. The view of my colleagues changed after this meeting, which went smoothly, contrary to our expectations. We thought that the scenario for the coming protest would not differ from previous demonstrations, nobody would be able to distinguish ‘Asa’ib from the rest by their clothes, slogans or chants.

There was a strategic rationale for the civil trend to accept AAH’s participation under these conditions, namely, the neutralization of a potentially hostile armed threat against which they had no other obvious recourse.

Despite this tentative agreement between the two sides, subsequent events illustrated that a shared basis for cooperation had not been established. All the assurances provided by AAH vis-à-vis the activists’ demands were not upheld. ‘Ala’ al-Baghdadi gave the following eyewitness account, corroborated by others, which clarifies the extent to which AAH sought to impose itself by occupying the physical and symbolic spaces of the demonstration:

A large electronic message board had been erected close to the Turkish restaurant [at the edge of Tahrir Square] which displayed an advert funded by Shaykh Qayis al-Khaza’li [secretary general

of AAH]. The display discussed some of the positions adopted by his movement . . . In another corner of Tahrir Square there was a group of young people raising signs displaying slogans that contradicted the demands of the protesters on the previous Friday, and they were stamped with the signature of "al-Hashd al-Madani." We heard that a fight had taken place because of the insistence of 'Asa'ib's cadres on keeping the main platform for themselves.<sup>82</sup>

AAH's actions caused the civil trend to withdraw en masse, leaving the Islamists in control of the central platform in front of the al-Hurriya (Freedom) mural. However, this was a pyrrhic victory. Without the civil trend's presence, Tahrir Square was a social domain emptied of its symbolic value. By intimidating civil trend activists, AAH also made sure that the need for protection via alliance with a counter-balancing group would be a strategic priority for those determined to persist in the protests. They would turn to AAH and Maliki's fiercest rival within the Shi'i Islamist camp, the Sadrists, to provide this function.

The first exploratory meeting between civil trend and Sadrist representatives occurred three weeks after the initial protest in Tahrir Square, and some two weeks after their confrontation with AAH. The meeting was scheduled to take place at the home of Sattar Mohsen 'Ali, head of the Baghdad-based Dar Sotour publishing house. However, the venue was changed at the last minute, and the meeting was eventually convened at the home of Hasan Hadi Zabun.<sup>83</sup> Zabun is another civil trend actor with an unusual social background in that he is a former Sadrist who migrated intellectually towards a secularist outlook. Zabun was, therefore, well placed to act as an interlocutor during this initial meeting. Attending from the civil trend were Sattar Mohsen 'Ali, 'Ammar al-Sa'di, and Fadhil 'Abas; the Sadrist delegation was headed by Shaykh Hasnawi and Shaykh Karim al-Manfi. This initial encounter produced little in terms of tangible results. Zabun told me why he decided to withdraw from potential cooperation with the Sadrists at this early stage:

The Sadrists are partners in political power, they have more than 100 director generals [a position below deputy minister in the Iraqi administrative system], more than five ambassadors and ministers, and forty deputies in parliament. Many of these are thought to be involved in corruption, so how can they protest corruption? The Sadrists also have a different vision, there is doubt about their acceptance of the principles of the civil trend such as their position on unveiled women, personal freedoms such as drinking alcohol, singing, and theater. Finally, there were worries that they would appropriate Tahrir Square and confiscate leadership of the protests.

However, this was not the end of the story. In the background, social brokers were being used to foster interactions between the two sides. Baghdadi had been contacted by Shaykh Hasnawi who told him of Muqtada's desire to reach out to the civil trend.<sup>84</sup> Utilizing his cross-ideological social ties, Baghdadi was asked to produce a list of names of civil trend activists who might be amenable to a meeting. The most prominent names on the list were: Ahmad 'Abd al-Husayn; Sa'dun Muhsin Thamad (who refused to participate from the beginning); Nabil Jasim; 'Ali Wajih; Shamkhi Jabir; 'Ali al-Sumari; and Jassim al-Hilfi. This list was passed to Muqtada via Shaykh Hasnawi. One key meeting, for example, took place in September 2015, several months after the start of the protests, and involved a dinner between the two sides at Hilfi's house. By this time, Hilfi had become more deeply involved in interactions with the Sadrists. However, at this stage, he



was still acting in a personal capacity as a civil trend activist, not officially representing the ICP.

Baghdadi’s account of this meeting illustrates how Sadrist actors such as himself and Shaykh Hasnawi, owing to their particular pathways of socialization, were able to engage in dialogue with their civil trend counterparts on shared cultural terrain. Baghdadi recounts the interaction:

Myself, Shaykh Sadiq al-Hasnawi, and Shaykh Muhammad al-Abudi went to Jassim al-Hilfi’s house where Jassim greeted us warmly. Some of the civil trend activists had arrived before us, the most prominent of whom was ‘Ammar al-Sa’di, the founder of the group “Enlightenment.” Later, we were joined by ‘Abd al-Husayn. We discussed many issues connected with the popular movement before dinner. After dinner, we went into the garden to drink tea and began a dialogue on culture, art, and literature that ended with a discussion of the role of the intellectual and its importance in the popular movement.

The account provided by Baghdadi suggests that participants understood the strategic dimension of their cooperation to be downstream of a deeper cultural understanding and the construction of a framing narrative that built on shared ideological resources:

Most of the meetings . . . were not characterized by detailed discussions of the procedural details of the popular protests but were expressed through general cultural dialogues that started with Voltaire, Sartre, Herman Hesse, Marquez, Albert Camus, and ended with Nietzsche, Spinoza, and Gramsci’s concept of the “historical bloc” . . . and the renewal project of Muhammad Arkun.

Following this series of private meetings a decision was taken for Shaykh Hasnawi, Shaykh Abudi, ‘Abd al-Jabar al-Hidjami, and Baghdadi to go to Mutanabbi street and al-Qishla Gardens and talk directly to intellectuals and civil trend activists in a public meeting: “It was a very important precedent, having some of the leaders of the Sadrist trend in Mutanabbi street, listening to all manner of questions and trying to respond with clarity in a flexible and quiet way that left very positive impressions for all,” Baghdadi recounted.

On 22 October 2015, a civil trend delegation visited Muqtada to formalize civil trend–Sadrist cooperation. The meeting with Muqtada culminated in a joint press conference in which Hilfi, standing next to ‘Abd al-Husayn, stated: “The Sadrist trend represents a huge social trend touched by many issues and our joint suffering unites us . . . Iraq is experiencing an exceptional moment, it is incumbent upon the civil trend and the moderate Islamists to work together in this fateful battle.”<sup>85</sup> For his part, Muqtada stated: “The demonstrators have done what is demanded by the current situation in terms of reform via peaceful means and which brings together all forces behind a single message.”<sup>86</sup>

As cross-ideological cooperation became formalized, it was also institutionalized in joint structures that routinized civil trend–Sadrist interactions. Individuals who had acted as brokers found their roles cemented within these new bodies. For example, ‘Abd al-Husayn, Hilfi, Baghdadi, and Shaykh Hasnawi were given places on Muqtada’s Committee for the Supervision of the Protests alongside ‘Abd al-Jabar al-Hidjami, Shaykh Salah al-Ubaydi, and Shaykh Abudi. A second body, the Coordinating Sub-Committee, was established later under the leadership of a young Sadrist named Hasan al-Ka’bi. This body was responsible for the day-to-day coordination

of civil trend–Sadrist activity. It was tasked with drawing wider elements of the civil trend into the cooperation.<sup>87</sup>

However, the capacity of brokers to generate cross-ideological political cooperation was limited and the social structures they sought to reconfigure proved more enduring than they had hoped. The civil trend–Sadrist cooperation culminated in early 2018 in an electoral alliance between the ICP and the Sadrists. However, this came at the cost of fragmenting the secular camp. The Sadrists, too, found themselves facing new forms of internal struggle as resistance to cooperation with the civil trend manifested in intra-Sadrist debate and argument. The endurance of cross-ideological patterns of social and political cooperation were often contingent on elite practice and susceptible to pressure from powerful actors who targeted the brokerage mechanism when they found their interests threatened.

Cross-ideological cooperation exacerbated transverse cleavages within the civil trend. Opposition took two forms: the first, involving elements of the civil trend determined to preserve their autonomy from the political field; and the second, involving the trend's own political actors. Some civil trend activists valued retaining their independence from the political field and regarded cooperation with political parties and entities as compromising the civil trend's core identity. Sa'dun Muhsin Thamad represented this school of thought. Like Zabun, he rejected cooperation with the Sadrists from the outset. Moreover, Thamad makes clear that his opposition did not hinge on Sadrist involvement alone, but also on the prominent roles of senior ICP figures within the protest movement.<sup>88</sup>

As the brokerage process began to falter, a significant number of civil trend activists began to peel off from those connected to the joint committees. Key figures such as Ahmad Sa'dawi, 'Ali al-Sumari, and Hamid Qasim disengaged and aligned themselves with Thamad. Consequently, two groups emerged within the civil trend: Mustamirrun (Continuing or Persisting), in which 'Abd al-Husayn and Hilfi were prominent and which became closely associated with the ICP, persisted with the civil trend–Sadrist alliance; meanwhile, a new group founded by Thamad, called Madaniyyun (pl. *madanī*, denoting a civil activist), drew activists together behind a strictly secular platform that rejected cooperation with any political entity, and particularly the Sadrists. This fracture placed considerable strain on personal relationships. In fact, Thamad told me that he felt certain ties had been damaged beyond repair and lines of intramovement communication and joint activity had therefore been severed.

The second aspect of civil trend cleavage emerged at the party-political level. Some smaller civil trend parties joined the ICP in Sa'irun. However, the more politically significant individuals and parties who had constituted the CDA broke away (including Mithal al-Alusi, Shiruk al-'Abayachi, and Fa'iq al-Shaykh 'Ali). I interviewed 'Abayachi in Erbil in 2017, before the ICP–Sadrist political alliance was officially formulated. She gave her view on the emerging civil trend–Sadrist cooperation, indicating the intensity of internal civil trend disputes:

What happened in Tahrir Square is that some individuals imposed themselves as representatives of the civil forces in interactions with the Sadrists . . . I do not think that there is an agreement between the civil trend and the Sadrists, rather, there is a convergence between some individuals in the civil movement and the Sadrist trend, individuals who do not even represent the ICP.

The lingering effects of the failed CDA experiment also continued to exacerbate these internal fractures, as ‘Abayachi told me:

In 2014, when we three deputies reached parliament as part of the CDA, it was meant to be the moment that this coalition transformed into a political framework for all the civil forces. Unfortunately, the CDA needed to get more than ten or fifteen seats and the ICP was not amongst the winners. For this reason, for me personally, the Communists started to fight against me, and began to publicly declare that these deputies do not represent the ICP and that Shiruk al-‘Abayachi got into parliament with our votes.<sup>89</sup>

The civil trend had briefly brought together secular intellectuals, journalists, activists, and political parties in an emergent movement struggling to gain self-consciousness and a political voice. By 2018 this movement had largely collapsed, and a pervasive sense of gloomy resignation characterized the sentiment of non-ICP elements of Iraqi secular civil society.

Internal Sadrist resistance to an alliance with the civil trend expressed tensions the lay activist and clerical strata of the movement reflecting their divergent pathways of socialization. Shaykh Usama al-Musawi, a prominent Sadrist cleric and *khātib al-jum‘a* (preacher for Friday sermon) in Sadr City, for example, openly discussed the emergence of what he described as “an internal conflict within the Sadrist line [*al-khaṭ al-ṣadrī*]”. Musawi grouped Sadrist “political leaders” and “journalists, writers, and philosophers” together, defining them as a “secular-liberal trend” that is “purely political.” This trend, in Musawi’s analysis, was fighting the clerical strata for greater influence in the movement.<sup>90</sup>

As the civil trend–Sadrist cooperation developed, these resistant forces targeted key links in the brokerage mechanism. There were verbal attacks on ‘Abd al-Husayn and Hilfi, accusing them of manipulating Muqtada and leading the Sadrists astray. There was also an effort to marginalize Baghdadi, who increasingly dropped out of the brokerage process. The young Sadrist, Hasan al-Ka‘bi, who had no previous ties to the civil trend, was made head of the Coordinating Sub-Committee tasked with drawing wider elements of the civil trend into the alliance. There is no reason to think that Hasan al-Ka‘bi was consciously seeking to subvert the cooperation. However, it has been suggested that his insertion into this key position, and the marginalization of Baghdadi, was designed by anti-reform elements to limit the expansion of civil trend–Sadrist cooperation.<sup>91</sup> This maneuver sought to change the configuration of social capital at a key site in the brokerage mechanism.

## CONCLUSION

Political cooperation between Iraq’s civil and Sadrist trends cannot be understood in terms of a purely instrumental power politics. Broad political and economic conjunctures did converge with transverse group cleavages in 2015 to reconfigure the political opportunities structure at the level of elite politics. However, the strategic actions of elites occurred against a background of social ties and ideological interactions between less senior actors. From this context, social brokers emerged who skilfully mediated cross-ideological interactions, building trust, shared ideological and discursive frameworks that facilitated political cooperation. The Sadrists had access to brokers because of the

movement's investment in Iraqi political, social, and cultural domains. Compared to the Sadrists' deep social roots, other Islamist factions, particularly those more embedded in Iranian networks, had, *ipso facto*, circumvented Iraqi society in pursuit of political power. I used a comparison between the Sadrists and AAH to illustrate this contrast.

However, the capacity of brokers to reconfigure social structures was limited and new patterns of cross-ideological political cooperation remained, to some extent, contingent on elites. The same patterns of transgressive social practice that provided brokers with strategically useful configurations of social capital, also tended to locate them more on the periphery of social groups. This made them vulnerable to elite manipulation or marginalization by more powerful actors. Internal resistance, within both the civil and Sadrist trends, also pointed to the endurance of deep-lying social structures that mitigated against radical transformations.

Nevertheless, I argued for a new, and more dynamic conception of Iraqi politics and society than the conventional focus on elite-sectarian dynamics. I have shown how transverse cleavages allow for complex strategies of cooperation across group boundaries. Moreover, looking beyond the domain of elite political bargaining reveals that routine social practices more commonly transgressed social boundaries than a more rigid top-down and sect-segmented model would suggest. Comparatively little attention has been paid to the sorts of intragroup social struggles, and their cultural and ideological dimensions, that characterize Iraq's civil and Sadrist trends. The outcome of my analysis is a more nuanced understanding of both groups in terms of their internal social and ideological structures, and how these factor in shaping their political strategies.

#### NOTES

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<sup>1</sup>Sadrists themselves sometimes prefer to use the phrase *al-khaṭ al-ṣadrī* (the Sadrist line), which emphasises the genealogical basis of the movement's religious character, as opposed to the modern, ideological framing of other "trends."

<sup>2</sup>Iraq analyst Kirk H. Sowell wrote that the election results "sent a shockwave through the establishment." See Kirk H. Sowell, "Understanding Sadr's Victory," The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 17 May 2018, accessed 1 January 2019. <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/76387>.

<sup>3</sup>*Al-tayyār al-madanī* (civil trend) is a term used in Iraqi political discourse denoting a network of individuals, civic groups, journalists, intellectuals, academics, and political parties who have sought to build a unified social movement to advance a secular political vision.

<sup>4</sup>Protesters used a variety of terms including: *al-ḥaraka al-iḥtijājiyya* (the protest movement); *al-ḥaraka al-iṣlāḥiyya* (the reform movement); and *al-taḏāhurāt al-iṣlāḥiyya* (the reform protests). "Reform protest movement" represents an amalgam of these terms.

<sup>5</sup>Muqtada al-Sadr, "Bi-l-Harf al-Wahid: al-Laqa' al-Muntazar ma' al-Sayid Muqtada al-Sadir," 21 November 2017, accessed 1 January 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3c7WAefoUw0&feature=youtu.be>.

<sup>6</sup>Toby Dodge, *Iraq: From War to a New Authoritarianism* (Oxon: IJSS, 2012), 40.

<sup>7</sup>Kirk H. Sowell, "Iraq's Fake Populism and Anti-sectarianism," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 9 June 2016, accessed 1 January 2019, <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/?fa=63777>; Zalmay Khalilzad, "Why American Needs Iran in Iraq," *Politico Magazine*, 2 May 2016, accessed 1 January 2019, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/05/why-america-needs-iran-in-iraq-213865>.

<sup>8</sup>Michael Weiss, “Moqtada al-Sadr, the Donald Trump of Iraq,” *The Daily Beast*, 26 May 2016, accessed 1 January 2019, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/moqtada-al-sadr-the-donald-trump-of-iraq>.

<sup>9</sup>Nibras Kazimi, “Iraq: What Was That All About?,” *Talisman Gate*, 10 May 2016, accessed 1 January 2019, <https://talisman-gate.com/2016/05/10/iraq-what-was-that-all-about/>; Damian Doyle, “Pulling and Gouging: The Sadrist Line’s Adaptable and Evolving Repertoire of Contention,” in *New Opposition in the Middle East*, ed. Dara Conduit and Shahram Akbarzadeh (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 45.

<sup>10</sup>Doyle, “Pulling and Gouging,” 48.

<sup>11</sup>Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics on Contention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>12</sup>Alberto Melucci, “The Process of Collective Identity,” in *Social Movements and Culture*, ed. Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans (London: Routledge, 1995), 45.

<sup>13</sup>Faris Kamal Nadhmi, “al-Taqarub al-Madani–al-Sadri fi Sahat al-Ihtijaj,” *al-Hiwar al-Mutamaddin*, 18 July 2016, accessed 1 January 2019, <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=524705>.

<sup>14</sup>AAH claims to have split from Jaysh al-Mahdi in 2004, while other accounts put the split as late as 2008.

<sup>15</sup>For more on Sadiq al-Sadr, see Rashid al-Khayun, *al-Islam al-Siyasi bi-l-‘Iraq: al-Shi’a* (Dubai: al-Mesbar, 2012), 353–81.

<sup>16</sup>Killian Clarke, “Unexpected Brokers of Mobilization: Contingency and Networks in the 2011 Egyptian Uprising,” *Comparative Politics* 46 (2014): 379.

<sup>17</sup>Jillian Schwedler, *Faith in Moderation: Islamist Parties in Jordan and Yemen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 22.

<sup>18</sup>Janine A. Clark, “The Conditions of Islamist Moderation: Unpacking the conditions of cross-ideological cooperation in Jordan,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 38 (2006): 539–60.

<sup>19</sup>Michaëlle L. Browsers, *Political Ideology in the Arab World: Accommodation and Transformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>20</sup>Thomas Pierret, “Islamist-Secular Cooperation: Accounting for the Syrian Exception,” in *The Dynamics of Opposition Cooperation in the Arab World: Contentious Politics in Times of Change*, ed. Hendrik Jan Kraetzschmar (New York: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>21</sup>Nella Van Dyke and Holly J. McCammon, *Strategic Alliances: Coalition Building and Social Movements* (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xxiii.

<sup>22</sup>Ellen Reese, Christine Petit, and David Meyer, “Sudden Mobilization,” in *Strategic Alliances*, 286.

<sup>23</sup>Juliet Kerr, “The Biggest Problem We Face Is Keeping Our Independence” (discussion papers, DP45, Centre for the Study of Global Governance, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, 17 May 2017), accessed 1 January 2019, <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/28017/1/DP45.pdf>. See also, Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 278; and Eric Davis, “The Historical Genesis of the Public Sphere in Iraq,” in *Publics, Politics, and Participation*, ed. Seteney Shami (New York: SSRC, 2009), 408–9.

<sup>24</sup>Toby Dodge, “State and Society in Iraq Ten Years after Regime Change,” *International Affairs* 89 (2013): 254.

<sup>25</sup>Only two monographs have been written on the Sadrist movement, Nicholas Krohley’s study of the movement’s paramilitary wing, and Patrick Cockburn’s journalistic account of the Sadrist movement (much of which focuses on the pre-2003 period). See Nicholas Krohley, *The Death of the Mehdi Army: The Rise, Fall, and Revival of Iraq’s Most Powerful Militia* (London: Hurst & Company, 2015); and Patrick Cockburn, *Muqtada: Muqtada al-Sadr, the Shia revival, and the Struggle for Iraq* (New York: Scribner, 2009).

<sup>26</sup>Juan Cole, “The United States and Shi’ite Religious Factions in Post-Ba’thist Iraq,” *The Middle East Journal* 57 (2003): 544.

<sup>27</sup>Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future* (New York: W. N. Norton & Co, 2006), 231, 173.

<sup>28</sup>Faleh A. Jabar, *The Shi’ite Movement in Iraq* (London: Saqi Books, 2003), 25.

<sup>29</sup>This is exclusive of the numerous splits within the Sadrists’ paramilitary wing, which are typically thought to be purely strategic and the result of Iranian interference rather than to have ideological roots.

<sup>30</sup>A good example was the deaths of twelve babies in a Baghdad hospital fire that was blamed on corruption. Sadrists dominate the health ministry. See “At Least 12 Babies Killed in Baghdad Hospital Fire,” *al-Jazeera*, 8 November 2016, accessed 1 January 2019, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/08/11-babies-killed-baghdad-hospital-fire-160810063620919.html>.

<sup>31</sup>Oil revenues represented 43 percent of Iraqi GDP, 99 percent of exports, and 90 percent of federal revenues in 2015. See Matt Bradley, "Iraq Plagued by Budget Crisis," *Wall Street Journal*, 5 November 2014, accessed 1 January 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/iraq-plagued-by-budget-crisis-amid-menace-of-islamic-state-1415231221#:VdqLUsv400mVBA>; and World Bank data on oil rents 2018, accessed 1 January 2019, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PETR.RT.ZS>.

<sup>32</sup>Borzou Daragahi, "Iraq's Cash Crisis Forces Salary Squeeze," *Financial Times*, 23 February 2015, accessed 1 January 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/23f1c6d0-b9e0-11e4-933f-00144feab7de>.

<sup>33</sup>Pierre Bourdieu described a logic of field solidarity, i.e., an implicit recognition amongst participants in a social field of the need to sustain the value of the field as an object of collective struggle.

<sup>34</sup>These ideas were also embraced nominally by the so-called "opposition bloc" in parliament (widely believed at the time to be a Maliki-orchestrated front).

<sup>35</sup>See report in *al-Ghad*, 26 February 2017, accessed 2 January 2019, <https://goo.gl/4ZBw37>.

<sup>36</sup>Jassim al-Helfi, Facebook, 28 February 2017, accessed 1 January 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/jassim.alhelfi/posts/10211110734379618>.

<sup>37</sup>Muqtada al-Sadr, "Bayan Muqtada al-Sadr Hawl al-Islah," 22 March 2016, accessed 2 January 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ocWnRzL5h4o&feature=youtu.be>.

<sup>38</sup>Muqtada al-Sadr, "Bayan," 14 June 2016, accessed 2 January 2019, <http://jawabna.com/index.php/permalink/9113.html>.

<sup>39</sup>Kirk H. Sowell, "Iraq's Status Quo Elections," Carnegie Endowment, 8 February 2018, accessed 2 January 2019, <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/75488>.

<sup>40</sup>AAH had contested the 2014 elections as part of Maliki's State of Law (Dawlat al-Qanun) coalition, winning just one seat. Following the 2018 elections, the group had raised its parliamentary representation to fifteen seats.

<sup>41</sup>Laurence Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics: Religious and Political Networks in the Gulf* (London: Hurst, 2008), 260–61.

<sup>42</sup>Ali Mamouri, "Why Shi'ites Are Divided over Iranian Role in Iraq," *al-Monitor*, 12 May 2016, accessed 2 January 2019, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/05/sadrists-iraqi-shiites-opposing-iranian-policy.html>.

<sup>43</sup>Fanar Haddad, "Understanding Iraq's Hashd al-Sha'bi," The Century Foundation, 5 March 2018, accessed 2 January 2019, <https://tcf.org/content/report/understanding-iraqs-hashd-al-shabi/>.

<sup>44</sup>Benedict Robin-D'Cruz, "Muqtada al-Sadr Wears Military Uniform," *Iraq After Occupation*, 12 July 2016, accessed 2 January 2019, <https://www.iraqafteroccupation.com/2016/07/12/muqtada-al-sadr-wears-military-uniform-some-thoughts-on-the-secularisation-of-muqtada-al-sadr/>.

<sup>45</sup>For more, see Benedict Robin-D'Cruz, "Nation and Citizenship in the Political Discourse of 'Ali al-Sistani and Muqtada al-Sadr'" (Master's thesis, 2016).

<sup>46</sup>"Muqtada Becomes First Iraqi Shi'ite Leader to Urge Assad to Step Down," *Reuters*, 9 April 2017, accessed 2 January 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-syria-sadr/sadr-becomes-first-iraqi-shiite-leader-to-urge-assad-to-step-down-idUSKBN17B070>.

<sup>47</sup>"Muqtada al-Sadr' Yujammid Kutlatu al-Siyasiyya fi al-Barlaman al-'Iraqi Mu'aqitan," *al-Arabia*, 20 April 2016, accessed 2 January 2019, <https://goo.gl/y7IKnb>.

<sup>48</sup>"Muqtada al-Sadr Yanhi Muqati'a Imtaddat 6 Ashh,r al-Ijtima' al-Tahal,f al-Watani al-'Iraqi," *Rudaw*, 1 October 2016, accessed 2 January 2019, <http://rudaw.net/arabic/middleeast/iraq/3009201612>.

<sup>49</sup>Joel Rayburn, *Iraq After America: Strongmen, Sectarians, Resistance* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institute, 2014), 216–19; Haifa Zangana, "Iraq," in *Dispatches from the Arab Spring*, ed. Paul Amar and Vijay Prashad (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

<sup>50</sup>In February 2011 Iraqi security forces opened fire on protesters in several cities, killing about thirty. See Rayburn, *Iraq After America*, 218.

<sup>51</sup>Zangana, "Iraq," 320.

<sup>52</sup>Rayburn, *Iraq After America*, 216–19; Zangana, "Iraq."

<sup>53</sup>During the second demonstration many civil trend activists were assaulted by gangs linked to AAH that forced them to retreat from Tahrir Square.

<sup>54</sup>Muqtada al-Sadr, press conference, 21 May 2017, accessed 2 January 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WMB3pDwCIUM>.

<sup>55</sup>See Faris Nadhmi, "al-Shuyu'iyun wa-l-Sadriyyun," *al-Hiwar al-Mutamaddin*, 17 June 2010, accessed 2 January 2019, <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=219387>.

<sup>56</sup>Interviews carried out by the author with Sa’dun Mohsen Thamad and Shiruk al-‘Abayachi, among others, indicated opposition to the overweening influence of the ICP within the civil trend.

<sup>57</sup>Mahmood Y. Kurdi, “Interview with Mithal al-Alusi,” *Rudaw*, 14 August 2017, accessed 2 January 2019, <http://www.rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/130820177>.

<sup>58</sup>“Al-Tiyar al-Sadri wa-l-Hizb al-Shiyyu’i Yabhathan al-Tansiyq fi al-Tazahurat,” *All Iraq News*, 7 March 2017, accessed 2 January 2019, <http://www.alliraqnews.com/modules/news/article.php?storyid=59178>.

<sup>59</sup>Face-to-face interview carried out by the author with Jassim al-Helfi, Erbil, 6 August 2017.

<sup>60</sup>For examples, see Schwedler, *Faith in Moderation*; Pierret, “Islamist-Secular Cooperation”; Browsers, *Political Ideology*; Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994); and Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *The Vanguard of the Islamic Revolution: The Jama’at-i Islami of Pakistan* (Oakland, Calif.: University of California Press, 1994). On Shi’ism specifically, see Jabar, *The Shi’ite Movement*; and Juan Cole and Nikki Keddie, eds., *Shi’ism and Social Protest* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1986).

<sup>61</sup>Anticommunism and resisting secularization of the Shi’i masses were core objectives of Muhammed Baqir al-Sadr’s Da’wa Party, established shortly after the 1958 revolution. Grand Ayatollah Muthin al-Hakim issued a fatwa against membership in the ICP in 1960. Leftist and Islamist forces clashed during the 1970s, culminating in the 1977 Intifada Safar. For more, see Johan Franzen, *Red Star Over Iraq: Iraqi Communism Before Saddam* (London: Hurst & Co., 2011), 237–38; and Jabar, *The Shi’ite Movement in Iraq*.

<sup>62</sup>Rachel Kantz Feder, *Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr and the Foundations of Revivalism and Modernization in Shi’ism, 1946-1980*, unpublished doctoral thesis submitted to Tel Aviv University, 2016.

<sup>63</sup>The “*al-hannana* meeting” is a famous audio recording of an interview with Sadiq al-Sadr from 1997, named after the neighbourhood in Najaf where he lived.

<sup>64</sup>Cockburn, *Muqtada*.

<sup>65</sup>Ismael, *The Rise*, 296–302.

<sup>66</sup>Raymond Baker, Shereen T. Ismael, and Tareq Y. Ismael, eds., *Cultural Cleansing in Iraq: Why Museums Were Looted, Libraries Burned and Academics Murdered* (London: Pluto Press, 2010), contains several chapters dealing with the targeting of academics, journalists, and activists by militias.

<sup>67</sup>This account is based on several written discussions between the author and Sa’ib ‘Abd al-Hamid that occurred between 2015 and 2018.

<sup>68</sup>This account is based on a combination of numerous discussions between the author and Faris Kamal Nadhmi between 2015 and 2018, as well as two face-to-face interviews conducted by the author with Nadhmi in Erbil on 7 August 2017 and 10 September 2017.

<sup>69</sup>Nadhmi, “al-Shuyu’iyyun wa-l-Sadriyyun.”

<sup>70</sup>See, e.g., Sadiq al-Ta’i, “al-Kutla al-Ta’rikhiyya’ fi al-‘Iraq . . . Tafkik al-Muqarabat,” *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 16 March 2016, accessed 2 January 2019, <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=509529>.

<sup>71</sup>“Al-Intikhabat al-Muqbila wa-Hadud al-Taghir,” *al-Mada*, 11 April 2017.

<sup>72</sup>Based on face-to-face interview carried out by author with Jassim al-Helfi, Erbil, 6 August 2017, Erbil.

<sup>73</sup>The committee included other prominent leftist academic figures such Faleh A. Jabar, Amer H. Fayadh, and several liberal intellectuals, such as Haider Saeed and Senan al-Shebebi.

<sup>74</sup>This account is based on several discussions between the author and Ahmad ‘Abd al-Husayn that occurred between 2015 and 2019 and written accounts of events provided to the author by ‘Abd al-Husayn.

<sup>75</sup>Ahmad ‘Abd al-Husayn, “To My Sadrist Friends Only!,” Facebook, 31 July 2016, accessed 14 January 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1446868738673463&set=a.203881282972221&type=3&theater>.

<sup>76</sup>See, e.g., Karim al-Thuri, “Ahmad ‘Abd al-Husayn Mara Ukhra,” *al-Muthaqaf*, 25 May 2016, accessed 2 January 2019, <http://www.almothaqaf.com/memoir/905977.html>.

<sup>77</sup>This account is based on several written discussions between the author and Shaykh Sadiq al-Hasnawi that occurred during 2018.

<sup>78</sup>Other examples would include Diya’ al-Asadi and ‘Abd al-Jabar al-Hidjami.

<sup>79</sup>This account of interactions between the civil trend and AAH is based on information provided to the author by Ahmad ‘Abd al-Husayn and the author’s translation of ‘Ala’ al-Baghdadi’s unpublished memoir.

<sup>80</sup>Nabil Jassim, Mustafa Sa’adoun, ‘Ali Wajih, ‘Ali al-Sumeri, Jihad Jalil, Baha Kamil, Mo’ayd al-Tayeb, ‘Ali al-Khalidi, Ahmad ‘Abd al-Husayn, Zaid al-Ajili.

<sup>81</sup>Abd Al-Husayn, 'Ali al-Sumari, Jihad Jalil, Baha Kamil, and Mu'ayad al-Tayib supported the idea of not leaving the square under any circumstances; Nabil Jassim, 'Ali al-Khalidi, Zaid al-Ajili, Mustafa Sa'adoun, and 'Ali Wajih supported postponing the demonstration.

<sup>82</sup>Account based on 'Ala' al-Baghdadi's unpublished memoirs.

<sup>83</sup>This account is based on several written discussions between the author and Hasan Hadi Zabun that occurred between 2017 and 2018.

<sup>84</sup>This account of these meetings is drawn primarily from 'Ala' Baghdadi's unpublished memoir.

<sup>85</sup>'Al-Sadr: al-Tazahurat didd al-Fasad Mustamirra wa-'ala al-Hukuma al-Istijaba li-ha wa-Hamaya Qadatha,' *al-Mada*, 22 October 2015, accessed 2 January 2019. <https://goo.gl/AynXFy>.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid.

<sup>87</sup>This account is based on several written discussions between the author and Hasan al-Ka'bi that occurred in 2016.

<sup>88</sup>Based on the author's face-to-face interview with Sa'dun Mohsin Thamad, Sulaymaniyah, 13 September 2017.

<sup>89</sup>Based on the author's face-to-face interview with Shiruk al-Abayachi, Irbil, 13 August 2017.

<sup>90</sup>Sayid Usama al-Musawi, post to his official Facebook page, 27 May 2017. <https://www.facebook.com/search/str/%D8%AA%D8%B5%D9%86%D9%8A%D9%81+%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%8A+%D9%84%D9%84%D8%AE%D8%B7+%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D8%AF%D8%B1%D9%8A+%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%81/stories-keyword/stories-public?esd=eyJlc2lkIjoiUzpfSTU3NzYwMTQyMjMwNDQ0NTpWSzoXNDY2NjgwNTEzMzk2NTI3IiwicHNpZCI6eyI1Nzc2MDE0MjIzMDQ0NDU6MTQ2NjY4MDUxMzM5NjUyNyI6IiV6cGZTVFUzTnpZd01UUXINak13TkRRME5UcFdTem94TkRZMk5qZ3dOVEV6TXprMk5USTMifSwiY3JjdCI6InRleHQiLCJjc2lkIjoiMjA0YTY3NzNhZDA2OTlhY2I3NWRiZDVjNzEwYWZjYTgifQ%3D%3D>.

<sup>91</sup>Anonymous Sadrist source close to events.