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Reconstituting the Resource Curse After Authoritarianism: Parastatal Organizations, Violence and Legitimacy Making in Post-Invasion Iraq

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science

in

Sociology

by

Zeinab F. Shuker

June 2017

Thesis Committee:
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The Thesis of Zeinab F. Shuker is approved:

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Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

Dedication

To the brave men and women who shared their stories with me. You are the creators of life and hope in the face of death and despair.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Reconstituting the Resource Curse After Authoritarianism: Parastatal Organizations, Violence and Legitimacy Making in Post-Invasion Iraq

by

Zeinab F. Shuker

Master of Science, Graduate Program in Sociology
University of California, Riverside, June 2017
Dr. Matthew C. Mahutga, Chairperson

In this article, I expand the theory of conflict in rentier states by looking at the process of legitimacy making after the collapse of authoritarian régimes. Literature on the resource curse shows that in the absence of an authoritarian regime, resource dependent countries tend to collapse into violent conflict (Collier and Hoeffler 1998, 2002). And while there is a wealth of research on the relationship between resources rent and violence, the question of whether or not legitimacy making occurs in rentier states when the authoritarian state apparatus is weakened – and what forms this process takes – is not fully explored. I argue that not only rent is a source that fuels the diverse and competing claims by the different groups in the country, but it also provides the financial resources for these groups to pursue those claims with not only violence, but also through "buying" and creating legitimacy. Limiting ourselves to research that only examines the relationship between violent conflict and resources undermines our understanding of the

full effect of the presence of resources in a country, how and why certain groups gain and maintain power, and the different layers of instability in that country. By drawing on the case of Iraq, my qualitative interviews with activists and journalists in Iraq provide evidence of the different techniques competing groups use to establish their power and authority. I find that the different competing groups engage in a unique and complex process of legitimacy making, and the failure or the success of that process plays a significant role in the survival of these group. This process seems particularly applicable and timely, even beyond Iraq, insofar as other states in the region (Libya) and elsewhere (Nigeria and Venezuela) are currently experiencing a similar confluence of a weak or failed state in the presence of oil revenues.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

THEORIZING THE RESOURCE CURSE 4

a. Resource rents, the failure of democracy and civil conflict 4

b. Power vacuums, the resource curse and non-violent barriers to democracy in post-war Iraq 7

DATA 10

RESULTS 15

Violent Competition 15

Legitimacy Making 17

DISCUSSION 22

CONCLUSION 24

BIBLIOGRAPHY 27

I. INTRODUCTION

Research on the resource curse establishes a link between resource rent and undemocratic political systems (Luciani 1990; Ross 2001)[1]. In the classic case of a rentier state, natural resources enable authoritarian regimes to persist by reducing the incentives for citizens to make demands of the state, and by providing the state with the resources to maintain its power (Luciani 1990). In addition, the literature shows us that in the absence of an authoritarian regime, rentier states tend to collapse into chaos and civil conflict (Collier and Hoeffler 1998; Ross 2004). And while there is a wealth of research on the relationship between resources rent and violent conflict[2], whether or not legitimacy making occurs in such states when the authoritarian apparatus is weakened is not adequately explored. I argue that rent provides the financial resources for these groups to pursue their claims with not only violence, but also through "buying" and creating legitimacy. Beyond violent conflict, this article sets out to further investigate other forms of conflict and fluctuating interactions between groups who vie for power.

Under the umbrella term conflict, there is a process of interactions and negotiations that cannot be observed in quantitative research. That is, not only is oil a source that fuels the diverse and competing claims by the different groups in the country,

[1] A rentier state is the state where 40% or more from the state's wealth must come from primary commodities – such as oil, agriculture and diamond.

[2] I make a distinction between violent and non-violent conflict in this paper. I argue that while conflict could take a violent and a non-violent form in the obscene of the central government, violent conflict is the more commonly studied aspect of conflict in rentier studies.

but it also provides the financial resources for these groups to pursue those claims with violence and, more uniquely, legitimacy campaigns. This process seems particularly important even beyond Iraq, as other rentier states are experiencing a similar state of instability due to the presence of oil revenues

By focusing on the case of Iraq, this article documents a novel political and social process by which oil rent undermines democratization even in the absence of an authoritarian regime. Since the U.S. invasion of Iraq, civil violence remains a central issue to the political and social condition in both the country and the region. I argue throughout this paper that the events occurring in Iraq are, to a larger degree, the product of Iraq's dependency on oil revenues. Even in the absence of an authoritarian regime oil continues to limit democratization. However, instead of inhibiting citizens' demand and procuring consent as it usually happens in the presence of a stable (and authoritarian) political system, when the state apparatus is weakened, oil instead fuels the uprising of alternative groups that compete for income, power and influence. In Iraq, these factions are comprised of tribal, religious and ethnic groups.

My analysis shows that oil rents incentivize competition over resource capture among politically motivated tribal, religious and ethnic organizations. The survival of these alternative forms of governance depends, to a large degree, on the existence of oil wealth, and thus, weakens the state structure even further. In addition, formal positions within the state bureaucracy are divided among these groups, which allow them to divert oil revenue back to their tribal, religious and ethnic organizations. Thus, they have significant incentives to accrue control over oil and wield the proceeds to benefit their

own interests. Combined with the long festering tribal and sectarian animosities suppressed by different regimes from the 1950s to 2003, oil-fueled conflicts between these parastatal organizations undermines the emergence of a unified civil society that could potentially mobilize for democracy in post-war Iraq.

To establish this argument, I conducted 16 structured and semi-structured interviews with activists and journalists in Iraq. Since I am interested in the process of legitimacy making in rentier states in the absence of a long-standing authoritarian regime, Iraq provides an ideal case to examine this process for two reasons. First, a largely exogenous external force ousted Hussain's authoritarian regime, which allows one to observe changes in a context of the absence of an authoritarian central government. Second, oil remains the key economic resources for the country and its effect on generating corruption and violent conflict is well established in previous research. Through looking at the interaction between these different organizations and the activists in the civil society, I believe we will be able to highlight the patterns of the different legitimacy-making techniques these groups use against those who are most active and vocal against them to establish their own power and authority.[3]

In the following sections, I will first start by highlighting some of the relevant theoretical and empirical research on the resource curse, namely the effects of oil on political equilibrium and on violent conflict, and how this previous literature help us form

[3] I am using Weber's conceptualization of legitimacy here. More specifically, I mean that these different competing groups have authority through domination (which they obtain through violence) but also through obtaining the consent of the their population, which make their authority legitimate to that population. The most common type of authority in Iraq is that of the traditional authority of the tribe, ethnic and the religious group.

our understanding of the Iraqi case. Second, I will discus the methods as well as the findings of this research. And finally, I will address the theoretical contributions of this research on understanding the case of Iraq specifically, and on advancing the larger theoretical framework of rent.

II. THEORIZING THE RESOURCE CURSE

The rentier economy is defined as "an economy where the creation of wealth is centered around a small fraction of the society [the political elite]; the rest of the society is only engaged in the distribution and utilization of this wealth" (Luciani 1990). Research on rent comes in two main forms. The first one examines the political economy of rent and its effects on the nature of the political system in a rentier state (namely authoritarianism). The second addresses how rent affects the duration and intensity of civil conflict.

a. Resource rents, the failure of democracy and civil conflict

There is an increasing interest in the concept of the resource curse across a range of social-science disciplines. The concept of the resource curse suggests that as resource dependency (particularly export dependency) increases, democracy is reduced and authoritarian political systems tend to form. For example, Tsui (2005) argued that oil reduces democracy by 30 percentage points per 100 billion barrels discovered. This is possible, as Beblawi argued, because oil resources elevate the pressure of accountability on the state through one or more of three mechanisms. First, governments in rentier states are less likely to tax the population, which reduces their incentives to demand

accountability. Second, resource dependent states use oil revenues to buy patronage and loyalties, which puts less pressure on the state to democratize. Finally, oil revenues provide the government with enough resources to stifle the formation of social groups (civil society organizations) outside the state, which limits democratic mobilization. All three mechanisms undermine democracy.[4]

Research also found that rent affects the duration and intensity of civil conflict after the collapse of the authoritarian political system in the state. Collier and Hoeffler (1998, 2002) found that, after covering 52 civil wars between 1960 and 1999, increasing resource dependence from 0% to 32% pushes a state's risk of civil war from 1% to 22%. Collier and Hoeffler (2000) also found that revenues from primary resources finance violent conflict, which makes civil conflict more likely to occur. They argued that "the extent of primary commodity exports is the largest single influence on the risk of conflict" (2000:26). Similarly, de Soysa (2002) and Fearon and Laitin (2003) found that oil exports increase the likelihood of civil conflict in a country. This effect extends to other natural lootable resources, such as minerals and gemstones (Aslaksen and Torvik 2006).[5]

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[4] This process occurs on two levels. First, the rent from primary resources provides the state the freedom from depending on other political parties and powers (the state could easily buy the votes it needs). Second, rent from primary resources provides the state with the tools to use violence against the opposition. The combination of these two factors is what undermines the civil society in rentier states.

[5] Extensive research looked at the relationship between the type of natural resources and the type of conflict, as well as the duration of conflict. For example, oil is associated with the onset of civil war, 'lootable' commodities like gemstones are correlated with the duration of conflict, and agriculture commodities are uncorrelated with civil wars (Ross 2004).

While researchers looked at the relationship between conflict and natural resources, they also looked at the possible explanations for why natural resources significantly increase the onset of conflict. Rent availability from natural resources gives the different competing actors an incentive to engage in separatist and non-separatist conflict. For example, Collier and Hoeffler (2002), Le Billon (2001) and Ross (2003) suggest that separatist conflict is more likely when the resource is more difficult to estimate, when the resource is physically concentrated and requires foreign investment, and if the resources are extracted through a capital-intensive process, as is the case with oil. As a result, oil rents have a particularly pernicious impact on the level of civil conflict in oil-dependent countries. In addition, research shows that rent seeking is preferred over other modes of production, which makes the different competing groups less motivated to seek different forms of production (Torvik 2002: Olesson 2004).

On the one hand, as Ross (2004) summarized, quantitative studies of natural resources and civil war fall into one or more of five categories of the resource-conflict relationship. These five aspects include whether or not natural resources start conflict, whether or not resources influence the duration of conflict, whether or not resources create a specific type of conflict, whether or not all types of resources are linked to conflict, and finally what kind of casual mechanisms link conflict to resources (2004:338). On the other hand, qualitative research and case studies provide us with data on the causal links between conflict and resources. For example, studies by Jackson (2001) and La Billon (2000, 2001) examine the process by which dependency affirms identity of the different competing groups through violent conflict. Other studies look at

violence committed by the state in the presence of resources (Harvey 1998; Scott 1985; Uvin 1996).

b. Power vacuums, the resource curse and non-violent barriers to democracy in post-war Iraq

What's missing from the above argument, however, is whether or not the different competing groups in a conflict situation also engage in legitimacy making. When I first started this project, I was set to investigate the question on why democracy is still not emerging in Iraq after the collapse of the old authoritarian régime of Saddam Hussein. As I started talking to my subjects, in an attempt to highlight the obstacles they face, I found that every person that I talked to pointed out in one way or anther towards the different competing ethnic, religious, and tribal groups. However, instead of talking about violent competition, my subjects spoke of a complicated process of legitimacy making that these different groups are adapting. This particular element is missing from the theories of conflict and competition in rentier states.

Legitimacy and legitimacy making is central to survival of the different authority forms. For example, according to Weber, legitimacy is central to the process of domination. He argued that domination requires an element of voluntary compliance amongst those who are being dominated. As a result, legitimacy involves a belief amongst those being dominated in the rightful authority of the dominant individuals. Since Weber, social psychologists, theorists of political transition, and institutionlists have argued that the survival and success of organizations, as well as new forms of governing depend on legitimacy. For example, social psychologists, such as Dornbusch

& Scott (1975), separated the dual aspects of legitimacy described by Weber into validity and propriety. Propriety is the individual's belief that the current social order is desirable and appropriate. While validity is defined as the individual's belief that he or she must obey that social order even if that individual personally disagree with the nature of the social order. Similarly, organizational ecologists argue that organizations gain legitimacy when their existence and prevalence are taken for granted (Hannan and Carroll 1992). As a result, these organizations depend on gaining the public and cultural support of the population (Meyer and Scott 1983).

Furthermore, in order for organizations to gain legitimacy, they must create their legitimacy in relation to already existing cultural norms and reasons (Douglas 1986). In addition, these organizations need more than material and technical resources to create their legitimacy and to maintain it. Legitimacy, in fact, is created and maintained through an ongoing cultural endorsement, and it's based in the superaorganizational belief of social order and reality (Scott 1995; Suchman 1995).

However, the legitimization of a new structure, as Johnson et al. (2006) argued, requires four steps: innovation, local validation, diffusion, and general validation. Innovation of a new social structure comes as a response to a need or desire by the actors as a response to structural conditions. However, in order for that new social structure to be validated the actors must relate that new structure to an already existing and accepted cultural frameworks and beliefs. Once the structure is validated, it needs to spread into other locations, and thus, this new structure is transformed into a social fact. Finally, this new structure become a taken for granted social fact in that society.

Zelditch and Walker (2003) argued that legitimacy, once created, it maintain the status quo of these taken for granted views in four steps. First, the authority structure and the status quo that govern the behavior of the group appear to have validity for the members of that group. Second, the validity of the structure (and its norms) allows the member of the group to continue engaging in widespread compliance with the structure. Third, compliance is also maintained by formal and informal sanctions against the members of the group. And finally, the different individuals accept the structure as a given.

The outcome of the success of this process in Iraq is that these competing groups became effectively governing bodies outside the state apparatus. More specifically, these competing groups create popular support, through discourse creation. This allow them to collect the votes they need to have access to power and resources from rent through occupying parliamentary and governmental positions. As they gain more power and resources, they are able to control discourse and to create meaning, which gives them more power and resources. And while violent conflict is still present, this process of legitimacy making by and through "parliamentary democracy" is more powerful, successful and dangerous on the overall stability of the country. An example of this is the legalization of the Hashd al-Shaabi (a Shia militia)which used these tools of legitimacy to gain power not only to become part of the state's military forces, but also to become a political ethnic entity (Mansour 2017). It is important to note that their power, which is exercised in rural and urban areas, even in places that were historically outside the control of the tribal and ethnic law, is a direct reflection of the weakness of both the state

apparatus and the civil sphere in the country. This weakness is the legacy of Saddam's 35 years effort to undermine and destroy the civil society, the weak state institution after the collapse of his authority, and the US policy in the years that followed. (Al-Ali 2014; Bremer 2006; Faust 2015; al-Khalil 1990)

To summarize the story, the inherited weak political institution, the division of the country vertically along ethnic and religious lines, the high level of corruption, and the recently re-born yet fragmented civil sphere, facilitate the rise of alternative governing groups. Citizens identified more strongly with their tribe and religious sect, rather than with an Iraqi nation. Moreover, the average citizen feels mistrustful of traditional political institutions. After years of living in fear and terror under Hussein's political regime, alienated citizens found a sense of self and identity among their tribes, religious and ethnic sects.

III. DATA

Iraq represents a unique case study with which to expand our understanding of the link between resources rent and conflict in post authoritarian countries. Iraq is the fourth largest producer of crude oil in the world and oil production has been occurring in the country since the 1930s (OPEC 2017). As a result, Iraq's dependency on oil is not a recent issue. In addition, under Saddam's rule Iraq was governed by an authoritarian central government, which one could argue was the direct result of dependency on oil (Ross 2001). Thus, resource dependency has been an important part of the Iraqi political, economic and cultural history. Now, Iraq is more dependent on oil revenues than any

other country in the Middle East, and oil production account for two-thirds of the country's GDP, 95 per cent of government revenues, and 99 per cent of total exports (Sassoon 2016).

However, the U.S. invasion of 2003 in many ways hit a "reset" button such that the contemporary process of political and social transition represents a version of the more difficult to observe antecedent processes of conflict in resource-dependent countries. This transitional moment allows one to witness the interactions between the multiple groups competing for political supremacy, and the impact that oil-wealth has on these interactions. Much of what we already know about contemporary Iraq—years of violent ethnic war—is utterly explicable within the existing body of resource curse literature. Indeed, a recent report from the Heritage Foundation suggests "Iraq's ongoing economic reconstruction has become increasingly fragile. The central government's weakness, the presence of powerful vested interests, and political volatility have hindered difficult policy reforms, undermining the limited but measureable progress made in past years. Grave security threats and instability continue to aggravate economic and humanitarian crises" (2016).

However, the imposition of a quasi-democratic form of parliamentarian governance and the close supervision by US and international bodies also altered the incentive structure of competing factions. I argue that these conditions, combined with lingering ethnic and tribal cleavages previously held in check by authoritarianism, have created a parallel, extra-violent path to democratic impedance. Here, competing ethnic, religious and tribal groups have become parastatal organizations. Predictably, they do

engage in violence. But they also engage in well-organized legitimacy campaigns at the local level that include alternative means of law enforcement and economic development programs. Because these groups become localized governing bodies outside the state apparatus, they undermine the development of a unified Iraqi national identity and both weaken and delegitimize western pluralist democracy.

To investigate the diversity and the complexity of legitimacy making in the Iraqi society post-2003, I conducted 16 structured and semi-structured interviews with activists and journalist in the Iraqi civil society. Since I am interested in observing the larger patterns of action committed by the different authorities in the country, I unpacked this mechanism through looking at the interaction between these different organizations and the activists in the civil society because I believe we will be able to see the full extent of the different techniques these governing groups use against those who are most active and vocal against them.

My approach to this research is rooted in the methodological approach of the extended case study. In other words, I attempt to highlight the general from the unique, to make the transition from the micro to the macro, and to add to the already established theories of rent. As a result, in my conversations with the activists and journalists in Iraq I was interested in their own accounts and daily experiences of how competition and legitimacy are created daily in Iraq. And my own understanding and analysis is rooted in the theories of rent and resource dependency.

The interviews were conducted during the summer, fall and winter of 2016 and 2017, and the participants were identified through snowball sampling. Most of these

interviews were done in Arabic, and translated later by me. Out of the 16 interviews, four of these interviews were conducted in English. In addition, the interviews were done through Skype, What's app, and Viber. The subjects were 13 males, and 3 females. All are very active members in the civil society in different capacities, and all have worked in one capacity or another since 2003. Occupation wise, they ranged from unemployed to physicians, and when it comes to their education, it also ranged from high school graduates to professors.

The interviews covered three main themes: first, the background of the participants, which gives us a better understanding of who are the people who are part of the political and civil process. Second, the questions covered the nature, definition, and conditions of the civil sphere in Iraq, according to those who are part of it to help us understand the conditions these different competing groups are operating in. Finally, the questions highlighted the different legitimacy making tools these organizations use. Using Atlas.ti, I coded the interviews to reflect the emerging patterns that I started to see in the interviews. In other words, my coding and sub-coding reflects, first, who are the individuals and groups who are participating in the civil society. Second, what type of civil action they are involved in. Third, what is the make and the nature of the current civil society. Fourth, what types of authorities (tribal, religious and ethnic) exist within the social, civil, and political spheres. Fifth, How these authorities interact with the activists and organizations in the civil society. Sixth, what is the role of the state in these interactions. And finally, how these relations are changing across time and space.

Finally, doing this research has proven to be challenging logistically and emotionally. First, as I was limited by time and resources, as well as, by security threats, I was unable to travel to Iraq to conduct one-on-one interviews with my subjects in person. As a result, it was fairly difficult to find subjects, establish trust with them, and actually conduct interviews, while accounting for the time difference, their access to the internet, and their ability to locate free time to sit down and talk to me online. While the interviews I conducted are very rich and informing, I acknowledge that 16 interviews could give us only a small picture of the complexity of the Iraqi experience. In addition, I believe that conducting participant observation and attending meeting and collective action with these participants, as well as documenting their interactions during these events with the different authorities, would have added a new depth to our understanding. However, my identity as a refugee from Iraq allowed me to establish connections and trust with the subjects, despite the difficulties mentioned above. After all, I was born and raised in the country, I lived there under Saddam's rule, as well as during the most intense and violent period of the civil war in the country. All of this has provided me with the prospective, as well as the tools, to understand and unpack the Iraqi ethos and mentality. Undoubtedly, I am studying Iraq because of my connection to my identity as an Iraqi-American, and thus, talking to the subjects has proven to be very rewarding, yet challenging and often times emotionally draining.

IV. RESULTS

As I indicated in the beginning of this paper, the primary goal of this research is to highlight the complex role, and unpack the mechanisms, by which conflict and legitimacy making take shape simultaneously along side violence in a rentier state. I argue that not only is oil a source that fuels the diverse and competing claims by the different groups in the country, but it also provides the financial resources for these groups to pursue those claims with not only violence, but also through "buying" and creating legitimacy. These themes emerged clearly in the interviews. On the one hand, I observe patterns of competition that take the form of tribal, intra-ethnic, and inter-ethnic conflict. On the other hand, these different competing groups also engage in a complicated process of legitimacy and meaning making, and the level of influence and the survival of a specific competing group depend on the degree of success of these groups in legitimizing their claims. This process takes several forms. For example, ethnic-religious political parties are often directly involved in organizing within the civil society, either with or against civil groups and individuals. In addition, tribal groups are actively involved in enforcing law and order among the people.

a) Violent Competition

One reason behind the unleashing of sectarian conflict after 2003, and ultimately civil war, was the politicization of long repressed sectarian identities in a political vacuum. Conflict was less about an historically deep hatred between the different ethnic and tribal groups than it was about the circumstances that opened the door to conflict and competition. These circumstances include both competition for resources, as well as a

desire to reclaim the "taboo" identities that some ethnic groups (e.g. southern Shia) were forced to discard under Saddam's régime. As the theories of resources would predict, conflict and violence took place between the different ethnic, religious, and tribal groups. However, conflict is not constant between these groups. Rather, conflict occurs sporadically between periods of inter-group equilibrium. As Haidar explained,

> There is the state authority, which is the military and the police. Then comes the authority of the militias that don't follow any law, and sometimes it follows agendas from outside the country. And there is the authority of the tribe. These three authorities [are] the mix that runs the society. In the beginning they fought, the militias and the tribes fought in several places. The militias and the state fought in several places as well. There are many examples, like the Mahdi Army and the state, Al Mahdi Army and the tribes, Al Asaib and the tribes, but now there is unity between them. Each group knows its boundaries. As a result, now if there is a conflict between a militia and a tribe, whichever is the stronger it will establish its authority and law.

He continues:

> There is a scenario that is always being repeated where we reach a period of collusion between the different parties, whether they are Sunni-Sunni parties, just like what's happening now. And in reality, it's happening now between the Sunni parties after the liberation of Al-Anbar. For example, there are assassinations between the different groups. What's most dangerous is the Shia parties that created armed groups and these armed groups want power. This collusion is terrifying…But it won't last.

However, even though conflict is not constant, these groups exercise a great deal of power and control, and a portion of their power comes from their ability to enact violence, as one subject explained,

> In Baghdad inside the city, I don't want to call it the ghetto area, but the middle class and the lower class areas, and housing clusters and something like that. They have more tribal tendencies and they tend to solve their problems through the tribes, whether it was tribal war, and I was actually there when it happened. They evacuated, they evicted a small Community,

> 25 houses, because one of them killed someone from another tribe. So the verdict was to kick them out of the area. So they just displaced 25 families. It's getting even tribal orientation in Baghdad.

b) Legitimacy Making

In addition to violence, legitimacy making was taking place. The level of influence and the survival of a specific competing group depend on the degree of success of these groups in legitimizing their claims. Legitimacy making occurs in different ways: first, these religious-political parties are directly involved in creating art projects, lectures, the establishment of TV stations and newspapers, or simply using images to create propaganda. This, I argue, allow them to control discourse. For example, when the offensive began last October to free Mosul from ISIS control, Qais al-Khazaali, the leader of Asaib Ahl al-Haq, has promised that the battle against ISIS will be won, and the Shia Muslims will avenge the death of Hussein. This became especially possible after many Shia militias were officially incorporated in the Iraqi army. Today, driving between Erbil in the Kurdish region to Mosul requires driving through multiple checkpoints, many of them are controlled by Shia militias that are affiliated with the Hashd al-Shaabi and the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU). These Shia militias are part of religious political organizations. Driving through these checkpoints, one could see images that represent the values and the culture of the Shia ethos, such as the black flag with swords. These images that are taken directly from the history of the Shia in Iraq and serve to both foster deep emotional connections and enforce identity among Shias, as well as signal the strength of these Shia militias to the Sunni civilians (Mansour 2017).

Second, these groups also provide access to jobs, prestige, and protection for their members. However, for one to access these positions, they need to emphasize their ethnic, religious and tribal identities, which I argue this will undermine the national identity on the long run. For example, one subject described the scale of this economic dependency:

> They control people through clientelism. They managed to stay in power because one of the reasons is that they expanded the number of public sector jobs and bureaucracy. There are about six million, four million and a half are employed and one million are retired, and all of them depend on these groups to get their salaries.

A third way these groups seek legitimacy is through directly engaging in the civil society, as one subject described the involvement of these groups in humanitarian work.

> Religious organizations are working in a way…They focus on the financial and civil aspects, and even for them, many of these religious parties have volunteering groups and humanitarian organizations provide humanitarian work and many things for the society… I saw that after the liberation of Fallujah, Takrit and al Ramadi many of the religious leaders in Najaf sent many humanitarian help to the western regions. And at the same time this displacement is the biggest evidence and prove that things are changing after 2007, after many displaced people from al Ramadi and from al Fallujah and from Salah al Dean and from Mosel all mostly went to the Shia regions… now we have many religious groups and they are all working. They all have humanitarian organizations and charity groups and they are all working on this area.

In addition, these groups engage the civil process either through direct participation in the civil society or through limiting the work of secular civil activists. For example, during the protests that started in 2015 in Baghdad and some of the southern cities, many civil activists went to the streets to protests the ineffectiveness of the government after the 2014 elections. However, along side secular activists, many

religious activists, especially the supporters of the Shia clerk Moqtada al-Sadr, went to the streets as well, as one subject described,

> The face of the protest was a religious face. Religious people were present and secular people were few…They were divided into two parts, one part close to the statue, where the religious people and those who had a religious motivation, and there were no secular people there. Even their slogans looked at the same, so you can tell they are together.

However, while there were some positive interactions between some of these religious protesters and between secular activists, most of the subjects that I interviewed have been victims of violence committed by these groups, during or after protesting.

> There was an accident. If you remember, there was a space called Freedom Square in the front of the statue. The religious people were standing there. In the beginning they used to stand together, religious and secular, and all of a sudden we heard shouting and there were women standing there. What happened is that there was some talk against these women, and some harassment. So there was a separation and shouting. Also, among the religious people there were spies. They will send them to the secular parts, and these people will dress like the secular people so we cannot know the difference. They will come to the secular part, where the secular and the Communists will stand, and they will ask questions and pretend they have no idea of what is going on, only to try to figure out what is happening on the secular part, so they can take the information back.

This violence against secular activists doesn't stop with attacks against protesters. For example, subjects who wrote, lectured, or organized against the action of some of these religious and ethnic parties were threatened or had their reputations attacked by members of these organizations. As one subject explained, "if you publish anything about religion…we say that religion should organize our lives, but not interfere in it, and they call you an infidel." Another subject (a journalist) recalled an incident he and his colleagues had during their work during the battle of Tikrit.

> We documented a beheading, two beheadings actually. And we just, we wrote down what we saw. So we had our protege, an American, received death threats. His picture was published on a pro-militia TV channel. They portrayed that this man is offending the popular mobilization forces or Al-hashad al-shabi as locally called and immediately on social media, and outrage by their followers, they were calling for his exile from the country and things escalated to they were demanding his head. We were shut down for three months. We were told to lay low or to leave the country if possible. I wasn't able to leave the country; I have to stay in my home. I had to leave my neighborhood for three months because of the nature of the threat and the seriousness of, I was forced to lie to my parents, telling them that we have remodeling at the office because it was a very serious situation and this side, this side, it was threating us very powerful and influential in the government. The issue was resolved when a senior manger of the company managed to talk to he prime minster during his visit to New York in September 2015, and the manager in Iraq met the head of this militia then they would leave us alone. We agreed, the agreement was for the manager who wrote the story to be forbidden from entering Iraq in exchange for the safety of the locals… The side that was attacking us was Asaib ahal al-hak pro-Iranian militia and till this day, every time we go to cover news on battle front we hear whispering between soldiers or fighters saying oh these guys are reports, don't talk to them, don't give them any news. Anytime we would write something about the atrocities committed, burning of houses, looting, we will get kicked out of the battle field or they will threaten us not to come. So we always in the constant fear of we need to watch what we writing, we need to be politically correct or we need to be on their good side.

Shutting down civil activists allow these competing groups to undermine the power of the civil society, and to enforce their own legitimacy by being the only alternative force in the streets.

A fourth way tribal and religious groups legitimate their authority is by employing their own customs to resolve local disputes. These customs tend to be anti-democratic in nature, but more importantly shape patterns of interactions and thinking among the population, especially the younger generations. In addition, normalizing the tribal and

religious law is undermining the legitimacy and the power of the formal state institutions.

As we see in these examples:

> The neighborhood that I live in…I know many friends in the police station, they say, "if there is a problem it will get solved between the tribes." They kill each other, or they assault each other, and they just exchange money or whatever and solve it. They exchange gifts; this gift could be a woman. The elders think this is the best solution to give a woman or a wife, and the problem is solved based on this. One time I witnessed two people fighting, one person hit the other and the person died, the people with that person called their tribe. A police car came by and they tried to help, the people told them that this is not their business, "we will solve it between each other." The policy man got in his car without an argument and left.

Another participants named Ali adds:

> Some people were threatened, and honestly, the religious authority, especially in Kurdistan, they control everything. So they were threatened. I didn't see anything, but I heard about a friend, a journalist, published a little time ago that there is an activist in Slamanyah was threatened by religious groups because he was an activist. This happens all the time… And honestly, the government is letting them do what they want, because as politicians they are doing nothing, and no one could afford to do anything to them now…There is no politics, the state is failing and it is not serving the people, so how can activists do anything, and half of the country is already gone, and the religious people can say anything they want.

Sarmad recalled a similar incident:

> Awhile back there was this guy called Hatam Al Shmari from Maysan, Al Amarah, he criticized a council member on Facebook. The whole thing termed into a tribal conflict, and tribes started to threaten each other and the government threatened to arrest they guy, and so on.

V. DISCUSSION

From what we have seen so far, these different competing groups are engaging in a complex process of legitimacy and identity making. These actions are not simply a reflection of the power – obtained through violence – of these groups, but they are, in fact, calculated steps taken by these groups to enforce their legitimacy. First, undermining the power of secular activists, through threats and reputation attacks. Second, pleasing and strengthening their base, through providing jobs and protection. Third, reaching for a new base outside their traditional ethnic and religious regions, through humanitarian work and propaganda. And finally, undermining the strength and value of the state, through disregarding the laws of the state and normalizing the laws of the tribe and the religious group. As a result, these groups are actively creating masses of people that depend on them, identify with them, fight for them, and even die for them, while at the same time these groups undermine the strength of the secular civil society and the traditional state apparatus. The religious, ethnic and tribal group that excel in both violence and legitimacy making is the group that could gain better access to more resources, more power, and thus, it will survive longer.

How this process came to be? After the collapse of Saddam's régime, the U.S. government advocated the creation of an ethnically diverse governing body. As a result, the first ruling consul that was established after the U.S. invasion had 12 Sunni members and 13 Shia members. With the emphasis on creating a representative government of the different ethnic, religious and tribal groups, politicians found that it is in their interest to emphasize their own sectarian identity to mobilize their voters and establish their base. In

addition, the collapse of the political institution after the defeat of Saddam's government, left a political vacuum that provided the perfect environment for the rise of new forms of governing. As a result, post-war chaos and divisions were most obvious in the way the political process was conducted. Positions of power were divided among leaders of major religious and ethnic groups, and thus reinforcing the notion of division rather than unity among the population, and especially among youth, who found that they could gain more – whether it was jobs, protection, prestige, etc., -- through associating with these groups. When the election of 2005 happened, which was considered one of the freest election in the country's short democratic history, the people who were elected were religious leaders, politicians who were part of religious-political parties, tribal leaders, and political parties that had a very clear association with one sect or another. Political parties that had an ideological political agenda were marginalized, and couldn't score many, or in some cases, any seats without associating themselves with larger religious and ethnic political campaigns. With time, the parliament came to be dominated with these religious and ethnical groups, while political parties were pushed to the side.

Access to oil resources allowed these political leaders to regenerate the system of welfare and rent that exists in most rentier states – and in Iraq during Hussein's time – but on a smaller scale, targeting only their specific population with things like access to jobs, protection, enforcement of laws, and access to educational programs, among other things. Thus, the new political elite had the ability to enforce their own power by not only violence, as previous research indicated, but also through creating their own form of propaganda and identity making.

As a result, With the continues dependency on oil as the main source of wealth, the weak intuitions the state inherited from the old régime, and the mechanism the oil generates in rentier economies of creating corruption, these leaders held on to power through having an access to resources that helped them establish alternative systems to the weak institutions of the state. They created militias that provided protection, used the tribal system of justices rather than the legal system, created propaganda through establishing newspapers and TV stations, and created identity for their followers that is based on the association of these followers with that group, rather than with the state. All these factors had generated a phenomenon where these groups became an alternative form of governing that enforce law and order, and create identity and culture, while the role of the state in it's traditional form, and the role of the civil sphere as a sphere that represent the population as a whole, is diminishing.

VI. CONCLUSION

I argued in this article that in addition to violent conflict, a complex process of legitimacy and meaning making occur in rentier states after the collapse of the authoritarian government. General theories of the resource curse have tended to ignore this aspect of conflict in rentier states. As a result, this article comes as a response to expand our understanding of the phenomenon. In looking at Iraq as a case study, I observed that the different religious, ethnic and tribal groups became effectively governing bodies outside the state apparatus. More specifically, these competing groups create popular support, through controlling discourse. This allow them to collect the votes

they need to have access to power and resources from rent through occupying parliamentary and governmental positions. As they gain more power and resources, they are able to create more ideology and meaning, which gives them more power and resources. And while violent conflict is still present, this process of legitimacy making by and through "parliamentary democracy" is more powerful, successful and dangerous for the overall stability of the country. In addition, these groups utilize several tools to create and maintain their legitimacy. These tools include, creating "civil society" organizations, creating TV stations, creating newspapers, using social media, organizing events and protests, providing access to jobs and protection, and creating and enforcing laws outside of the state apparatus. The danger of these groups comes in the form of their ability to create alternative identities to their members, and thus undermining the national identity in the process, and their ability to become governing bodies outside of the state apparatus, and thus weakening the power of the central state further. One can clearly see that this particular situation is a threat to the formation of a democratic political institution. After all, these groups are creating their own ideologies, identities, system of laws and interaction, and their own system of domination and legitimacy. They are also in control of power and resources, and the traditional state structure is their tool to access these resources. As a result, they are unlikely to engage in any meaningful effort to build a functional political institution that will most likely undermine their own power. And since the population is either divided in loyalties to these different groups, or it is made of secular individuals whose their only tool of influence is a fragmented and weak civil society, these groups are in fact the greatest danger against the survival of the Iraq state.

In addition, I argued that looking at this transitional moment of the Iraqi case in depth will provide us with the starting point towards understanding conflict and governing in other rentier states. And while Iraq is the focus of this case study, the purpose of this paper was not to provide a historical recall of the modern history of Iraq, nor it was designed to provide a detailed historical examination of Iraq and its institutions. The purpose of this research was to examine the patterns that are emerging in the interviews and to develop a theoretical reasoning along these patterns.

VII. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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