

# Civil Society in Iraq: A Literature Review

A particular emphasis on the Islamic discourse

By:Hayder Saeed

To start with, it must be noted that we do not have a heritage of analytical research on the experience of civil society in Iraq, like other countries in the region, because Iraq did not have a real civil society experience, at least during the last four decades, we went through a totalitarian regime during the era of Baath Party rule (1968 -2003). Therefore, Iraq has been long absent from the bibliography of civil society in the region, which began taking shape in early nineties, with a series of groundbreaking books: a convention organized by the Center for Arab Unity Studies in Beirut in 1992 and issued its work in the same year in a book titled "Civil Society in the Arab world and its role in attaining democracy, and the book of Amani Kandil "civil society in the Arab world" (1994), and Auguste Richard Norton's book "Civil Society in the Middle East" (1995).

The only revelation of a civil society experience in Iraq is what you can find in Tawfeeq Al Moraine's book " Civil society and political state in the Arab World" (1997), which devoted a long investigation about Iraq, where the author focused on political parties, as the most significant aspect of civil society in Iraq, and argued that the historical mission of civil society is to achieve national incorporation, " Mudaini says:" The character of civil society in Iraq begins with the expulsion and denial of conflicts among tribes and cities, and among the tribes themselves, as a seed of any community-based civil coherent unit, With the authority of the tribe packed down, shoving Iraq towards historical progress that will lead to the advancement of cities and the disintegration and dissolution of clan system. " However, the continuing conventional forces, which supported the British colonial presence, according to "Mudaini", made this civil society purely elitist. Never the less these parties have contributed to building a sober union movement since the late twenties.

As a matter of fact, the experience of civil society in Iraq, focused historically on the union's movement, which was linked to the left and to the political parties in general. Unions were an arena among other arenas for ideological conflict between major parties in Iraq, keeping up with the vision of the Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci (1891 1937) that civil society is an arena for practicing power, i.e., beyond its function as a trend to care for and defend the interests and rights of certain ranks.

Trade unions till now are still arenas for conflict between traditional parties, an extension of the historical tradition of conflict between these parties, which is also the case in many countries in the region.

Although the experience of these civil societies were based on an ideological ground not similar to background of civil society after 2003, we will see later that Gramscian vision will continue to dominate the understanding and path of civil society in Iraq, at least by the political players.

The experience of trade union did not go beyond this general model during the era of Baath Party rule (1968- 2003), the party continued looking at the unions as a sphere of dominance, and worked to put them and their activities under its supervision.

### **Civil society and the emerging democracy**

The radical political change in Iraq after Saddam Hussein is a serious challenge to building a civil society. The crack point at this moment completely changed the perspective of understanding (civil society) and how to deal with it. Iraq is facing a new concept of (civil society); it does not look at it as a space for domination, but as an essential player with a vital role to play in building a democratic system. Civil society is no longer merely organizations concerned with protecting the interests of certain groups, but a force regulating the distribution of governance between Community and State.

This is a Neo-liberal vision that the United States tried to apply in Iraq, which considers (the state) one of the ills and the first obstacle to building a democracy.

Discovery of oil and the emergence of oil industry in the region since the twenties of last century, and the beginning of the state discovery of oil revenues, and benefiting from its resources, led to the growth of the state apparatus to dominate and control society. This among others was a primary beam for the emergence tyranny

phenomenon : The dominance of state over the economy, creating a strong entity depending on the economy of oil boom.

The state made the society one of its margins, consuming not only its riches and products, but also, its values and models. This pattern made the state a major obstacle to democratic reform, not to mention that Iraq went through a bureaucracy slump and the state lost its efficiency in performing many of its functions, especially during the Iran-Iraq war and international embargo in the nineties.

This was the point where the Neo-liberal model tried to put aside the state role in Iraq, and Iraq became a laboratory for the neo-liberal model in the region. The spectacle of 9-4 was a huge opening and a stamp of social acceptance for that model, which is when Iraqis turned to take revenge of the state, in an unforgettable scene.

There has been a radical philosophical difference in dealing with the issue of modernization between the British, who established the Iraqi state in 1921, and the Americans, who saw their task as rebuilding that state in 2003. The British saw (the State) as the source of the modernization, while Americans considered (the Society) as the source.

This vision implies that weakening the state will lead to two crucial conclusions in creating a political democracy: Community will be stronger than the State, and that will give way to the emergence of civil society organizations free from a state interference that has a long heritage of controlling the Iraqi society movement.

So the American neo-liberal program in Iraq actually tried to weaken the state, in a perception that this will lead to building a civil society.

We must note though, that the experience of civil society in Iraq after 2003 can not be seen as unique and isolated from the old experience unless we take these contrasts into consideration:

- Civil Society is not only a (charity work), which formed the early obsession of civic groups in Iraq, it is also a built on the idea of (popular participation),
- And it can not be reduced to lobbying for the rights and interests of a certain group , which dominated the trade union movement, but should be considered an indispensable element in building democracy,
- The key point here is a civil society that is independent from the state, not a tool for dominance.

Most of the studies that dealt with civil society in Iraq after 2003, as limited as they are, turned towards this theoretical direction which is: to clarify the status of civil society in the context of building a democracy, or more precisely: clarifying the relationship of civil society with the state.

And here , we can talk about two major sources of studies on civil society in Iraq beyond 2003:

- Theoretical materials of workshops and training courses funded by international organizations in support of building a civil society in Iraq,
- Numerous articles published by Iraqi press since 2003, tuned to reflect the theoretical presentation of (civil society).

Al- Sabah newspaper, a semi-official newspaper funded by public money, devoted a weekly supplement titled (civil society). I tried to discover the general trend of the articles published, and found that more than two-thirds of them deal with theory. However, some articles discussed the practical problems facing the experience of civil society in Iraq.

Perhaps the typical text in this direction is a book written by Faleh Abdul-Jabbar "Civil society in post-war Iraq (2006)," revolving around the idea of state-civil society relationship, and re-writing history from this perspective, it perceives the rise, fall and revival of civil society as linked to its relationship with the state.

### **Islamists and the civil society, from refusal to adaptation**

The more exiting sources about the experience of civil society in Iraq are represented by the Islamic discourse to the concept of (civil society). These are not focused on the relationship with the state, but on what I call (adaptation of the concept to fit in the Islamic context).

Most studies which addressed the idea and practice of (civil society) in the Islamic world, were directed towards how to adapt this idea, with its Western origin, and foreign context, to the Islamic context. The approach focused on two levels: The first is the cultural and historical elements of Islam, and whether they are obstacles or catalysts for (civil society), and to what extent it will be accepted- based on that- by Islamic societies, or reject it as a civic culture. The second is the role of local cultures in Islamic societies and their role in determining the way in which to handle (civil society), given that Islam is not a centralized unified version, but a product of complex cultural interaction between it and religions and cultures of local communities it came to.

So the focus was not on the (Islamic civil society) but on the major forms of adapting the (civil society) concept in the Islamic world, and the ways Muslim societies will deal with the concept.

### **Historical study of civil society**

It is not easy to pinpoint the beginning date of the Islamists discussions of the concept of (civil society), but the literature in this field yield that the concept of (Islamic civil society), did not appear before the second half of the eighties of last century, when they were discussing this concept in response to the increasing talk about it, which the Islamists understood as a tool in the war against them. Islamists assumed that the secular intellectuals, particularly Communists and Marxists, were behind the adoption of this concept in the region, for three reasons: the fall of the Communist project as a result of the Soviet Union fall, the failure of the post-independence state and the lack of

interest by the nation of Islam intellectuals in the western graduates, who have agendas related to thinking, priorities and interests based on western issues. These intellectuals wanted to renew their political ambitions and used the issues of (democracy) and (human rights) and (civil society) as tools to pump blood in them; some of those were aware of the global transformations, and that these ideological issues are in harmony with the new world order, so they responded quickly, as they say, even though they were, until recently, hostile to these ideas.

According to Islamists, the secular intellectuals painted a specific image of (civil society), similar to the one in early stages of Western culture, when civil society was contradictory to both religion and secularism, and perceived as arbitrary and ideologically as a concept of motion. Under the influence of these secular intellectuals, the focus was on the perception of Gramsci, a perception "they saw" no longer valid for understanding civil society, Gramsci's concept is reducing (civil society) into a metaphor frozen in a different time. Rashid Ghannouchi says: "the anti-religious dimension was not behind rejecting the idea [civil society], it was intended to revive it in the eighteenth century [... To be] a tool limiting the state power and its authority, and to prevent concentration of power" and in that "the religious establishment in the West [...] the largest institution of civil society, [...] It is an institution independent from the state, to create balance and to provide various services." religion, according to Islamists, play key roles in the transformations that the world has witnessed in the last quarter century, both in the profound changes witnessed in the Soviet Union, or the role played by the Catholic Church, which marks the return of Christianity as a force towards democracy, social justice, human rights and addressing social and class oppression.

Ghannouchi asks: " If the institution of church is on both sides of civil society face, why civilization then is considered a rebellion against religion?".

Thus, the first methodological step in dealing with the concept of Islamic discourse (civil society) is a congruence between (secular) and (civil society), or rather, proving that there is no contradiction between (religion) and (civil society).

### **Islamic profile of (civil society)?**

This understanding pushed Islamists to a fundamental step, called in some Islamic literature (adapting the concept), which adapt (civil society) to be in harmony and consistent with the experience of the Islamic civilization. Majid Gharabawi see that there is no reason why, in theory, we can not borrow the term civil society and adapt it to the Islamic atmosphere, after excluding the puppet of the philosophical foundations of the Western view about Universe and Life.

The concept of civil society originated in the context of the evolution of western cultural experience. However, the view in most Islamic societies is that creating an institutional expression reflects the effectiveness of community confronted with failure of the State to meet all the humanitarian needs , so that the community should be able to create institutions for the custody of individual, and to create an environment for exercising the rights associated with the quality of the profession, occupation, role or general human rights in the face of any violation, and after that making these institutions capable of playing the role of mediator between the ruler and the ruled, or by informing the power holders of the needs and advocating them.

The strategy underlying the methodology in the Islamic discourse, in dealing with the concept of (civil society), is to emphasize the historical depth , which will include three things:

1. Dealing with the Western model of (civil society) as a special experience in its cultural context, and the political and social development of the Western societies, and therefore, it is not a mainstream.
2. Disclosure of social formations in the Islamic historical experience was performing the function of western civil societies themselves, which Kawtharani calls a good (configurations of civil society in the Islamic experience), such as the Organization of the Ulama, the Foundation for the advisory opinion, and so on, which means that the concept of (civil society) is solid, and deep rooted in Islam, theoretically and experimentally. Some believed that the rule ( Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice) is embodying the idea of authority of community in parallel to the state power, it makes a Muslim, when confronted with what ombudsman may happen in the community

a positive factor, and makes him a positive force of change, and establish a sense of responsibility.

3. Building civil society that fits the experience of Muslim communities, aware of the confidentiality of these communities, is not necessarily coinciding with the Western model, Islamists see that it is possible to integrate the traditional institutions that led the role of civil society, such as the Inheritance (the Institutions of Muslim privacy), and the modern institutions of civil society, " It is not necessary to build the institutions of civil society on the ruins of inheritance or civil institutions, but together they can feed a sober Islamic society." Gharabawi cites the example of Iran, where "the institutions of inheritance, domestic or [...] Played a major historic role. It is one of the main reasons for success of the (Altmbako) and the Constitutional Movement (conditional), and at last the Islamic revolution [in 1979]."

However, there is no agreement among Islamists on using the term (civil society). Sadiq Allaridjani says: "Why do we have to use the term (civil society), if we believe that what we want is quite different from the western civil society?" But it appears that some Islamists see the term (civil society) more suited to match this region than historical Islamic words, Wajeeh Kawtharani said.

### **Concept (Islamic civil society)**

In 1997, during the Eighth Islamic Summit Conference, held in Tehran, Iran's president, Mohammad Khatami, introduced the concept of (Islamic civil society), which became the center of a huge controversy among Islamic movements, particularly the cultural circles of Iran, and that produced a huge literature to discuss and explain the concept, and to present or critique or comment.

In general, Khatami's vision summaries the thinking of the Islamic mind on the issue of (civil society), which stems from the question that civil society in the Muslim communities is consistent with the appropriate historical and cultural specificities of these communities. Khatami said: "The civil society, which I call for its stability and integrity in our country and I recommend to all Islamic countries, conceptually differs radically and fundamentally from the civil society emanating from the Greek philosophical thought the political experiences of Rome, there is no conflict between the

two in results and benchmarks. western civil society is forked from historical terms of assets, and the theoretical underpinnings, starting from the Greek city-state political system and then to Rome, while the civil society we aspire to, has its historical and theoretical origins in the city of the Prophet. "

But the exciting thing in the perception of Khatami reveals his innermost thinking in the Islamic state-civil society relationship, although it was acknowledged theoretically that there is counter pleading between the two entities.

The symbolic opening of introducing the concept of (Islamic civil society) from the state, and building mostly on an experience understood as the experience of autism, does not correspond to the relationship between society and the State, namely, (City of the Prophet). It therefore, does not include an Islamic interpretation of (civil society) independent of the state.

Some Islamists believe that this particular model of liberal independence, "reducing the state's role and strengthening the institutions that exercise their activities in a civil society, are the most important categories of liberalism," Allaridjani argued that "civil society and liberalism are twin brothers. " In the view of other Islamists the separation between the (state) and (community) "is not the same like separation of these two parties in the West, and it was not in the past, when the state and society emerged in concert to achieve the (project of modernity)." Thus, this chapter will have a negative impact on the Muslim community, Hisham Jaafar said: "Some advocates of civil society in our countries like to lobby for a complete separation between the myth of the state and the society, or the permanent and continuing conflict between the two. [...] The conflict between society and the state is only imagined in the Arab and Muslim world [...] because it weakens both of them and this can be a serious transfer of experience from a cultural reality to another culture reality without realizing the applications and confidentiality in the new reality. "

The neutrality of the State will result, according to Allaridjani in (multi-ethical) norms, meaning that "the State has no [...] building to set right and wrong and give

prescriptions, [... And that] do not give the state an anchor to diagnosis the right and wrong ethicists , interests, and the real evil ", according to this understanding, the" function of the state will be limited to preserve our freedoms. "Neutrality of the State is a result of the essential links between liberalism and (civil society). He says: "Civil society in this thesis means the neutrality of the State, [...] it supplies liberal thought [that] becomes an immoral law or project, and would be applicable only if the public was satisfied, and the state is responsible for its statement and application." According to Allaridjani the (moral pluralism) is not compatible with Islam and, therefore, it is defending the (moral function of the state). He says: "a man who believed in Islam and Islamic pillars, and bow to the religious values, can not be neutral about them. And the society that believe in these values and the constitution which made Islam the standard of governance can not be careless about these values."

This vision is derived from the ideology of theocratic Islamic movements, "the system in Islam takes its sacredness of the sanctity of Islam practiced by the state and the leadership, and the governor who sits on its block, whatever rank or classification, takes his legitimacy from God all mighty, because the state is God's covenant , "and then" in Islamic regime a civil society can not be established with a vertical mobility of his head towards the mandate and authority, [...] Thus, the effectiveness of this civil society takes a different turn towards the components of society. "

The function of civil society towards the state is determined in the Islamic discourse, "guiding and advising the leadership", so " the duty of citizens is the obedience of governor and the right advice him," which considers the possibility reflected in two posts: "the production of public opinion have effects in the elections of all kinds, so it affects most layers of influence of power, except the first leadership, [... and] the role of civil society is reagent for the leadership [... including] a contribute to clarify the picture when reading the social realities. "

As a result, and despite of the fact that Islamic discourse did not distinguish between the status of civil society under the Islamic state and its posture in a non-Muslim or non-Islamic system, it is essential in the understanding of Islamists of (civil society) that it

does not correspond to a relationship with the state, but a complementary relationship. And more explicitly, (civil society) is nothing more than an arm of the state. This seems justified in the eyes of Islamists, as it reflects the Islamic interpretation aware of the privacy of Muslim societies, even though this interpretation is beyond the essence of the idea of the global (civil society).

This functional understanding of civil society is dominating the rest of the Islamic experience. It has appeared in various forms, including the relationship and understanding of Islamic parties of (civil society), even when it was outside the framework of the State.

This form is governing the relationship of Islamic parties in Iraq with civil society, whether in power or not; a model that will forge the relationship in a more abstract way: There should be always a political incubator of civil society.

Islamization of the State, or Islamization of society? Islamic civil society as developed within the structural Islamism

This pattern of history for the above (Islamic civil society), in the contemporary Islamic discourse, deals with this concept purely as a response to the concept of (civil society), which was presented strongly in the Muslim world during the mid-eighties of the twentieth century.

However, there is another history that deals with (Islamic civil society) as an expression, and part of the structural evolution within the Islamic movement.

There is a general rule of Islamism, that it started with the idea of (Islamization of the society), and shifted to the idea of (Islamization of the state) during the forties and fifties, with the development of the ideas of Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb and Khomeini, going back again to the idea of (Islamization of the society) during the eighties.

In spite of this general linear division , and the shift to ( Islamization of the state), there is a direct linkage to radical periods in the political system for a number of Islamic countries, (the separation of Pakistan and India in 1947, and the independence in the case of Mawdudi, the 1952 coup in Egypt which ended the monarchy and established a republic in the case of Sayyid Qutb), Islamism in Iraq too, began in the context of an advocacy movements with the idea of (Islamization of society), but the time sequence was not consistent with the above dates.

The early Islamic groups in Iraq revolved around the ideas of (advocacy) and (religious education). According to the rules of procedure for the (Muslim Youth Organization), founded by Izz al-Din Algazaery in 1951, which was the first organization in the history of Islamic Movement in Iraq: "he advocated (young Muslims) to correct and spread Islamic awareness, [... And] to bring the Islamic education into the Muslims lives, by "Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice. " According to documents belong to the early (Islamic A Dawa Party), which represent the essential part of the Islamic Movement in Iraq, a document written by Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, the founder and the spiritual leader, explains the background of naming the party Al Dawa, which means (The Call): " The name of the Islamic Dawa is the name for our natural and legitimate expression of our duty to call people to Islam, [...] and we call to Islam and we are Ansar Allah, Ansar al-Islam, we are a movement in society and an organization of work, [...] and we call to Islam. " He noted that "I do not mind expressing ourselves as a Party, a Movement or a Management", which means that he saw no contradiction between the draft of Islamization of society and the party organization. The Party at that stage adopted the theory of the Shura, in line with its advocacy trend, it saw that "the absence of text around the form of government in the era of explanation may be the Shura, and that is what is called the Shura Council or the nation rule."

In spite directing the activity of the party towards the community, the traditional religious establishment (Hawza=estate) opposed that, because it saw it as a departure from tradition, which is almost limited to advisory and teaching. However, in the background , there was a feeling that the party can be an alternative to the estate.

The party ignited a considerable controversy within its estate, about the meaning of engagement of some of the leaders in a political party, the nature of the relationship between the party and the religious background, and the possibility of building a party sponsored by the reference, as what Muhammad Shirazi tried to do.

This led the party to move towards the idea of (Islamization of the state), but this did not occur till after it was exposed Khomeini's ideas, who coined the theory of (Islamic government) in the late sixties, during his teachings in Al- Najaf, where he lived in exile about 13 years.

Although Mohammed Mahdi Naraqı (d. 1848) was the first to coin the theory of (Wilayat al Faqih), the frame of reference of the present discussions go back to the mid-twentieth century, when Naraqı was thinking about the problem of conflict between al-Faqih and the Sultan, the current problematic space revolves around the relationship between Islam and the state, is as modern as the state itself in the region, which is the driving force of social mobility within its borders.

As a result, Khomeini theory (the mandate of the jurist) spin around the same frame of Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb ideas, but the Islamization of the State as articulated in the context of Khomeini Shiite political heritage, which has been going for two centuries now, about the role of the Faqih. Thus, Khomeini is the continuation of the problem of long-Shia political culture, but on the other hand he marked the intersection point, between this problem and the problematic relationship between Islam and the State, so the jurist occupy the central organization point in Islamization of the state, while Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb, reflected on the same project through the idea of (Governance is for God).

So , the Islamic Dawa Party came back to the idea of (Islamization of the society) after the execution of al-Sadr in 1980, and the exiting of the leadership advocating "Welayat al Faqih", an important part of the Iranian decent leadership , has been gradually integrated into the Islamic system in Iran, while the Dawa Party, attributes the failure of

Islamization the state in Iraq to the failure of public to accept the idea, therefore, returning to the Islamization of the society to embrace the Islamic State.

Dawa Party has moved in a circular motion from: the Islamization of the society to the Islamization of the state and back to the Islamization of society.

However, the Islamization of the society was not the same both times: the 1st Islamization of the society was based on harmony with policy, while the second is based on (I am abstract) to the State, the first was based on religious education, while the second is based on political action , the first created the missionary movements, while the second created the civic movements, or Islamic civil society, the two are not the same, and this may explain why many accepted the idea of Islamic movements (civil society), while exercising activities so close to the activities advocacy movements.

The Islamist political parties were born from missionary movements, these parties formulated the Islamic civil society.

It appears that this movement is more pronounced in Iraq, while the Islamic scene in general, is an incubator for different models (advocacy movements evolve into political organizations, Islamic civil charity work that takes a political shape later, political parties establish associations,). Thus, this transformation, and differentiation, is crucial and essential in understanding the structure of civil society in Iraq, which is reshaping the abstract lines between constructions of Islamic civil society, in the context of internal development of Islamic movement.