

"The Millennial Generation in Post-Intervention Iraq – What alternatives for destitute youth in ill-functioning state? "

By Nils BARTOLOMEO

Course "Sociologie des relations internationales dans le monde"

Taught by Laurent Bonnefoy at Sciences Po

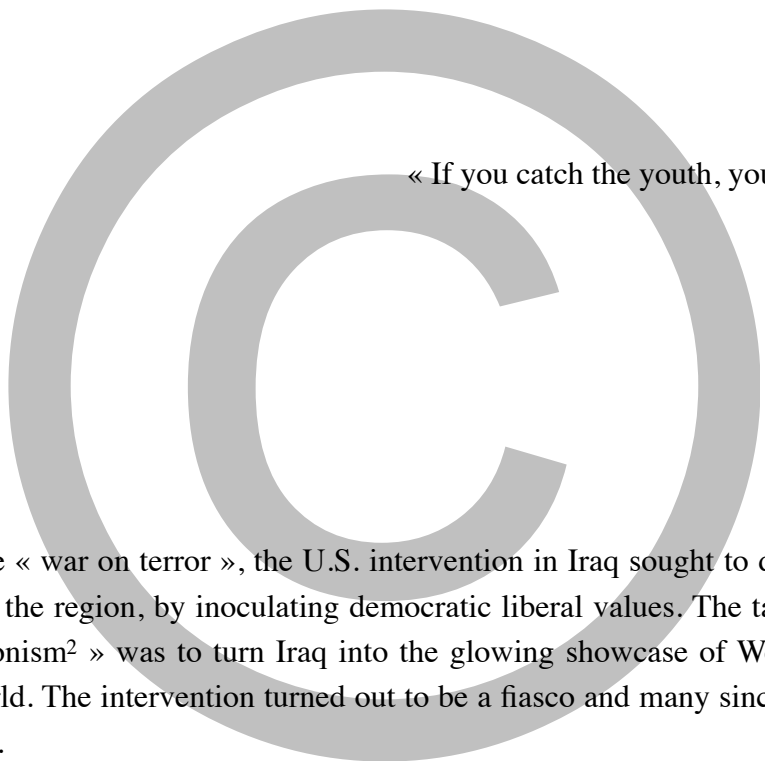
Fall 2016

This paper has received the *KSP Student Paper Award*
of the Kuwait Program at Sciences Po

The copyright of this paper remains the property of its author. No part of the content may be reproduced, published, distributed, copied or stored for public or private use without written permission of the author.
All authorisation requests should be sent to program.kuwait@sciencespo.fr

THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION IN POST-INTERVENTION IRAQ

— What alternatives for a destitute youth in an ill-functioning state ? —



« If you catch the youth, you catch the future¹. »

Saddam Hussein

Introduction.

In the context of the « war on terror », the U.S. intervention in Iraq sought to deeply transform the country, and with it the region, by inoculating democratic liberal values. The tacit objective of this « radical interventionism² » was to turn Iraq into the glowing showcase of Western liberal values within the Arab world. The intervention turned out to be a fiasco and many since then consider Iraq as a « failed state³ ».

However, although the U.S. intervention undoubtedly worsened Iraq's domestic situation, one must bear in mind that Iraq's predicament is actually the result of a long-term process. Today's situation leaves us with a lingering sense of déjà-vu. Since the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, the « sanctions decade⁴ » that followed the 1991 Gulf War, coupled with a large financial debt resulting from the war and the repression conducted by Saddam Hussein, strongly damaged the material, institutional and psychological foundations of the Iraqi society.

¹ Eric Davis, *Memories of the State : Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2005

² Michael C. Hudson, "The United States in the Middle East," in Louise Fawcett, (ed.), *International Relations of the Middle East*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 337

³ Tareq Ismael, Jacqueline Ismael, *Iraq in the Twenty-First Century, Regime change and the making of a failed state*, Routledge, 2015

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5

In such conditions, Iraq's youths have had « neither normalcy nor a sense of progress⁵ » since the 1980s. Yet, the current situation of the youth is more critical than ever : numerically very significant⁶, economically and communally diverse, the millennial generation grew up in the aftermath of Saddam Hussein's fall and inherited a country burdened by alien control, fossilized by chronic governmental corruption, and torn apart by sectarian polarization⁷.

In a country often presented as the archetype of sectarianism in the Middle East, this « generation of chaos⁸ » is fueled by a common sense of aimlessness that occasionally oversteps fratricidal tensions in order to challenge the political establishment.

In order to fully understand the overlapping dynamics that enliven Iraq's youth, it seems essential to take a step back from the traditional state-focused approach. Grasping all the issues at stake in the Iraqi case necessitates to focus on the many interactions that work together between various actors at play. The current predicament of the youth in Iraq can only be interpreted in the light of the multifaceted interactions to which it has been subject — be they historical, local, social or cultural. It should be pointed out that few mentions will be made in this paper of young Iraqi Kurds. Although this mainly Sunni community accounts for a significant 17% of the total Iraqi population, it actually experiences different dynamics. The Iraqi Kurds emerged unscathed from the redaction of the 2005 Constitution : since then, the Iraqi army is no longer allowed to enter the Kurd territory, and Iraqi Kurds enjoy greater economic freedom. Moreover, Iraqi Kurds have set up well-established and functional institutions that are autonomous from Baghdad. In other words, it can be said that the Kurd minority administers its own territory.

With that in mind, we will first try to show that young Iraqis have been — and still are — subject to both an *a priori* sectarianism and a politicized sectarianism. We will then wonder to what extent the general resentment among the youth towards the political establishment can overstep sectarianism. In a second section, we will try to understand the conditions of emergence of collective action — and its limits — in the case of Iraq's youth. In order to comprehend the way young Iraqis get themselves heard, we broadened Albert Hirschman's famous « Exit, Voice and Loyalty » framework.

To fully grasp Hirschman's tryptic framework in the case of Iraq's youth, one must bear in mind that Hirschman's analysis is an *interactive process* more than a fixed assessment, in which “exit” and “voice” both appear as alternatives to the harmful changes that young Iraqis experience; while “loyalty” constitutes an underlying psychological variable.

⁵ International Crisis Group, *Fight or Flight: The Desperate Plight of Iraq's "Generation 2000"*, Middle East Report n°169, 2016, p.3

⁶ Currently, the total Iraqi median age is around 20. As of July 2016, Iraqis between 15 and 24 accounted for 19% of the total Iraqi population, and Iraqis under 15 accounted for 40% of the total population. See “Iraq Demographics Profile 2016”, Index Mundi, http://www.indexmundi.com/iraq/demographics_profile.html

⁷ Although no exact information on sectarian or ethnic composition was delivered before the U.S. invasion, the U.S. authorities based their policies on those percentages in early 2003 : around 60% of Shiites Arabs, 20% of Sunni Arabs and 17% of Sunni Kurds. A map of Iraq including these percentages circulated among U.S. officials in early 2003. See Appendix 1.

⁸ International Crisis Group, *Fight or Flight: The Desperate Plight of Iraq's "Generation 2000"*, Middle East Report n°169, 2016, p.1

I. IRAQ'S YOUTH : MULTIFACETED VICTIM OF SECTARIANISM IN A FLAWED SYSTEM

A political transition as sudden as the one that occurred in 2003 in Iraq necessarily entails major upheavals in the social dynamics of power. According to Haddad, « no other event has had as momentous and detrimental an effect on sectarian relations in the Middle East as the war and occupation of Iraq.⁹ » Following Saddam Hussein's fall, the Sunnis greatly feared the “revenge of the excluded”¹⁰. They ended up perceiving themselves as victims of sectarian discrimination. It is common indeed that the political habitus that prevails undertakes indirect, and sometimes direct, acts of discrimination against the excluded group.

One must however bear in mind that sectarianism is a complex shape-shifting phenomenon that not only encompasses confessional concerns but also historical, social, cultural and geographic issues. We would like to show in this chapter that Iraq's generation 2000 appears at the same time as the heir of an *a priori* sectarianism and as the target of a politicized sectarianism.

A. The youth as heir of an *a priori* sectarianism

The fundamental difference between the elder generation and the millennial one is that the latter « has grown up with sectarianism as an *a priori condition* that constrains friendship, mobility and daily practices¹¹ ». Iraq's youths indeed have experienced several traumatic events, such as the politicization and entrenchment of the sectarian discrimination in 2003-2005, followed by the sectarian war between 2005-2007. Those long-lasting and salient confrontations of identities drew many lines between the Iraqis. The young Iraqis, because they grew up and shaped their personalities in this confined context, are the first victims of a multifaceted sectarian discrimination.

First, those lines were geographic : cities and provinces were clearly demarcated by invisible frontiers that prevented people from connecting to each other. Second, communal frontiers separated people across ethnic and confessional lines, even among the same sects.

It was not long before these imaginary boundaries became concrete. The « Surge » materialized remoteness and confinement by erecting real walls between communities. This initiative was accompanied after 2011 by restrictions on mobility imposed by the government of Prime Minister al-Maliki. This exacerbated the geographic and sectarian divide, by restraining young people's social interactions. Most young Iraqis spent their entire adolescence within their own communities, without ever rubbing shoulders with other ethnic or confessional groups.

As a result, many young Iraqis are subject to the *ignorance* of “the other”. This ignorance, which constitutes a direct heritage of the long-term geographic and ethnic sectarian divide from which youths have suffered, deforms their perception of reality.

Those misperceptions are all the more pernicious that they often are the result of a mechanism of opposition or affrontement, therefore inciting youths to despise the unknown. The confrontation to

⁹ Fanar Haddad, “Sectarian Relations and Sunni Identity in Post-Civil War Iraq,” in Lawrence Potter, (ed.), *Sectarian Politics in the Persian Gulf*, Hurst Georgetown University's Center for International and Régional Studies, 2013, p. 82

¹⁰ Pierre-Jean Luizard, *La question irakienne*, Fayard, 2004, p. 425

¹¹ International Crisis Group, *Fight or Flight: The Desperate Plight of Iraq's “Generation 2000”*, p. 10

the unknown — people, habits, ideas — no longer stems from experience but from flawed narratives youths have been subject to. As Haddad points out, « for the first time, as the state collapsed, the Iraqi other came into full, unrestrained view to the rest of his compatriots. But claims and counterclaims, visions and counter-visions of what Iraq and its recent history meant were forcefully, often violently, asserted¹² ». While the members of the elder generation confronted each other *for real* — during the 2005-2007 sectarian war for instance —, Iraq's youths are subject to « competing representations of reality that depend on the narratives to which they are exposed within their localities rather than direct experience¹³ ».

However, the millennial generation, more than simply an heir of a long-lasting constructed sectarianism, also appears as a chosen target of sectarian politicization.

B. The youth as target of politicized sectarianism

First, youths have suffered systemic sectarian politicization. In the aftermath of Saddam's demise, the political system organized by the invader was a « confessional system that structure[d] political authority on a sectarian quota basis¹⁴ ». The Sunni minority only got four representatives in the Transitory Government and quickly felt like they were the victims of an institutionalized prejudice. This feeling proved to be even greater among the millennial generation.

The idea of systemic sectarianism was reinforced by the perception among young Sunni Arabs that the security apparatus — and especially the Army — was dominated by the Shiites. According to them, it was clear that the army was a Shiite-controlled instrument of sectarian oppression, more than a guardian of peace. According to Louër¹⁵, the recruitment process within a security apparatus may tell a lot about confessional sectarianism. In the case of Iraq, Pierre-Jean Luizard steps even further, arguing that the Iraqi military apparatus is in itself the guardian of a political system based on ethnic and sectarian discrimination¹⁶. Indeed, one cannot ignore for instance that Iraq's security apparatus included the Badr Brigade, a Shiite militia that « engaged in a policy of wide-scale ethno-confessionnal cleansing¹⁷ ».

The same strategy was implemented by the authorities themselves. Indeed, the al-Maliki government has deepened sectarian polarisation by orchestrating a divide-and-conquer strategy. All along his tenure, al-Maliki and his staff have implemented measures that were designed to enhance perceptions of a sectarian agenda. According to the International Crisis Group, al-Maliki for instance dismissed prominent officials, mostly Sunnis, « pursuant to the Justice and Accountability Law, on the basis of alleged senior-level affiliation to the former Baath party¹⁸ ».

The will formulated by al-Maliki to carry out a “de-Ba’thification“ within the state institutions is actually symbolic of the interaction between sectarianism and patronage. Indeed, the “de-Ba’thification“ process implicitly served as a justification for al-Maliki to co-opt mostly Shiite leaders via patronage.

¹² Haddad, *Op. cit.*, p. 68

¹³ International Crisis Group, *Fight or Flight: The Desperate Plight of Iraq's "Generation 2000"*, p. 11

¹⁴ Ismael, *Op. cit.*, p. 95

¹⁵ Laurence Louër, “Sectarianism and Coup-Proofing Strategies in Bahrain“, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 2013

¹⁶ Luizard, *Op. cit.*, p. 355

¹⁷ Ismael, *Op. cit.*, p. 94

¹⁸ International Crisis Group, *Make or Break: Iraq's Sunnis and the State*, Middle East Report n°144, 14 August 2013, p. (i)

As a result, beyond sectarianism, the young Iraqis actually seem to share a general sense of frustration towards the political establishment, which is often perceived as deeply corrupted.

C. *Beyond sectarianism, a general resentment toward the political establishment ?*

Under Saddam's regime, corruption and nepotism were embedded in the very social structure, forming large networks and benefiting a « ruling clan-based class¹⁹ ». This actually sounds widespread among authoritarian Arab states, in which the main problems are not necessarily due to state deficiencies, but to the society itself, which often proves to be deeply spoiled by endemic corruption and patronage²⁰.

The « shock and awe » doctrine carried out during the 2003 Anglo-American intervention not only led to the collapse of the Iraqi state and institutions but also to the erosion of Iraq's political culture of citizenship and, with it, the society as a whole. The general degradation of the situation, along with the collapse of state institutions, created resentment among the youth toward the political leaders, all accused of corruption and theft.

The radical Anglo-American intervention decidedly created a fertile ground for chronic corruption, alighting a general sense of aimlessness among Iraq's youth. According to the International Crisis Group, the political system created in the aftermath of the invasion with the elected 2005 Transitional Government encouraged a « political-party appropriation of state institutions and encouraged the spread of party-based patronage networks throughout the public sector²¹. »

This deep system of patronage induced two antagonist effects. First, it ensured the survival of both al-Maliki and the political establishment. In the meantime, as corollary, it subverted any kind of political alternance or pluralism, and it dissolved practices of good governance.

As a result, young Iraqis feel trapped in an endless cycle of occupation : while the U.S. invasion shaped their adolescence, they now have to endure a long-lasting “invasion“ of people that they despise, in a system that they condemn. Education, public health system, services : every single act of daily life seems dependent on overlapping patronage and corruption. For instance, most young Iraqis have to pay bribes they cannot even afford in order to get their driving license or their diplomas delivered.

In such a context, Iraq's youths more broadly nurture the feeling of a preordained failed destiny. Currently suffering from a blatant lack of opportunities, young Iraqis tend to perceive themselves as doomed to failure.

However, it is fascinating to notice that although the resentment toward the political establishment is prevalent among the millennial generation — even across sectarian lines —, the *expression* of such discontent remains fragmented. The common denunciation of this corrupted and patronage-based system remains disunited. The isolation — even ghettoization — of the youths within their own communities or sects makes the anti-establishment protests even more complicated to generalize.

¹⁹ Ismael, *Op. cit.*, p. 27

²⁰ Michel Camau, “Globalisation démocratique et exception autoritaire arabe“, *Critique Internationale*, n°30, 2006

²¹ International Crisis Group, *Fight or Flight: The Desperate Plight of Iraq's “Generation 2000“*, p. 4

II. « EXIT, VOICE, LOYALTY »²² : UNDERSTANDING THE OVERLAPPING ALTERNATIVES OF IRAQ'S YOUTH

In this chapter, we will try to understand the conditions of emergence of collective action — and its limits — in the case of Iraq's youth. In order to comprehend the way young Iraqis get themselves heard, we reformulated and broadened Albert Hirschman's famous « Exit, Voice and Loyalty » framework.

This tryptic framework²³ asserts that in a given context, actors that are facing a harmful change in their environment may choose between two potential alternatives : exit and voice. As for loyalty, it plays an underlying psychological part by influencing the actors' propensity to opt for voice or exit²⁴. To fully comprehend Hirschman's framework in the case of Iraq's youth, one must bear in mind that Hirschman's analysis is an *interactive process* more than a fixed assessment.

In this section, we will also try to point out that Iraq's youths have become an easy target at the mercy of opportunistic actors. Never has this “generation of chaos“ been so appropriately named. Indeed, in the context of the Syrian uprising, and even more in a country that not only saw its institutions dismantled but also its « political culture of citizenship disintegrated²⁵», destitute youths became easy to mold.

On both domestic and regional scales, we notice the emergence of various actors — radical islamists, militias, populist movements — counting on the demise of the state and the sectarian polarization to recruit young Iraqis and manipulate their voice.

As the International Crisis Group deservedly asserted : « The millennial generation has an amorphous identity : depending on the context and who seeks to mobilise them, ethnic, sectarian, tribal, locally geographic or other sub-national identity will emerge as the avenue through which members see and challenge the establishment.²⁶ »

A. “Exit“ : *emigrate to escape a destructive cycle*

According to Hirschman's framework, one must bear in mind that loyalty and defection nurture each other. Young Iraqis, even the more marginalized of them, are usually very attached to their country: they have grown up within the boundaries of their communities, or sects, and their knowledge of the external world is often narrowed, if not flawed or inexistant. Thus, before they will seriously consider the alternative of emigration, loyalty incites the young Iraqis to *threaten* to leave. In doing so, they intend to influence the government's actions and hope things will get better.

In order to spread the threat of mobilisation, those young usually rest upon their tribal groups or kinship affiliations. This strategy is often flawed : as we saw previously, communal frontiers often separate people across ethnic and confessional lines, even among the same sects, therefore

²² Albert Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, Loyalty : défection et prise de parole*, Université de Bruxelles, 2011

²³ Frédéric Charillon, “Provocation, agitation, contestation : la stratégie des trublions“, in Bertrand Badie, *La fin du monde unique*, 2011, p. 42

²⁴ William Robert Clark, Matt Golder, Sona Golder, "An Exit, Voice, and Loyalty Model of Politics" [online], Pennsylvania State University, Available here : <http://mattgolder.com/files/research/evl.pdf>

²⁵ Ismael, *Op. cit.*

²⁶ International Crisis Group, *Fight or Flight: The Desperate Plight of Iraq's “Generation 2000“*, p. 12

preventing them from allying to each other or getting their voice heard. Moreover, if a tribe constitutes for sure an essential point of reference for the youth, the tribal leaders generally engage themselves in power battles against the authorities. As a result, the relations between tribal leaders and the state have increasingly deteriorated since 2003. In other words, the intermediaries that were supposed to carry the voice of young people actually end up weakening their threat of emigration. Worse than that, the relations between tribal leaders and the youth have progressively fallen apart. Before, tribal leaders used to be both thorough intermediaries to negotiate with the state and, most importantly, respected symbols among the youth. But in the post-2003 turmoil, and even more since the Syrian uprising and the emergence of jihadist groups, we assist to a split between the youths and their tribal leaders. In order to confront the radical groups and ensure their own protection, many young Iraqis ask their tribes to supply money and weapons. But since tribal leaders usually are unable to satisfy those needs, young Iraqis tend to distance themselves from them and seek protection elsewhere. In other words, the line of allegiance between the youths and their tribal leaders is slowly falling apart.

Consequently, when the threat to leave proves to be useless or ineffective, and when the youths find themselves endangered by the government's inability to enforce the law in a militia-dominated environment, those young come to contemplate defection as a viable alternative.

This desperate situation mainly affects young educated people willing to find professional opportunities. Unlike the destitute young enrolled by extremist groups, the typical profile of the young Iraqi eager to leave the country is the following : educated, professional middle class, feeling outcasted by the authorities, victim of financial difficulties, horrified by the militarisation of the society.

Leaving the country also appeals to young students that suffer from corruption. Since the emergence of the jihadist group ISIS, the government no longer recognizes diplomas from universities located in areas controlled by the radical islamists. Those students thus face two alternatives : pay bribes and contribute to maintain an already ill-functioning system, or stay away from school.

In such a context, many young Iraqis reach a saturation point and feel like the only alternative to escape this destructive circle is to leave the country. This decision is often well thought-out and socially discussed. As the International Crisis Group points out, « the pattern of flight resembled that of militia mobilisation : contagious, spreading by word of mouth and social media, often within small circles of friends²⁷ ».

Unlike what young Iraqis thought would happen, the threat of defection, instead of inciting the government to improve their living conditions, actually worsened their situation. Indeed, due to the threat of a massive brain drain, the authorities have taken measures destined to make it hard for young students to get copies of their diplomas, which they absolutely need to work abroad.

One must therefore be conscious of both the material and psychological difficulties for young Iraqis to leave for good. Beyond the financial or practical obstacles related to the escape (paying smugglers to leave the country, getting a copy of a diploma), the youths remain emotionally attached to their social environment. The psychological difficulty to exit is actually underlined by Hirschman himself when he declares that loyalty turns defection into a desperate alternative.

²⁷ International Crisis Group, *Fight or Flight: The Desperate Plight of Iraq's "Generation 2000"*, p. 24

Therefore, loyalty is definitely a two-sided variable that may also incite young Iraqis to remain on their soil so as to reform a country to which they are deeply attached.

B. “Voice“ : *protest or fight as an alternative to exit*

As we just said, many young Iraqis are so close to their social structure (communities, sects, etc.) that they would rather protest or fight in order to reform and improve the current flawed system (“voice“) rather than escape (“exit“). Once again appears the essential — yet underlying — role of loyalty : in Hirschman’s own words, loyalty acts this time as a *stimulator* of “voice“.

This function of stimulator is multifaceted : on the one hand, when people voluntarily and consciously decide to step in to get their voice heard, “voice“ becomes an *alternative* to exit. On the other hand, when people decide to rise because they have no other choice but to stay, “voice“ becomes a *residue* of exit.

In the wake of the 2012 Syrian uprising, the anti-establishment resentment boiled over in protests among young Iraqis. Those revendications were carried out by diverse groups: tribes, clerics, political movements. As the International Crisis Group mentioned, « though the protests were in majority-Shiite areas, they assumed a kaleidoscopic rather than sectarian character, reflecting the rich diversity of society.²⁸ »

The protests went wild after that Iraqis’ special forces murdered more than fifty demonstrators during a tent sit-in near Hawija, in May 2013. It is interesting to observe that what began as a peaceful political campaign destined to denounce corruption turned into a crusade against the whole endemically flawed post-2003 political system. Along the same lines, young Iraqis more broadly condemned at the time what they perceived as an overarching influence from regional actors in the dynamics at play in Iraq. They felt like the Iraqi government was nothing more but a puppet in other sovereign states’ hands — namely Iranian hands.

However, the way young Iraqis expressed their backlash varied. “Voice“ as an alternative to “exit“ may take different paths, especially in such a powder keg as Iraq. The antagonist paths that young Iraqis have chosen to express their resentment are consistent with the very essence of this generation. Indeed, as mentioned above, the way young Iraqis challenge the establishment greatly differs depending on both the context and who tries to recruit them.

What is really striking is how young Iraqis perceived their protests. In their eyes, this global crusade was actually more a wide platform for *social expression* rather than a thorough avenue for political implication. They were fueled by « enthusiasm and the prospect of heroism [...] more than by rational motives²⁹ ».

However, despite this global resentment and the growing enthusiasm in denouncing it, the “voice alternative“ got flawed in two ways.

On the one hand, the protest movement imploded by itself. Indeed, it was not long before discrepancies started undermining the youth’s common anti-establishment message. Once again, loyalty played an underlying — and here destructive — part in the process : to the detriment of

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 16

collective action, group loyalty (toward sects, tribes, political parties, religious institutions, etc.) got the upper hand.

On the other hand, the movement's message was blurred and weakened by opportunistic actors that offered new alternatives to the youth and revived fratricidal tensions. Although these youths initially shared similar objectives, their lack of political and social points of reference made them easy to manipulate by jihadist groups, populist movements, or Shiite militias (trained by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards and often perceived as proxies deployed by Teheran).

In a context of chaos, those young « have been increasingly left to the mercy of radical groups that promote dehumanized, even demonized perceptions of one another³⁰. » Therefore, the strong will of the youths to get their voice heard was eventually exploited in order to revive confessional polarization. That is especially the case for the young Iraqis who decided to join ISIS : they were exhorted to transfer their anti-establishment hostility (that was based on a relation that opposed streets vs. elites) towards a sectarian one (that eventually opposed Sunni provinces vs. the Shiite-dominated government).

From Hirschman's perspective, the will expressed by young Iraqis to join ISIS may be analyzed both as a "voice" and as a residue of "exit".

First, the young Iraqis who swell the ranks of ISIS are those who seek a platform for social expression, more than anything else. In this case, joining ISIS therefore represents a strong "voice". Indeed, in some young Iraqis' eyes, ISIS is both able and willing to « provide a sense of belonging to a collective inspired by ideals, namely establishing a caliphate, and to give opportunities for advancement within informal structures, allowing youths to gain prestige in their home environments³¹ ». This "voice" may be characterized as a radical one : it constitutes for young Iraqis a clear denunciation of what their state has not been able — or willing — to offer them over the past decade.

If we try to push the analysis even further, this radical voice might even be interpreted as a *negation* of the Iraqi state itself. In young Iraqis' eyes, joining ISIS in order to create a caliphate constitutes the ideal reprisal against a failed state that has unjustly deprived them of opportunities since 2003. In this very specific radical aspect, this "voice" actually becomes a residue of "exit" : indeed, for those young, building a new state over the existing one appears as the best way to claim loud and clear that they metaphorically wish to "exit".

At the end of the day, the initial common message carried out by the youths appears seriously dismantled : as the International Crisis Group points out, « youths flocking to either side of the sectarian divide [initially] faulted ruling elites on the same grounds but ended up fighting each other³² ».

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p (i)

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 27

³² *Ibid.*, p (i)

Conclusion and perspectives

The millennial generation grew up in the aftermath of the Anglo-American intervention, which wrecked the Iraqi state and threatened to undermine the very existence of the Iraqi nationhood itself. As we tried to demonstrate, young Iraqis may opt for different but overlapping alternatives to the current chaos : emigration, protest or combat. In order to concretely grasp this situation, we implemented Hirschman's tryptic analysis by broadening it to the social structures and actors at play in Iraq.

One must bear in mind that the main turmoil that this young generation currently faces is the absence of viable opportunities. Therefore, many young Iraqis wind up manipulated by opportunistic actors — such as fighting groups — that exploit the social and political vacuum of the Iraqi society and revive fratricidal tensions.

However, beyond the apparent enduring uproar, many concrete initiatives have been launched for a few years in order to overstep this fratricidal divide. In the words of Pierre-Jean Luizard, despite the discrepancies and difficulties that violently assault Iraq's youth today, « Iraqis are looking for a new pact of coexistence³³. » This idea sounds consistent with Haddad's analysis³⁴, according to which *arabism* — this common sentiment of Arab identity — is a strong producer of social bonds in Iraq, and this in spite of a deep confessional politicization that usually promotes Iraq to the rank of archetype of confessional struggles. To what extent can Iraq's youth pave the way for a new arabism beyond sectarianism and internal strifes ?

As mentioned above, many efforts destined to reunify the Iraqi nationhood beyond fratricidal tensions have been carried out both by the state and the youths.

On the one hand, since the political transition that saw Prime Minister al-Abadi replace al-Maliki³⁵, some reforms have been engaged by the government. Those reforms have been implemented following growing popular and clerical pressures³⁶. For instance, the sectarian quotas basis that has long handicapped the Iraqi political system has been removed. According to Feurat Alani³⁷, al-Abadi cleverly managed to turn the popular protests against the government into a non-sectarian patriotic struggle. In the eyes of many specialists, this attitude represents a brand new political effort to build a non-confessional and nationalist image of Iraq.

On the other hand, the youths have sought to both reinvent and reunify the nation through leisure activities, especially in Baghdad³⁸. Young Iraqis have launched campaigns and demonstrations in order to promote the vision of a united country. For instance, the campaign “Ana Iraqī wa ana aqrā” (“I am Iraqi and I read”), launched in September 2012, consisted in distributing books in the streets in order to incite young Iraqis to revive the rich cultural heritage of their country. This

³³ Luizard, *Op. cit.*, p. 13

³⁴ Haddad, *Op. cit.*

³⁵ Both of them belong to the al-Dawa political party though.

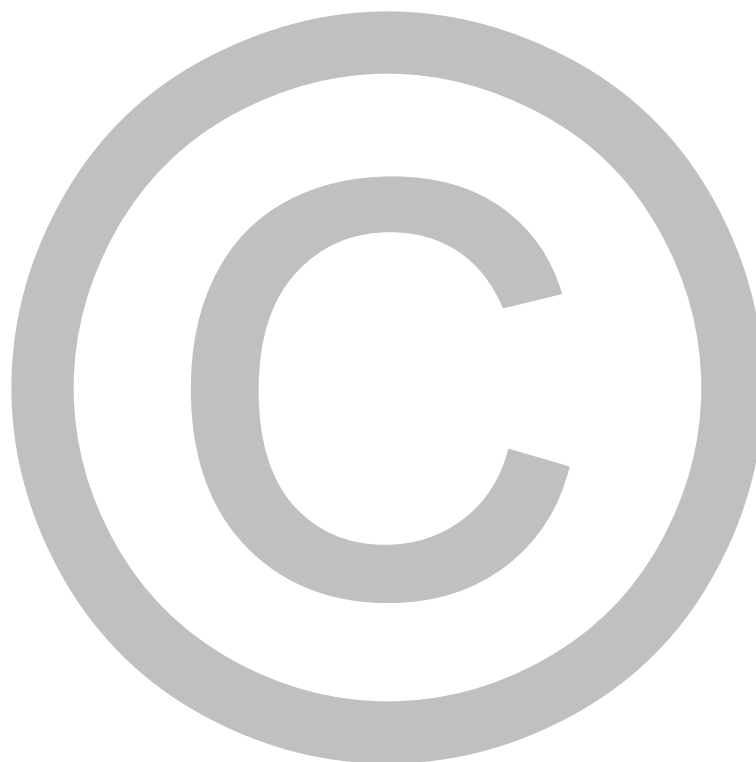
³⁶ Lately, the well-respected Iranian ayatollah al-Sistani has strongly influenced the actions of the Iraqi government.

³⁷ Reporter in Bagdad between 2003 and 2008 for iTélé, Ouest France, Le Point. Based in Dubai, he is now a journalist and producer for the agency In Sight Films, and regularly collaborates with Al Jazeera, Arte, Canal +. See <http://orientxxi.info/magazine/insurrection-citoyenne-en-irak,0991>

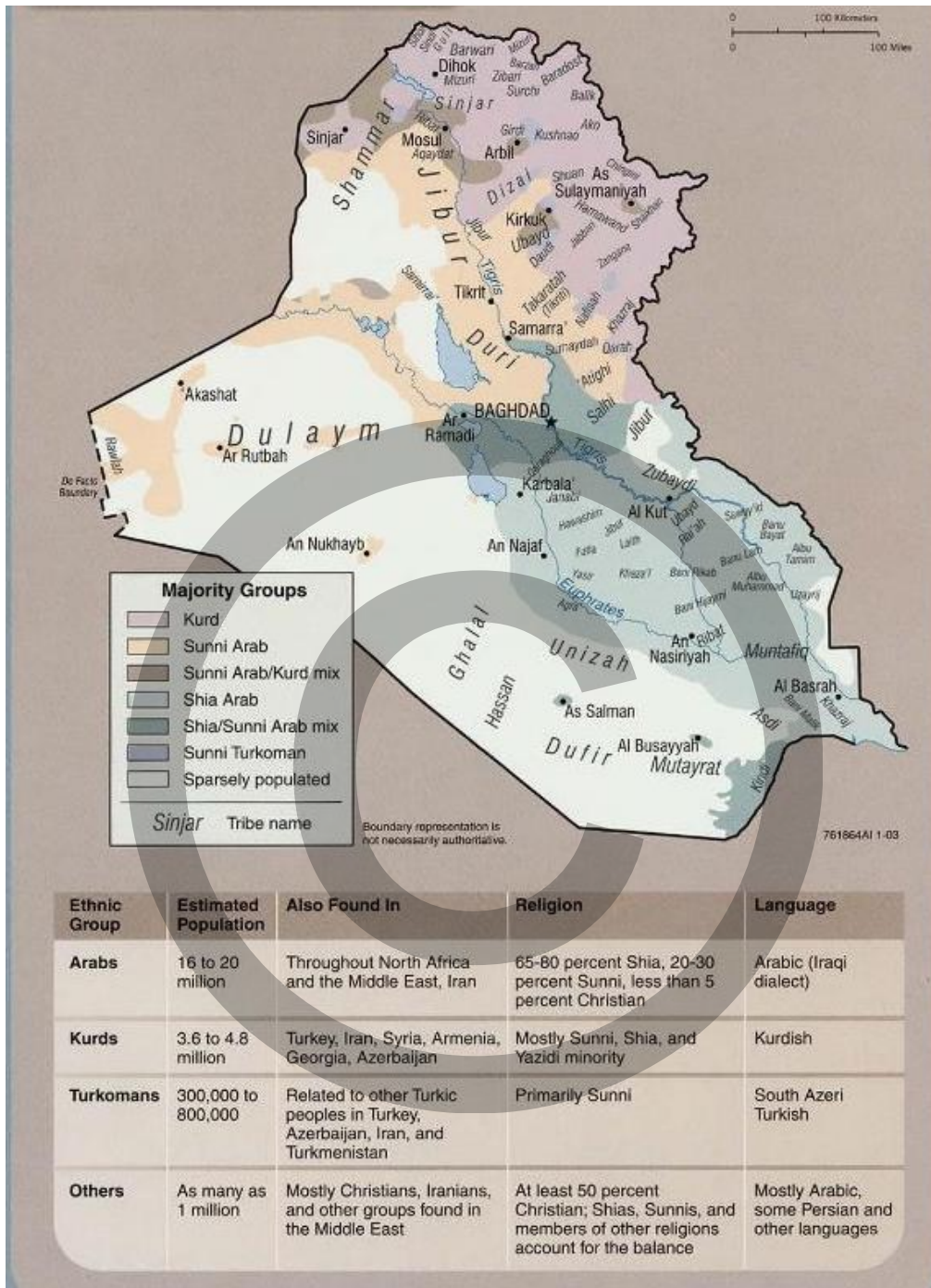
³⁸ Laurent Bonnefoy, Myriam Catusse, François Burgat, *Jeunesses arabes : du Maroc au Yémen : loisirs, cultures et politiques*, La Découverte, 2013. See also “Retrouver Bagdad” [online], <http://orientxxi.info/lu-vu-entendu/retrouver-bagdad,0376>

campaign, alongside with other initiatives launched by small associations such as “Yum al-thaqafa al-iraqi” (“The Iraqi day of culture“), was a way to scrap Iraq’s cultural decomposition. Always described as independent and apolitical, those initiatives are never actually neutral : they all implicitly strive to reactivate the idea of a mosaic nation sharing a common history, a collective set of values and ideals.

The government’s response to those campaigns sounds encouraging. By officially supporting those initiatives, and by helping them out concretely, the Ministry of Culture proved to be willing to rebuild the nation *from the bottom*, on a cultural basis, and more importantly, beyond sectarianism.



Appendix 1 : Distribution of religious and ethnic groups in Iraq (early 2003)



Source: "Iraq: Country Profile," Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) map found in "Iraq: Distribution of Religious Groups and Ethnic Groups," Map Collection, Perry-Castañeda Library (PCL) at the University of Texas at Austin, Jan. 2003. See <http://usiraq.procon.org/view.additional-resource.php?resourceID=002425>

BIBLIOGRAPHIE

REFERENCES

BONNEFOY, Laurent, CATUSSE, Myriam, BURGAT, François, *Jeunesses arabes : du Maroc au Yémen : loisirs, cultures et politiques*, La Découverte, 2013

CAMAU, Michel, "Globalisation démocratique et exception autoritaire arabe", *Critique Internationale*, n°30, 2006

CHARILLON, Frédéric, *Provocation, agitation, contestation : la stratégie des trublions*, in Bertrand Badie, *La fin du monde unique*, 2010

DAVIS, Eric, *Memories of the State : Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2005

HADDAD, Fanar, "Sectarian Relations and Sunni Identity in Post-Civil War Iraq," in Lawrence Potter, (ed.), *Sectarian Politics in the Persian Gulf*, Hurst Georgetown University's Center for International and Régional Studies, School of foreign service in Qatar, 2013

HIRSCHMAN, Albert, *Exit, Voice, Loyalty : défection et prise de parole*, Université de Bruxelles, 2011

HUDSON, Michael C., "The United States in the Middle East," in Louise Fawcett, (ed.), *International Relations of the Middle East*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013

ISMAEL, Tareq, ISMAEL, Jacqueline, *Iraq in the Twenty-First Century, Regime change and the making of a failed state*, Routledge, 2015

LOUER, Laurence, "Sectarianism and Coup-Proofing Strategies in Bahrain", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 2013

LUIZARD, Pierre-Jean, *La question irakienne*, Fayard, 2004

ROBERT CLARK, William, GOLDBERGER, Matt, GOLDBERGER, Sona, "An Exit, Voice, and Loyalty Model of Politics", Pennsylvania State University, available here : <http://mattgoldder.com/files/research/evl.pdf>

REPORTS

International Crisis Group, *Fight or Flight: The Desperate Plight of Iraq's "Generation 2000"*, Middle East Report n°169, 8 August 2016

International Crisis Group, *Make or Break: Iraq's Sunnis and the State*, Middle East Report n°144, 14 August 2013

International Crisis Group, *Déjà Vu All Over Again: Iraq's Escalating Political Crisis*, Middle East Report n°126, 30 July 2012

OTHER SOURCES

“Défection et prise de parole“, In Sciences Humaines [online], Evelyne Jardin, 1 September 2003, consulted on November 2016. Available here : http://www.scienceshumaines.com/defection-et-prise-de-parole_fr_13077.html

"Iraq: Country Profile," Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) map found in "Iraq: Distribution of Religious Groups and Ethnic Groups," Map Collection, Perry-Castañeda Library (PCL) at the University of Texas at Austin, Jan. 2003. Available online here : <http://usiraq.procon.org/view.additional-resource.php?resourceID=002425>

"Iraq Demographics Profile 2016," In Index Mundi [online], consulted on November 2016. Available here : http://www.indexmundi.com/iraq/demographics_profile.html

Les Clés du Moyen Orient [online], consulted on November 2016. Available here : <http://www.lesclesdumoyenorient.com/>

Orient XXI [online], consulted on November 2016. Available here : <http://orientxxi.info/>

