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"City of a Million Shards": Neighborhood Barriers and Sectarian Division in Baghdad

In the aftermath of the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, the city of Baghdad has experienced increasing civil conflict and extensive transformations in the geography of urban life. These changes have produced profound shifts in Baghdadi identity, security and sense of self, culminating in visible trends towards homogenization, segregation and insularity within neighborhoods and populations. These trends follow a post-occupation logic which positions sectarian identity, in this case the alignment to Sunni or Shi'a sects of Islam, as the defining factor of urban life. Government policy, urban architecture and military strategy have created overlapping regimes of sectarian division within the city, exacerbating tensions between Sunnis and Shiites and perpetuating unprecedented levels of conflict and hostility. These divisions, partially connected to longstanding conflicts between Sunnis and Shi'as, were utilized by the occupying forces as well as local militia leaders to destabilize and re-order modern Iraqi identity along sectarian lines. "Iraqis and their districts have been labeled according to the occupier's dehumanizing vocabulary," writes author Haifa Zangana "Iraqis are no more. They are Sunnis, Shi'as, Radical, Sunni terrorists, Sunni Arabs or Muslim extremists" (11).

Compounding these tensions, a rigorous program of forced displacement and architectural separation, embodied in the form of 'neighborhood walls', forced many residents into homogenized and militarized sectarian enclaves. From 2006 to 2011, over 44 barrier walls divided Baghdad neighborhoods such as Al Adhimiya, Al Dubat, and Sadr City. While ongoing efforts to remove the walls began in 2009, they were not totally dismantled and the effects of separation architecture are still deeply felt in the social fabric and political landscape of the city. Sectarian violence, including attacks perpetuated by the Sunni-Wahabi Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, remain commonplace. 13 years after the beginning of the US-led invasion, Baghdad is now

a

space fractured by a pervasive logic of sectarian segregation, forever marked by massive urban architectural programs aimed at concentrating and controlling residents based upon their sectarian identity.

Much of this tension is the direct result of political and military interventions brought on by the US-led occupation and the resulting Iraqi insurgency. Local extremist groups, who carried out much of the displacement, vied for territory with the US-led occupation, leading to the increased destabilization of Baghdad's security due to territorial, not sectarian, conflicts. The existence of widespread civilian protests against sectarian walling of neighborhoods as well as diverse examples of intersectarian cooperation and co-existence undermine the narrative of an intractable historical conflict unrelated to the political changes brought about by the occupation. Ultimately it can be concluded that, rather than addressing a rise in sectarian tensions, the occupation forces' strict policy of enforcing ethnosectarian divisions contributed to severe damage to the urban landscape of Baghdad. These policies also resulted in the entrenchment of sectarian conflict and the perpetuation of cycles of isolation, mistrust and retaliatory violence. While small reductions in violence were seen in the city during the height of sectarian segregation, the overall effect was "some safety with the price of strong social and economic isolation and stagnation" (Almukhtar 8), occurring along with the creation of deeply-felt divisions between Sunni and Shi'a groups.

Conflict between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims has played in important role in the history of both Islam and the nation of Iraq. Stretching back hundreds of years to the first caliphates of Islam, the divide between these two sects has been both a catalyst for armed violence and a point of leverage utilized by colonizing forces to divide local populations. Differences between the two sects can be traced back to a disagreement about who should lead the Islamic faith following the death of Islam's founder, Muhammed, in 632 CE. Followers of Sunni Islam, the faith's largest sect, believe that that Muslim community correctly elected Muhammed's father-in-law, Abu Bakr, as the first Caliph. Shiite Muslims believe that Muhammed's son-in-law and cousin Ali was the founder's true successor. Disagreements about the line of succession led to a series of sectarian attacks and assassinations in the years following Muhammed's death. War between the two sects broke out in 656 CE and reached a high point

with the assassination of Hussein, a beloved Shiite leader and imam, at Karbala in present-day Iraq. Following

the assassination of Hussein, sporadic conflicts have developed between Shiites and Sunnis, catalyzed by the

development of a devoutly Shiite government in Iran and a Sunni government in Saudi Arabia, two regional

superpowers. While both sects agree on the holiness of the Quran and the basic tenets of Islam, the sectarian split

has resulted in noticeable derivations in prayer practice, religious leadership and interpretations of Islamic law.

Furthermore, naming cultures reflective of admiration for Sunni and Shia historical leaders have strongly

encoded the belief that a person's familial name or surname can be used to correctly identify their sectarian

background. As we will see, this assumption is complicated by the high incidence of inter-sectarian marriage in

modern Iraq.

Sectarian divisions within Iraq are influenced by a variety of unique factors. Most critically, while the

Pew Research center has found that "[o]f the total Muslim population, 10-13% are Shi'a Muslims," they make

up "65-70%" of the Iraqi population. Despite their majority, they have rarely held positions of political control in

the country, and Sunni leadership has often been cemented with policies that privilege and empower Sunni

citizens and religious movements. This historical struggle between the majority Shi'a population and Sunni-

aligned governments has defined Iraqi history, becoming even more prominent in the era of British colonialism.

During World War 1, British rulers actively courted Shiite support while promising increased freedom and

political representation in the royal government. "After the war," writes researcher Ches Thurber "the British

instead installed Faisal, a Sunni Hashemite prince...Though Iraq experienced several revolts and coups over the

course of the twentieth century, national leadership had always previously remained in Sunni hands, culminating

in the brutal dictatorship of Saddam Hussein" (1).

Though Saddam Hussein's Sunni-aligned Ba'ath party continued to oppress and disenfranchise Shi'a

citizens, sectarian tensions gradually faded from public prominence in Baghdad. Prior to the 2003 invasion,

Baghdad was increasingly seen as a multi-sectarian urban space where "Sunni, Shiite and Christian lived side by

side, conscious that they belonged to different sects but not frightened of one another" (Cockburn). A young

Iraqi blogger, writing under the name Riverbend, described this period, saying "I remember Baghdad before the

war—one could live anywhere. We didn't know what our neighbors were—we didn't care." Despite sectarian

bloodshed in other parts of the country, notably a brutally repressed uprising of Shi'as and Kurds across Iraq

following the end of the Iraq-Iran war in 1991, Baghadad remained a space of relative peace between different

sects. The US invasion of Iraq in the first 'Gulf War' did little to affect prevailing sectarian order in the capitol,

and left Saddam Hussein and his ruling Sunni Ba'athist party in full control of Baghdad. While Sunni-dominated

governance established a sectarian hierarchy of power under Saddam, it was "often noted by Iraqis that Shi'a and

Sunni Arabs living in Baghdad did not regularly experience sectarian discrimination or segregation" (Damluji 4).

In 2003, operating under the unfounded suspicion that the Ba'ath party possessed 'weapons of mass

destruction' which might pose threats to American interests, a US-led coalition of western forces invaded Iraq.

They reached Baghdad in April of 2003, toppling Saddam Hussein's regime and building a heavily fortified

military complex, the 'Green Zone', in the heart of the regime's former palaces. To protect the Green Zone, the

US first began to establish checkpoints and install massive barrier walls, creating "the same sort of bubble that

American oil companies had built for their workers in Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, and Indonesia" (Chandrasekaran

11). Protected by its high walls and restrictive security measures, the Green Zone became Baghdad's first

fortified enclave, prefiguring American military policy in the years that would follow. Following the

establishment of the Green Zone, a series of disastrous political choices, including the full disbanding of the

mostly-Sunni Iraqi Army, led to widespread resistance to American occupation, culminating in a massive swell

of insurgent violence across the city.

This insurgency, which originally targeted predominantly coalition forces, soon expanded to bombings

and assassinations aimed at the newly formed Iraqi government, mostly composed of Shiite opponents of the

Ba'athist regime in collaboration with US forces. Due to the pre-existing political dimensions of sectarian

identity, the violence of the insurgency, swelled in numbers by the now-disbanded army, took on a decidedly

sectarian character. The rise of a Sunni political faction, Al-Qaeda in Iraq (later to be known more famously as

The Islamic State in Iraq), is widely seen to have pushed sectarian conflict in the city to a tipping point. Al-

Qaeda in Iraq's leader, Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi instigated a series of attacks on Shi'a citizens, aiming to not only

re-assert Sunni control of the city but to also "spark a national conflagration that would keep the U.S. military

tied down in Iraq for years on end" (Thurber 3). Al-Zarqawi's "explicit aim was to incite sectarian violence in

Iraq" (Carpenter 15), coordinating attacks specifically designed to provoke retribution, install sectarian mistrust and create an environment of conflict in the occupied city.

Many multi-sectarian neighborhoods within the city took strong stances against the increasing violence being committed under the name of sectarian difference. Neighborhood watches were formed to resist infiltration and attacks by sectarian forces, and they interrupted burgeoning sectarian violence with "conflict resolution, inter-family dialogue, tribal dialogue, respected individuals (i.e. 'wise old men'), respected families, and the 'street' intervention of friends and passersby" (Carpenter 19). One resident recalls standing guard over his neighborhood with a multi-sectarian neighborhood watch, saying that "we considered any attack on the neighborhood as one against the whole people not only a particular sect" (Carpenter 15). According to Thurber:

> Both Shia and Sunni tried to show restraint in the face of Zarqawi's brazen attacks. Shia clerics condemned the bombings but pleaded for their followers not to seek revenge. A shopkeeper living in Baghdad's Zafaraniya neighborhood told the International Crisis Group, for example, that "most of us offered protection to our Sunni neighbors, as they were very afraid. (Thurber 4)

As conflict escalated on both sides of the divide, attempts to cooperate across sectarian lines were countered by violence specifically aimed at perpetuating sectarian conflict. When sectarian militias entered his neighborhood, one Sunni Imam "refused cooperating or having any connections with them...He tried to help a Shiite man who was chased, and he [the Imam] was shot" (Carpenter 14). Sectarian violence, far from being the norm in many neighborhoods of Baghdad, was instead often deliberately sown by extremist elements in contrast to neighborhood groups whose goals were to "protect neighborhood boundaries rather than drive out residents, and 'keep out extremists' rather than carrying out attacks in other places" (Carpenter 15). By leveraging sectarian tensions, extremist groups such as the Sunni Al-Qaeda in Iraq and the Shiite Mahdi Army were able to secure territory in the city and consolidate political power in certain neighborhoods

The US military, who "were not given enough time to put together the best blueprint for what [was] called Phase IV—the ongoing reconstruction of Iraq" (Hoffman) often ignored or exacerbated these cycles of

provocative sectarian violence. By siding almost exclusively with Shi'a elements in Baghad, the US forces were seen as arming and supporting key actors in the sectarian conflict. Beginning in 2003, the US Coalition

Provisional Authority(CPA), under the control of L. Paul Bremer, began a process of explicit sectarian favoritism in the selection of new government officials. He created the Interim Governing Council, specifying that "the council be composed according to sectarian criteria, and set quotas that predetermined a Shi'a majority" (Damluji 74).

Furthermore, perpetuating a narrative of deeply entrenched sectarian violence may have allowed US forces and their allies to redirect attention from the growing insurgency formed in response to the US occupation. A focus on the ethnosectarian dimensions of violence in the city, including the significant and tragic death toll, "distract[ed] attention from the continuation of military violence," (Gregory 11) and allowed the occupation forces to shift blame from failures in military policy to an obscure religious conflict outside the US's control. While the "effects of conflict were primarily the result of military and political strategy" (Almukhtar 5), this redirection allowed the occupation forces to avoid the political consequences of increased violence while also strengthening their ability to control the urban space through selective leveraging of sectarian violence. According to Haifa Zangana, "many Iraqis believe that the US information machine covered up their failures by portraying the slowly mounting armed insurrection underway in Baghdad as militias in neighbourhoods fighting each other" (Zangana 3).

Furthermore, though much of the US narrative centered around the role of Sunni insurgents like Al-Zarqawi, an anonymous source reported to the Washington Post that "of all the bloodshed in Iraq, none may be more disturbing than the campaign of torture and murder being conducted by US-trained government police forces" (Zangana 4). The US encouraged a high permeability between Shi'a militia elements and the Iraqi police, further complicating efforts to resolve conflict or investigate violence fairly. A Los Angeles Times report stated that "Shi'a militia factions dominated the ranks of Baghdad's police force, and that these militiamen had been encouraged to enlist in Iraq's national security forces under CPA order 91" ("Killings Linked to Shiite Death Squads"). Reports of death squads composed of members of the Iraqi government, police and counter-terrorism

forces were common. Night-time raids on Sunni neighborhoods "reportedly involv[ed] armed men dressed in police or military uniforms arriving in cars bearing state emblems" (International Crisis Group 8).

The growing incidence of sectarian violence took a drastic turn in 2006, beginning what is known as the Iraqi civil war. Attacks on US and coalition troops had increased as "numbers of the insurgents rose from more than 15,000 to approximately 20,000 in April 2006 and the number of daily attacks to 185 per day by the end of the year" (O'Hanlon et al.). Sectarian violence also reached new heights. In April of 2006, a prominent Shiite mosque in the Samarra neighborhood was destroyed by members of Al-Zarqawi's militia. "As many as 1,500 Iraqis of both sects were killed in retaliatory violence in the days following the Samarra bombing" (Thurber 7), unleashing an uncontrollable wave of conflict across the city and overwhelming attempts at reconciliation of the sectarian conflict. Attacks on neighborhoods such as Sadr City, as well as markets like Sadriyah killed over 500 civilians. In one particularly gruesome episode, 40 Sunnis were executed by a Shiite death squad as retribution for an earlier car bomb attack. As cycles of retaliatory violence gripped the city, car bombs, death squads and random killings were used by militias of both sects to attack their rivals.

The effects of the civil war on Baghdad were profound. Average citizens, who had once "regularly married, resided and worked together in shared communities, families and neighborhoods," (Damluji 71) were now thrown into the midst of an escalating civil conflict, mostly guided by extremist groups and worsened by the condition of a foreign occupation. Efforts at self-defense in individual neighborhoods became increasingly aligned with sectarian identity, as militant groups monopolized violence in particular areas to gain control of territory. One Iraqi militia member described how the "goals and identity of the armed groups shifted from self-protective to sectarian over time" (Carpenter 6), as non-aligned neighborhood militias were overwhelmed by sectarian pressues. A shift towards widespread retaliatory violence polarized previously non-aligned citizens into stances of sectarian resentment and violence, following a pattern described by Carpenter and her team:

Psychological changes include the development of hostile attitudes, perceptions, and goals toward an 'other' group, including tendencies toward blame and fear. Blame encourages retaliatory conflict spirals

by inducing anger and a desire to punish; fear induces defensive conflict spirals wherein 'each party

reacts so as to protect itself from a threat it finds in the other's self protective actions' (Carpenter 6).

Reeling from the unexpected insurgency, mostly carried out by former members of the Iraqi armed

forces, and eager to regain control of the urban landscape from sectarian forces, the US attempted a bold new

strategy in cooperation with the nascent Iraqi government to stem the tide of sectarian violence. A complex

system of barriers, including checkpoints, ID controls and blast walls, would be used to cut off and control

access between neighborhoods. Described by military strategistsDavid Kilcullen as 'the urban tourniquet', the

strategy of creating sectarian enclaves had three specific goals: the control of entry into walled neighborhoods,

the prevention of attacks originating from walled neighborhoods, and the increase in cooperation with

occupation forces. Kilcullen, like many Iraqi and US military leaders, believed that the walled communities

" [do] not represent oppression of the population, but rather protects them from insurgent intimidation"

(Kilcullen), a claim rejected by the thousands of Sunni and Shi'a protesters who marched in Adhamiya against

the construction of the walls. General Brigadier Qassim al-Moussawi stated that building of walls is "one of the

tools to confront acts of violence and is a military strategy which allows the implementation of the military

offensive against the insurgents on one hand and restricting their movement on the other hand" (Abdul Aziz).

Restrictions on movement were applied to all residents entering or leaving an area, and often involved the use of

ID cards, iris scans, fingerprint scans and other biometric data.

This system of creating 'sectarian enclaves' involved the massive displacement of Baghdadi citizens, as

"80 per cent of Baghdad's households fled their formerly multi-ethnic neighborhoods" (Carpenter 4). The

International Medical Corps estimated that by 2007, during the height of the campaign to displace residents into

sectarian enclaves, over 430,000 Baghdadis were forced to move from their homes ("Iraqis on the Move").

Residents who lived in neighborhoods where they did not form a sectarian majority were often harassed,

threatened or attacked by opposing militia elements, either leaving by choice or being forcibly displaced to make

room for incoming residents, themselves sectarian refugees from other neighborhoods. The International

Organization for Migration reported that residents were subjected to explicit threats through "phone calls, text

messages, leaflets and grafitti" (Damluji 78). Sunni and Shiite militias often swept through mixed neighborhoods,

displacing or killing residents of the opposing sect in order to create homogenized sectarian enclaves under their

control. These enclaves then began a process of arranging armed militia members, along

with Iraqi and US security forces, to control access to neighborhoods through the use of checkpoints. Members

of opposing sects were stopped at the single entrance to the now-walled off neighborhoods and denied access,

often simply on the grounds of having a Sunni or Shiite name. These massive displacements caused cascading

effects within Baghdad's residential market, as a sharp rise in demand caused a skyrocket in prices. This had the

effect of "pushing up rental prices in relatively secure areas [and] resulting in the eviction of families who could

not pay the increased rent" (Damluji 78).

The most visible aspect of the process of sectarian division was the construction of over 3,000 individual

segments of 20 foot tall concrete blast walls, as well as the deployment of hundreds of shorter 'Jersey' barriers,

much like the ones used to divide freeway traffic in the United States. These blast walls often fulled ringed entire

neighborhoods such as Al Adhimiya and Al Ghaziliyah. While the construction of sectarian enclaves was

promoted as a way to protect both Sunni and Shiite residents from sectarian violence, it quickly became clear

that the majority of the walls would surround Sunni neighborhoods. These neighborhoods, considered the most

'vulnerable' by US military authorities were often left "cut off and surrounded by the opposing sect," (Damluji

89) leaving many to wonder whether the effect of the walls was to keep opposing sects out or to hem in and

control the Sunni population, whose insurgency had provided the most significant military challenge for US

forces since the beginning of the invasion. The civil war also triggered the destruction of many of Baghdad's key

pedestrian and traffic bridges, including some that spanned between neighborhoods which were subsequently

walled in. One Baghdadi noted the particularly devastating effect that these destructions wrought, saying "I saw

the Jumhuriya Bridge today. It's very sad to see a bombed bridge. A murderous action, for it destroys a link"

(Zangana 5).

In contrast to many Western military strategists, who viewed the barrier systems as a solution to pre-

existing sectarian hostility, scholars such as Sarah Almukhtar view them as veiled attempts at controlling the

urban space of Baghdad for the purposes of military occupation. Almukhtar argues that a logic which situates

sectarian barriers as a response to hostility is an inversion of fact. In her view, these "strategies are exclusionary, promote segregation and division among Baghdadi people, and reduce mobility in and access to the city - in other words, they were the catalysts for ethno-sectarianism" (Almukhtar 8). In many cases, the construction of a

barrier occurred in a neighborhood which had not experienced sectarian conflict. For example, the construction of a wall between the Al Baia'a and Al A'amil neighborhoods in 2008, "outraged residents who demonstrated in their thousands asking the US military for an explanation since the two districts have been peaceful with no violence, sectarian or otherwise" (Zangana 7). The plan to wall Sunni enclaves such as Al-Adhamiya, supposedly for the protection of residents from Shiite militias, was greeted by thousands of Sunni and Shi'a protesters who carried signs reading "Children in Adhamiya want a Baghdad without walls" and collectively "expressed a desire to restore the heterogeneous neighborhood they had once known" (Damluji 80).

Suspicions that the program of sectarian enclaving had been pursued with motives other than resolution of the civil war were widespread, beginning with Al-Adhimiya, the first neighborhood to be walled. Based on conversations with other native Iraqis, Zangana reports that "from the start, the 'sectarian conflict' justification for the Adhamiya wall was not convincing, coming as it did in April 2007 at the height of resistance activity in Baghdad and its condemnation by all the neighbourhoods." (Zangana 8). One defense official reiterated the role of the enclaves as primarily a counterinsurgency strategy, saying to the Los Angeles Times that "you can create [walled communities] to control the population and its movements, and make it more difficult for insurgents to operate" ("Plan Calls for Zones of Safety"). Furthermore, the occupation forces are just one of a series of actors who stood to benefit from the formation of these enclaves. "Security services of the client regime; local warlords; security firms and surveillance technology manufacturers; corrupt local officials acting as gatekeepers and go-betweens; and local gangsters controlling economic activity" (Zangana 7) all reap rewards from sectarian violence. The system of sectarian barriers ultimately represented a "criminal capitalism characterized by local monopolies and 'sole agencies'" (Zangana 8). Many have described the incidences of sectarian conflict not as a spontaneous explosion of built-up tension, but rather a calculated territorial expansion, carried out by extremist militias pursuing "strategic practices designed to eliminate Sunni or Shia civilians from designated areas in the city" (Damluji 74).

Though protested by many, these programs of division and 'enclaving' became the de facto strategy of urban occupation in the city starting in 2006, leading some residents to claim that "promoting civil war isn't enough...it is now time for America for physically divide and conquer" and others to state that they now live "in

[their] own little prison" (Gregory 35). Reduced mobility, increased violence and the proliferation of systems to regiment and identify citizens have led to multiple analogies to imprisonment, with Iraqi scholars claiming that "these spatial disfigurations based on the age-old colonial strategy of 'divide and rule' have manufactured 'carceral' landscapes in Iraq," creating "people that have been criminalized and controlled by these structural impositions of coloniality" (Mehta 2). Many have noted similarities between forms of sectarian division seen in Baghdad and the partition and segregation of Palestinian communities in the West Bank. Filmmaker Ghaith Abdul-Ahad explains that his native Baghdad more and more "resembles the West Bank" (Abdul Ahad), a sentiment echoed by Abu Qusay, a pharmacist from the walled neighborhood of Al Adhamiya who asks bluntly "are we in the West Bank?" ("In Baghdad, a Wall Rises"). Mona Damluji also connects this period of time to "dark memories of Sarajevo in the 1990s" (72), evoking another city that experienced deep fractures in access and movement due to sectarian violence brought on by conditions of military occupation. Scholars such as Peter Shirlow have noted that other cities which have developed sectarian enclaves have experienced a worsening in sectarian tensions. He notes that in Belfast, the site of a brutal conflict between Christian sects, the "reorganization of space, due to violence, increased separation and re-emphasized the fundamentals of ethno-sectarian division" (Shirlow 198).

While the creation of these sectarian enclaves was proposed as an effort to heal and protect Baghdadi citizens, it had the effect of fracturing intersectarian lines of connection, depriving local populations of economic and social access, and alienating members of different sects from each other. Iraqi poet Sinan Antoon writes "the Baghdad that once existed, in which its inhabitants could move around and experience the city relatively freely, no longer exists", leading him to refer to modern Baghdad and its isolated residents as "the city of a million shards." Mehta describes the shift brought on by the sectarian enclaves as a change from "holistic honeycomb-like configuration into a fragmented topography of splintered prison-like enclaves dominated by the panoptic surveillance of the 'neo-colonial fortress' and the vigilant eyes of the sectarian militia" (Mehta 6). Ultimately,

these physical barriers became barriers to social, economic and intersectarian life, contributing to cycles of poverty, isolation and violence that indelibly harmed the fabric of Baghdad's previously multi-sectarian urban landscape.

Movement and social networks were especially vulnerable to the architecture of sectarian division. Daily travel between neighborhoods became incredibly dangerous, making the maintenance of social and familial networks difficult, and complicating long-established habits of visitation, shopping, burial and celebration. While, according to Derek Gregory, "socio-human interconnectivity and the multiple choices of services and markets are what make a city," (5) the interruption of urban space with sectarian barriers consistently denied Baghdadi citizens these resources. Culture, tradition and intergenerational connection were all severed or destabilized with the new sectarian order. Baghdadis were now required to take difficult, circuitous trips to reach the single entrance and exits of their neighborhood, "making it almost impossible for the elderly to get out or visit relatives in other areas" (Almalaf Press). Haifa Zangana warns that these processes have had "enormous impact on family and social life since visiting the elderly or being with them is a sign of respectability, appreciation and continuity of culture and traditions" (8). These interruptions of urban connectivity also leave Baghdadis "increasingly isolated in their gated neighborhoods, making it more difficult for them to get to school and work or to safely operate their shops and restaurants" (Almukhtar 8). The resulting economic woes have the potential to generate further sectarian conflict, as "unemployment rendered young people more vulnerable to the gradual adoption of sectarian attitudes and behaviors" (Carpenter 11). The creation of sectarian barriers has promoted an environment where residents experience a diminished 'right to the city' and "little to no control over the fast paced transformations occurring around them" (Almukhtar 11). The separation of individuals from wider communities, along with restricted exposure to members of other sects and increasingly fractured urban space, all contribute to destabilizing trends within the city, making populations vulnerable to conflict.

Social networks, trade and movement all affect a community's ability to resist sectarian violence and build reconciliation. By creating intersectarian relationships and fostering regular communication, these forces "help people organize in times of tensions, and function as a positive feedback loop for strengthening people's belief in the possibility and benefits of peace, which in turn motivates peaceable behavior" (Carpenter 4).

Consequentially, policies and programs that directly interrupt urban connectivity contribute to cycles of retributive violence and sectarian hatred. As Carpenter's research notes, the destabilization of social and familial

networks, combined with reduced access to urban resources, constitute "structural changes that accompany conflict escalation and drive it forward toward inter-group violence" (Carpenter 6).

Cultural values central to Iraqi identity across sectarian lines have also been stressed. Hospitality and welcoming, core values in the Islamic faith, became risky activities in the newly divided landscape. One Iraqi noted that "while in the past people of all neighborhoods used to welcome any stranger coming in the neighborhood asking about a particular person and they helped them, this has changed" (Carpenter 21). This stressing of social fabric fractures intimacy and closeness amongst members of communities, harming the overall strength of social bonds in the city. "People used to know each other very well, unlike now," reports a resident of Palestine Street "the people had a stronger relationship with each other" (Carpenter 22). Public celebrations that had previously brought together members of different sects in periods of rejoicing, such as the feast of Ashura, were strictly curtailed by the lack of intersectarian access.

While efforts to remove the walls were successful in some neighborhoods in 2009, others have remained permanently demarcated by sectarian barriers. A New York Times writer reported in 2010 that "no one is seriously talking about taking the walls down around neighborhoods like Amiriya and Qadisiyah" (Nordland). While there was a lull in violence following the US troop 'surge' of 2006 and 2007, some report that the rise of large sectarian militias like the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant have indicated that sectarian violence may be a fixture in Iraqi life for many years to come. Following the stabilization of political life in 2007, many Iraqis were hopeful about the removal of the walls and the future of sectarian cooperation, but with the rise in ISIL attacks, "this hope is quickly vanishing" (Almaki 28). In 2016, plans were unveiled by by Iraq's Interior Ministry to build a 65 mile long wall and trench around Baghdad "in a bid to prevent militant attacks" ("Iraq Builds Wall and Trench"). Considering the effects seen inside Baghdad as a result of walling individual neighborhoods, there are concerns that walling off the entire city may sever communications and social networks between cities just as they have interrupted connections between neighborhoods.

Diverse critics of the system of sectarian enclaves have pointed out multiple negative effects on long-term stability in the city, arguing that the stark isolation and violent dislocation of multi-sectarian neighborhoods contributes to the perpetuation of sectarian violence. While the walls may have causes temporary lulls in large-

scale attacks, they have also "bolstered sectarianism, isolating Iraqis from their neighbors and leaving them increasingly dependent on militias like the Mahdi Army for food, supplies and protection" (Niva). Rather than providing the stability on which to found a dialogue about reconciliation, the system of sectarian enclaves has hardened the resolve and entrenchment of extremist elements, exposed communities to displacement and severely hampered economic and social growth in the city. Narratives of intractactable sectarian violence are directly and causally related to voluntary choices made during the initial occupation, as well as Iraqi government policy informed by US support. Acting as what journalist James Denselow calls 'a temporary freeze' in the conflict, a structural encouragement of extremist violence has "prevented the possibility of genuine strategies to address sectarian segregation and establish conditions for a lasting reconciliation between Iraqi Sunnis and Shi'as" (Damluji 80). Ultimately, the failures of the US occupation and government policy in Iraq serve as tragic examples that sectarian segregation and the creation of sectarian barrier architecture is counterproductive, deleterious to social identity, and contributes to the perpetuation of violence within the urban landscape.

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