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### **The Clash of Cultures in Iraq after the First World War**

From sociological point of view, the First World War was an extraordinarily important event in Iraq. Before the war, the Iraqi society was almost isolated and had a highly integrated culture. During the war, and afterwards, the European civilization suddenly began to pour into Iraq. It caused a disturbing social change and clash of cultures.

In the present paper a brief sketch of these changes and clashes is attempted.

#### **The Old Pattern of Culture**

The local culture which was prevalent in Iraq before the war revolved around two complexes — the Islamic rituals and beliefs on the one hand, and the nomadic values on the other. From the idealistic point of view, there was a certain kind of contradiction between the Islamic teachings and nomadic valuation, but in reality people were not aware of it. They were nomadically inclined in their social behaviour, while fanatically clinging to the ritualistic and doctrinal aspects of Islam.

Approximate statistics in the middle of the 19th century showed that 35% of the Iraqi population were purely nomadic, and 41% were rural with strong tendency toward nomadic and tribal organization. The rest were towns' people who were semi-nomadic in many aspects of their social life.

The nomadic values had been continuously penetrating the Iraqi society from the neighbouring desert during the Ottoman regime. The local government was too weak to enforce law and order throughout the country. People resorted, more or less, to nomadic and tribal organization in order to maintain a relative safety of their lives and property. (See the writer's book, *A Study in the Iraqi Society*, Baghdad, 1965).

### The First Impact of Civilization

Before the war, Iraq had a very limited contact with the European civilization. Few cultural traits from Europe had penetrated Iraq. During the war, the British army began to invade the country. Eventually, it defeated the Ottoman army and occupied the whole country. European civilization was brought to Iraq on a large scale as a result of the British occupation.

It should be noted here that the coming civilization was sophisticated in comparison to the native material culture of Iraq. People were mentally overwhelmed and astonished by it. Airplanes, automobiles, trains, telephones, gramophones, moving pictures, etc. seemed miracles in their eyes. Many of them tried to explain the puzzle by saying that the Europeans were "illegal children of the Devil", if they could achieve such extraordinary things.

### The "Ġihād Movement"

Since the beginning of the war, the Ottoman propaganda was concentrated on the idea that the British were "kāfirs", that is to say, unbelievers whose purpose was to destroy the religion of Islam. The religious leaders issued a holy decree to the effect that the duty of all Moslems was to fight against the invading "unbelievers". Many tribesmen and townspeople were enlisted in this "ġihād" movement. The "ġihādis" lost their first battle against the British army, and were completely dispersed. But the ideology of the "ġihād" continued to influence the Iraqi people for a long time after the war.

They believed that the new civilization was a "kāfir" business which had anti-Islamic intentions. They considered everything brought by it devilish and ungodly. They prohibited the adoption of any item of European dresses, institutions or concepts, such as hat, trousers, shaving of beard, hair toilette, modern school, unveiling of women, reading of newspapers and learning of a European language. Even the idea that rain comes from vapour, or that the Earth is spherical in shape, were regarded irreligious and prohibited.

### The Conflict between the Modernists and the Traditionists

The modernists who tried to follow the new path of civilization were very few in the beginning. Their number grew with the passing of time. They were looked upon by the majority of the people as Europeanized "kāfirs".

In 1924, a severe conflict and controversy arose between the two groups as regards the unveiling of woman. Another conflict arose, around the same time, as regards modern schools, and so on and so forth.

The conflict continued until the present time. The traditionists were losing battle

after battle. Many of them found themselves contradicting themselves within a short time. They found themselves drifting along the line of Europeanization shortly after they had declared their condemnation of it. For example, most of those who condemned the unveiling of woman in 1924 saw their daughters afterwards unveiled without any effective sign of protest.

### **The Weakening of the Religious Attitude**

As a reaction to the traditionalists' ideology, the modernists developed a contrary one. Since the traditionalists believed that everything new was bad, the modernists thought just the opposite. They looked upon the religious rituals and beliefs as things of the past which must be reactionary and harmful. Atheism or skepticism as regards the existence of God became a widespread fashion among them. They compared the old religious beliefs with the new European doctrines in the same way as they compared the mule caravans with the modern vehicles of transportation. They mocked at any person who tried to be religious and modernistic at the same time.

Nationalism, along the fascist and Nazist line, began to spread among them. Nationalism seemed to fill the place of the lost religion in their unconscious minds. During the Second World War, the Nazist propaganda overwhelmed the country to an extent which, I suppose, could not be reached by any other Arab country.

After the Second World War, the communist ideology began to rival the nationalist one in Iraq. It was very successful in certain districts of the country.

### **The Rapid Growth of Public Criticism**

Public opinion was very weak in the Ottoman regime. The majority of the people had a fatalistic attitude toward the injustice and clumsiness of the government just as they did toward natural catastrophes such as flood or epidemic. In fact, they had a religious consciousness rather than a political one.

Democratic ideology began to spread in the country immediately after the First World War. It was extremely encouraged by the religious consciousness and the "ḡihād" movement. People revolted against the British occupation mainly on the basis that it was "kāfir" i.e. non-Moslem. The well-known revolution of 1920 was instigated and strengthened by such idea in the first place.

The Iraqi people were officially asked, for the first time in their history, what sort of government they wanted and whom they liked to be crowned as a king. When Fayṣal I was chosen in 1921 as a king, people hoped that he would help them in winning their independence and establishing a real democratic government. They finally found that their hope had failed and the king became a tool in the hands of the British. Consequently, political tension began to develop and accumulate year after year. Political parties and newspapers worked on agitating the public opinion.

When the national army became strong enough, several coups d'état took place. Each one of them enhanced the political consciousness among the mob.

### **Outburst of the „Effendi” Class**

“Effendi” is a Turkish word which usually means a person who has graduated from a modern school and became an official in the government. In the Ottoman regime, the “Effendi” formed a highly esteemed and closed class in the Iraqi society. Most of them were Turks. Few of them were of Iraqi origin.

In the last stage of the Ottoman regime a limited number of modern schools were opened in Iraq, but they were almost monopolized for the children of the “Effendis”. After the First World War, modern schools began to be opened on a large scale, and children of all social classes were admitted.

In the beginning, the traditionists looked down upon modern schools and regarded them irreligious, as we have mentioned, but this negative attitude disappeared within a few years, particularly after the economic depression of 1929. People began to look upon schools as means for guaranteeing a good future for their children. They began to send their children to schools for the purpose of making them “Effendis”.

The economic dislocation, which will be mentioned afterwards, intensified the trend. Children all over the country became ambitious to be enlisted within the “Effendi” class. Consequently, the government faced two problems: first, the opening of schools which would sufficiently satisfy this rapidly growing need, and, secondly, the finding of governmental jobs to absorb the growing number of the new “Effendis”.

### **The Economic Dislocation**

Before the First World War, towns' people were content with their old-established handicrafts and small-shop business. When the new factory-made commodities poured into the country after the war, many craftsmen and shopkeepers found themselves out of business. The new industry which began to develop in Iraq was too small to absorb the large number of the unemployed.

Those who had influential relatives or friends were able to obtain jobs, more or less, in the governmental offices and institutions. The rest remained on the verge of starvation, and became discontent and ready to be agitated by political partisans and demagogues.

In the rural districts another sort of economic dislocation and disturbances took place. Tribal organization began to disintegrate after 1931, when cultivated lands began to be surveyed and registered in the names of the “Sheikhs”. The “Sheikhs” were no more dependent on their tribesmen to fight against hostile tribes. They became owners of the lands instead of being chiefs of tribes. A certain kind of feudalism devel-

oped as a result. Many of the "Sheikhs" tended to leave their villages and live luxuriously in Baghdad. Their interest was directed toward pleasing the government rather than pleasing their village-tribesmen. They became, in a sense, absentee lords.

### **Migration to the Towns**

Since the economic depression of 1929, a huge torrent of migration from the rural districts to the big towns has taken place. About 80% of the migrants have come from the Amara district. It seems that feudalism and tribal disintegration there have been more intensive.

In the beginning, the migrants lived on the outskirts of the big towns, particularly Baghdad, in small and dirty reed cottages. Many of them wish to get petty jobs in the government, such as to be policemen, soldiers, office-servants, sweepers, scavengers, etc. They look up to be within the ruling class of the society. One may prefer being a sweeper to being a grocer or any shopkeeper. According to their old tribal values, shopkeeping is a very contemptible business for a man.

Statistics in the sixties show that only 16% of the migrants in Baghdad have been lucky in getting government jobs. 62% try to earn their living by working as unskilled labourers, especially in the building business, but they regard this job only a temporary one. Those who have been obliged to be peddlers or shopkeepers are 12% of the migrants in Baghdad. They form a focus in which the clash between the old tribal values and the new profit-making ones is concentrated.

Generally speaking, the migration is progressively going on with the passing of time. It is considered a source of a severe social problem. It is depleting agriculture from its farming hands, while crowding Baghdad and other big towns with discontented job seekers.

The rate of crime among the migrants is comparatively high, but their criminal tendency is directed against the towns' people rather than against their fellow-tribesmen. Many of them look upon the towns' people with envying and greedy eyes. They are ready to foray the towns as soon as they notice some weakness in the local government. They did a great deal of pillaging and killing through-out Baghdad in 1941, and they were about to do it again in 1958 or after.

The communist ideology has penetrated widely among them, and so they thought of the towns' people as unjust bourgeoisie who should be deprived of their luxuries.

### **The Emancipation of Woman**

In the old regime, women had an extremely low status. The urban woman was strictly veiled and imprisoned within the house walls. The rural woman was unveiled but economically and socially exploited by man. Man did not hesitate to kill her as

soon as he was informed of a bad gossip against her. He inherited from the nomadic culture the well-known complex of "washing of shame by blood". If he hesitated to comply with it, a permanent shame would fall upon his person, his family and his tribe.

In fact, the impact of the European civilization as regards woman status had a very little effect in the rural districts, while it had a great one in the towns, especially in Baghdad. The effect of modern education, moving pictures and lately television has been enormous in this direction.

People tended to send their daughters to school just as they did with their sons ten or fifteen years ago. They wished to make their daughters officials in the government like their sons. Unveiling and social freedom of woman consequently developed.

Foreigners who saw Baghdad in the thirties and see it now would be astonished by the extraordinary jump which woman has achieved in this regard. This is one of the fundamental landmarks of the new social change in Iraq. In 1920, only 15 women held governmental jobs. They were teachers in the girl primary schools. In 1960, the number of women who held administrative and teaching jobs in the government was approximating 17,000. However, the number is progressively increasing year after year. Jobs outside the government have also been progressively occupied by women.

### **The Change in Family Organization**

A great deal of family disorganization and reorganization have been consequently going on. The old patriarchal type of family is now in the process of disintegration and disappearance. A small type of family based on equality of sexes has been developing.

Romantic love leading to marriage is now in vogue among young men and women. They are behaving toward each other in the same way as the film stars do in cinema. They like to get married along the modernized line in spite of the opposition of their parents and relatives.

Young men and women sometimes feel a kind of psychological conflict within themselves. On the one hand, they try to imitate the film stars in their romantic behaviour. On the other hand, they can not neglect the unconscious influence of the old folkways and mores into which they have been reared and brought up. Personal and family disorganization may result out of this psychological conflict.

### **The Rise of Cultural Ambivalence**

MacIver and Page say: "... When the individual is subjected, especially at the formative stage of life, to the counter demands of clashing culture patterns, he may fail to achieve an adequate personal accommodation. He undergoes a process of

cultural denudation or, seeking vainly to reconcile in his behaviour the opposing demands, he becomes more or less schizophrenic. We have then the phenomenon of cultural ambivalence ...” (MacIver and Page, *Society*, London, 1953, p. 580)

In my opinion, the phenomenon of cultural ambivalence is quite prevalent in the new society of Iraq. Almost all modernists in Iraq have it in various degrees, some of them have a very clear split, or schizophrenic, personality in this sense.

In their childhood, they had been habituated and indoctrinated in the old mores of their local communities. When they grew up, they adopted the new concepts and ideology of the coming civilization. In many aspects of their social life, they were not able to reconcile in their behaviour the opposing value-schemes, and so they tended to follow one direction at a certain time, and follow an opposite direction at another time.

This may be quite obvious in their political activities. On the one hand, they vehemently believe in the new democratic principle of equality and social justice as regards all citizens of the country. On the other hand, they are strongly inclined to adhere to the old local values of loyalty toward their relatives, neighbours, friends ... etc. When one of them becomes an influential person in the government, he finds himself falling under opposite social pressures. His old affiliation with his tribe, family, friends, neighbours, religious sect or any other group, presses him toward one path, while the new developed public opinion presses him toward a contrary one. Sometimes he finds himself forced to follow both paths at the same time without paying attention to the obvious contradiction with which he has been entangled.

People, in general, look down upon any person of prestige who does not help his fellowmen. They consider him mean and coward. But as soon as they notice a sign of unjust procedure done against them in the government offices, under the influence of men of prestige, they protest loudly against it and demand from the government a strict adherence to the democratic principles of equality and social justice. It seems that they demand the application of the equality principle when it favours their private interests. Otherwise, they forget it and demand adherence to the old principle of loyalty and favouritism.

It can be said that this kind of cultural ambivalence is causing a very severe political tension in Iraq. People demand from the government what is difficult, or perhaps impossible, to be achieved. The government officials have grown up in the same social and mental atmosphere in which other persons have grown up. It is, therefore, not easy to behave according to what the newly growing public opinion demands from them.

### Conclusion

Linton says: “It is quite true that the more perfectly the elements of a culture are adjusted to each other, the more smoothly and efficiently these elements can function. This, no doubt, accounts for the observed tendency of cultures which are

shielded from disturbing contacts and diffusion of new elements to develop a more and more perfect state of integration ..." (L i n t o n, *The Study of Man*, Student Edition, p. 363).

In fact, this sort of cultural integration was to a great extent achieved in Iraq before the First World War. After the war it has been intensively disturbed. Under the impact of Europeanizing process, people began to learn new cultural traits which were extremely inconsistent with their old ones. The harmony and content of their old regime could no longer remain intact.