Sherko Kirmanj, *Identity and Nation in Iraq*, Boulder Colorado and London: Lynne Rienner, 2013, xviii + 321 pp., (ISBN: 978-1-58826-885-3).

This book represents an ambitious effort to offer a more inclusive and balanced account of formations and contestations of Iraqi national identity. Sherko Kirmanj examines Kurdish and Shiite perspectives on national identity, which he argues are generally overlooked in scholarship on the Iraqi state. He does so by tracing the "enduring conflicts" between Sunni Arabs, Shiites, and Kurds from the creation of the state in 1921 through 2012. His book synthesises much of the historical and political science literature on Iraq, drawing heavily from classics like Hanna Batatu's *The Old Social Classes and Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, as well as from a variety of Kurdish and Arabic language sources that provide insights about the experiences of Kurdish and Shiite communities. Kirmanj's thesis is that the absence of shared "collective identity or attachment to a single homeland" (p. 321) is primarily to blame for the inability of successive regimes to forge a lasting Iraqi national identity.

Identity and Nation in Iraq succeeds in offering a relatively concise, chronological narrative of the Iraqi state and national identity. Chapter 1 contextualises identities in Iraq with a brief historical, geographical, and cultural overview. Kirmanj introduces the reader to the ethnic and religious diversity of Iraq, although the experiences of minorities he mentions, such as Turkmen, Yazidis, or Mandeans, are beyond the scope of the book's almost exclusive focus on Kurdish and Shiite communities. The author's examination of these communities is a deliberate response to three trends in the literature on the Iraqi state: First, Kirmanj rejects the primordialist notion that before the formation of the state "Iraq was already a nation" (p. 10) whose communities have demonstrated a consistent desire to remain united. Conversely, Kirmanj also finds unsatisfactory the interpretation that "each group tends to think primarily in terms of its own ethnic or confessional community and identity" (p. 11). Third, the author gently critiques scholarship that attributes the rise in sectarian violence in Iraq solely to the failures of the British administration's state-making during the Mandate period or to the Coalition Provisional Authority during the early years of the Iraq War (2003–2011). Instead, Kirmanj evaluates episodes of sectarian conflict throughout the history of Iraq, noting the multiple forms of identity and political ideologies at play.

In his conceptualisation of identity and nation, Kirmanj is strongly influenced by Anthony D. Smith. He builds upon Smith's theorisation of the "ethnic origin of nations" to suggest that nation-formation requires three conditions: "(1) a memory of a common past; (2) linguistic or cultural ties that enable a

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higher degree of social communication within the group …; and (3) a conception of equality between members of the group that is organized as a civil society." If a population does not possess all three conditions, then its members will struggle to "bond as a nation." The author also lists seven measures for assessing "national integration," the most important of which is "recognition" by other groups and by the state. Throughout the book, three types of actors appear, although the author does not always clearly delineate them: "state and/or elites," "ethnic or religious groups," and "influential individuals" (p. 15). Finally, three "competing nationalisms" are considered in the study: "Iraqi patriotism," "Arab nationalism" or "pan-Arabism," and "Kurdish nationalism."

Following Chapter 1, the book proceeds formulaically in its assessment of historical evidence and some recent political events against the three postulates described above. Chapter 2 discusses the "fragmented nature" and "complexity" of Iraqi society during the British Mandate period. Chapter 3, "Faisal and the Dream of a Nation," reviews the efforts of Iraq's first king to unify the country and assesses the British role in shaping Iraq, a theme that continues in Chapter 4. Kirmanj reminds the reader that national integration during the monarchical era was not total; various uprisings during the early and mid-20th century "stopped at ethnic or religious boundaries" and faced opposition from other ethnic or sectarian groups (p. 101). Whereas the first half of the book portrays Iraq as mostly "integrated" through the monarchy, urbanisation, and modernisation, the latter describes the "failure of national integration." Chapters 6 and 7 detail the rise of the Baath Party and how Saddam Hussein appealed to "tribalism" and religion to maintain power. Chapter 7 also includes brief summaries of Kurdish political parties and the push for Kurdish autonomy. In Chapters 6 and 7, Kirmanj points to many examples of sectarian conflict prior to the United States-led invasion, which is the subject of Chapter 8.

In the final chapter, "The Paradoxes of Nation Formation in Iraq," the author concludes that Iraq lacks "a common memory" and "shared destiny" that are essential to producing an enduring national identity (p. 252). Without multilateral coalitions that span ethnic and sectarian interests, Kirmanj argues, "any hope of a united Iraq or overarching Iraqi identity is mere wishful thinking" (p. 253). Kirmanj maintains that the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) was the "only political party that attracted members from all ethnic and sectarian communities" (p. 149). Furthermore, he critiques the idea that a common enemy produces national integration. For example, he demonstrates that "the surge of Iraqi nationalism" during the Iran-Iraq war was a "myth" by noting how many people deserted and how Kurdish factions supported one another's enemies rather than forming a unified front (p. 144). In the final pages of the book, Kirmanj suggests that Iraq does not need to be "rebuilt" but "built" on the basis of mutual

"recognition" of the diverse identities comprising the state. To accomplish this, Kirmanj recommends that "past injustices" must be acknowledged; that "recognition of the right to self-determination of the Kurds" must be granted; and that "consensus" must be achieved to safeguard against "return to minority or dictatorial rule" (p. 253). Through what political arrangements or "core values" (p. 122) these conditions will be achieved, the author does not say.

At times, the book's terminology is a bit inconsistent and the thread of the argument subsequently lost, which is, perhaps, an oversight of the publisher: Although the first chapter clearly defines "nation," "nation-state," and "state," there is a good deal of slippage or fuzziness between these terms throughout the remaining chapters. For instance, there are allusions to the "Iraqi nation-state," which at other times seems to be used synonymously with the terms "Iraqi nation" or "state." Second, there is a minor problem with organisation: While there are helpful summaries at the end of chapters, the book as a whole lacks cohesion in its overall argument; it needs a section in the final chapter that specifically revisits the three postulates and seven criteria for nation-building outlined in the first chapter. As it is, the reader is left wondering how the criteria introduced in the first chapter are to be applied in the final analysis.

The primary strength of *Identity and Nation in Iraq* lies in its incorporation of Shiite and Kurdish perspectives, which the author accomplishes by analysing contested symbols of the state and minority groups, particularly in the Iraqi education system. For example, Kirmanj notes at which times and in which environments various communities displayed different flags (pp. 31, 112) or sang different "national" anthems (p. 29). While most of the book relies on standard secondary sources, such as well-known histories of Iraq, the author offers some original and insightful analysis of Iraqi identities by examining dozens of Arabic and Kurdish language materials. For instance, Kirmanj examines Sati al-Husri's writings (p. 51); efforts to establish a Kurdish education directorate (pp. 101–103); Shiite youth centers (p. 119); Baathist education programs (pp. 136, 141, 143); and school textbooks across successive regimes in Iraqi history, including recently revised Kurdish language textbooks commissioned by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Kirmanj's analysis of identities as represented and contested in the education system is a less-studied perspective on Iraqi identities, one which I hope he will continue to pursue. Likewise, the author mentions that he conducted some informal interviews with individuals, which is also a valuable yet understudied approach to the topic. This more inclusive, book length treatment of a worthy subject is a welcome addition to the scholarship on Iraqi identities.

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