

# 1 *Assyrians and the Iraqi Communist Party*

The left in Iraq emerged in the 1940s as an anti-sectarian space with broad mass appeal inclusive of a variety of ethno-religious and linguistic communities. While understood as an urban phenomenon, prevalent in Baghdad, leftist engagements were also visible in communally diverse places in the north, and particularly Kirkuk, but also in areas that came to host international oil and transportation corporations, whose local workers in turn became a conduit of leftist activism. Localizing leftist engagements in the north enables us to discuss sectarian narratives based on relations that were established by the various communities in these spaces.

Kirkuk experienced accelerated economic and urban development following the discovery of an enormous oil field in 1927. Assyrians and other communities relocated from surrounding rural districts and Mosul to this new urban space in search of employment at the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) – a British-dominated multinational corporation that employed a significant number of Kirkukis, including Assyrians – in a process that altered the demographic makeup of the city. The changing demography of the city, combined with its rapid urbanization and economic development, gave rise to new political affiliations that benefited and empowered many recent arrivals to Kirkuk. The Assyrians experienced socioeconomic mobility as a result of their employment at the IPC, where some acquired positions of leadership; but their employment by the organization could also be complicated. Assyrian workers at the IPC became politically engaged, forming workers' unions, going on strike, and joining the Communist Party. Within this new urban space, they were able to mobilize politically, emerging from the peripheries to take a visible and active role in the urban politics of Kirkuk. Their activities disrupted the existing paternalistic order, igniting socioeconomic tensions that had gendered dimensions.

Many Assyrians were drawn to the Iraqi Communist Party, given the Party's emphasis on socioeconomic and ethno-sectarian justice, and its promotion of anti-sectarianism, secularism, and minority rights, "a struggle shared by all religions and ethnicities" in Iraq.<sup>1</sup> The Simele massacre of 1933 is a recurring theme of the memories of Assyrian communists born in the 1920s, who became politically active during the 1940s and onward.<sup>2</sup> The injustices they faced as a community are blamed not only on the Iraqi government but, to some extent, also on the imperial powers, especially Great Britain.

This chapter draws on British and Iraqi archival sources, personal memoirs, and oral histories pertaining to members of the Assyrian community, as well as publications of the Iraqi Communist Party. The British colonial sources provide background on communist activity within the Assyrian community from the 1930s to the 1950s. Through its relations with certain members of the Assyrian community during the Mandate period, the British Foreign Office received enquiries from a number of Assyrian figures who had either been exiled by the Iraqi regime following the events of the Simele massacre or immigrated to Britain and its Commonwealth nations. Iraqi archival sources pertain to the period following Qasim's toppling in 1963, and comprise a collection of court-martial records of Communists and their sympathizers. Memoirs and oral interviews with Assyrians affiliated with the Communist Party enable a close analysis of individuals and community members, revealing their level of organization and reasons for attraction to the ICP. Their accounts contribute to the construction of the historical memory of the community, which runs alongside, but is often in tension with, the account of the ruling authority, whether that was the British colonial administration or the Iraqi Republican regime. Similarly, publications of the ICP illustrate the Party's own narrative of its history, providing a place to commemorate its persecuted members, whom it identifies as martyrs. Using a variety of complementary sources, the chapter provides a unique analysis of an under-examined period in Iraqi history.

In the second half of the twentieth century, the Assyrian community became more urbanized than it had been in its modern history. By

<sup>1</sup> Orit Bashkin, *New Babylonians: A History of Jews in Modern Iraq* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), p. 143.

<sup>2</sup> Abu Baz interviewed by author, Alqosh, Iraq, December 18, 2011.

moving to larger city centers, or living in cities that grew more urbanized, such as Kirkuk, Assyrians were able to begin working for larger firms – for example, the IPC – or studying in mixed high schools and universities. Alongside injustices they might have suffered as a community, urban centers exposed them to grievances that had an impact on other Iraqis on their socioeconomic level, such as workers in the IPC. Leftist ideology and exposure to a more vibrant Iraqi press during this period helped draw them toward communism. In Kirkuk these influences were supplemented by active workers' unions and a Communist Party growing in strength and influence. The republican state under Qasim's leadership, which replaced the monarchy in 1958, did not translate into what Communists might have anticipated, yet the toppling of Qasim in 1963 unleashed extreme violence toward Communists and their sympathizers. The Assyrian community was not spared during this period, as the court cases demonstrate. Assyrians were imprisoned for a variety of reasons, but primarily because of their membership in the Communist Party or involvement in one of its affiliated organizations. Issues of identity, citizenship, and gender also played a role, however. According to Batatu and Ismail, and evidence retrieved from certain court-martial records, grudges based on socioeconomic, ethno-sectarian, and personal hatreds surfaced during this period, especially in Kirkuk. Violence ensued and, at least temporarily, interrupted the urban imaginary created in Kirkuk. Rapid urban development in such cities, combined with new political affiliations, allowed new communities to emerge that disrupted the established order and the place of traditional communities within it. In 1963, the patriarchal sociopolitical system corrected this disruption, which had been enabled by Qasimite rule, identifying this period as the "chaotic tide." As this chapter will reveal, alleged Assyrian Communists, members of the Iraqi Women's League, and thousands of other Iraqis were targeted in the campaign of terror that followed Qasim's overthrow in 1963.

Although the ICP appeared to be blind to the ethno-sectarian affiliations of its members and many of its urban cells comprised members of diverse backgrounds, Assyrian Communists generally organized according to their communal affiliations, especially after 1963, when the Party's center shifted to the rural north. This sort of organization simply made sense to a newly urbanized community flocking to large cities such as Baghdad and Kirkuk, in contrast to the much smaller

towns and villages they had left. In urban centers, new immigrant communities would have relied on each other and held on to their communal and regional affiliations, which would have been beneficial in finding employment and housing, and in learning how to navigate a big city. Many Assyrian ICP members indicate that they were attracted to the Party through a relative or friend from their hometown. In times of political turmoil and persecution of the ICP by the government authorities, these communal ties were important both for individual members and for the Party, and contributed to the passing of information from the center to the peripheries. Furthermore, communal affiliations within the Party and community were strengthened after 1963, as relatives and townspeople were collectively punished by state forces in times of turmoil, including in 1959 and 1963, and in the early 1970s by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), due to the ICP's temporary association with the Ba'athist state. The ruling authority came to identify the community, at least in certain areas, with the Communist Party, and punished them accordingly during its corrective revolution. In turn, a certain village or town would have felt obliged to stand in solidarity with the Communists in defending their village, hence further reinforcing the affiliation between Party and community members. Moreover, as this chapter will show, Assyrian Communists, especially following 1963, found themselves in an ambiguous position. They had joined the Communist Party to transcend their ethnic and religious associations, yet they found that the Party afforded them the space they needed to reinforce their identity, but also as a result of the attacks on their communities by state agencies and anti-communists groups.

### **The Assyrians and Communism in Iraq**

Although the role of Assyrians within the Communist party has not been fully investigated, there are some primary and secondary sources that illuminate it. For instance, Hanna Batatu, in his seminal book on the Iraqi Communist Party, identifies important communist figures within this community, such as Petros Vasili and Yūsif Salmān, known as Fahd. Fahd was the secretary-general of the ICP from 1941 until his execution by the Iraqi government in 1949. His story can be taken as an example of how members of communities do not necessarily think along ethnic lines. Vasili, a “professional revolutionary,” is credited

with introducing Fahd, “the real builder of the Iraqi Communist Party,” to the ideals of communism.<sup>3</sup> Vasili’s family originated from ‘Amadiyya, a city in northern Iraq. In Ottoman times they had emigrated to Tiflis (Tbilisi), Georgia, where Vasili was raised and educated. His multilingual fluency surely aided him in his constant movement from place to place. Vasili returned to Iraq by way of Iran in 1922, probably with the wave of Assyrian refugees who had escaped the genocide in Ottoman territories and in Urmia, Iran, following the World War I. In Iraq he lived in various cities, including Basra, Baghdad, Sulaymaniyya, Nasiriyya, and Ba‘quba – the town where the Assyrian refugee camps were located. Just before Vasili’s banishment from Iraq in 1934, the British Special Service assisted the Iraqi police in discovering his communist activity, and specifically his communication – through an Assyrian driver – with Filimonovo, a Russian professor of “Oriental Propaganda” at the University of Baku living in Kermanshah, Iran.<sup>4</sup> Batatu makes an explicit connection between Vasili and Fahd, but more implicit ones can also be drawn between this important communist leader and the general Assyrian community. For example, Ba‘quba was home to a large Assyrian refugee camp, and if Vasili lived in Ba‘quba it seems natural to assume that he either lived in this camp temporarily or visited Assyrian relatives and friends living there, and passed his communist teachings and organizational skills on to them. Kermanshah enabled yet another connection between Vasili, the Assyrian community, and communism in general. Kermanshah was a city that many Assyrians passed through during the exodus en route to refugee camps in Iraq; some eventually settled there. In the early 1920s, many Assyrians of Urmia who had settled in Iraq following the exodus were anxious to return to their villages. In 1922 the Iranian authorities allowed them to return. Of the Assyrian returnees, approximately 5,000 settled in Hamadan, 1,000 in Kermanshah, and 4,000 in Tabriz and Maragah.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq’s Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of Its Communists, Ba‘thists, and Free Officers*, Princeton Studies on the Near East (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 404.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> John Joseph, *The Modern Assyrians of the Middle East: Encounters with Western Christian Missions, Archaeologists, and Colonial Power* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 207–8.

Drawing connections between cities such as Tbilisi and Kermanshah – cities in the shadow of Soviet strategic and/or ideological influence<sup>6</sup> – enables an interesting transnational understanding of communism in general, and a possible Soviet–Assyrian/minority connection in particular. Most importantly, for the purposes of this study, these connections allude to interactions between Assyrians across recently fortified borders. Although Assyrians in the next half of the twentieth century would become more integrated in their respective countries, especially as the Iraqi state gained more power and influence, Assyrian transnational interactions would become evident within Iran and Iraq, and in other countries to which they emigrated.

Meanwhile, the British blamed the Russians for the attraction of Assyrians to communism – an attraction corroborated by British Foreign Office archives. For instance, a report on the strike in Kirkuk’s Iraq Petroleum Company in 1946 specifies the importance of the Palestinian cause to all workers, including Assyrians. The ICP was believed to be the organizing force behind the strike.<sup>7</sup> The Iraqi government had allowed political parties to form in the late 1940s, with the exception of the ICP. In response, the Communists tried to infiltrate legal left-wing parties, and increased their appeal among student, women’s, and trade union groups, “leading to a wave of labour unrest in 1946–1947.”<sup>8</sup> In January 1948, the Iraqi government signed the Portsmouth Treaty with Britain, extending Britain’s military control over the country for twenty-five years.<sup>9</sup> As news of the treaty became public, leftists and Communists organized a mass uprising, the Wathba, that swept through Baghdad and led to the abandonment of the treaty and the resignation of the prime minister, Salih Jabr.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> For example, there was a Soviet consulate in Ahwas according to Batatu, and one in Kermanshah itself according to British Foreign Office sources. Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, p. 405; FO 371/68481A, February 9, 1948, No. 2096, “The Iraqi Communist Party and the League of Iraqi Communists,” prepared by Security Intelligence Middle East to Foreign Office, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> FO 371/52456, August 1, 1946, No. E 3860, “Minutes,” by P. Garran.

<sup>8</sup> Tareq Y. Ismael, *The Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Iraq* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 28.

<sup>9</sup> Ismael, *Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Iraq*, p. 39; Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 117–18.

<sup>10</sup> Tripp, *History of Iraq*, p. 117.

In early 1948, the ICP was at the peak of its influence, having demonstrated its mass appeal.<sup>11</sup> In February of the same year, the British Foreign Office issued a report titled, “The ‘Iraqi Communist Party and the League of ‘Iraqi Communists.” It offered an analysis of the Communist Party for the previous year that included reports on Iraq’s minority communities. Assyrians, like many Kurds and Armenians, were believed to have been drawn to the Communist Party under Russian influence:<sup>12</sup> “Assyrians feel themselves insecure in Iraq and many are disappointed in the British from whom they had expected (usually unreasonably) more help than they have received. As a result a number of people among them, as in the Armenian community, seek leadership and protection from the USSR.”<sup>13</sup> Striking an orientalist note, the report continued, “The Assyrians have a natural love of intrigue and capacity for being dissatisfied with their lot.”<sup>14</sup>

According to the report, there had been talks in support of Russia among the Assyrians, and Russia had made contacts with Assyrian Church of the East converts to the Russian Orthodox Church.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, the British report downplays the role of Assyrians in the ICP by suggesting Soviet influence. Moreover, it seems that the report took into account only Assyrians who had come to Iraq after the World War I, ignoring those who were in Iraq already. It also focused on Church of the East Assyrians, but ignored Chaldean and Syriac Orthodox ones. On the other hand, a secret investigation into the ICP issued by the British in March 1949 showed how individual Assyrians had been drawn to the Party.<sup>16</sup> This investigation used police reports of house searches and arrests of suspected Communists in Baghdad and the northern provinces. For instance, among the arrested men in Kirkuk, many Assyrian names came up. Following a search of the house of Nāfi Muḥammad ‘Alī – the head of the ICP branch office for the northern provinces, situated in Kirkuk – several men were

<sup>11</sup> Ismael, *Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Iraq*, p. 40.

<sup>12</sup> FO 371/68481A, February 9, 1948, No. 2096, “Iraqi Communist Party.” See also FO 371/75131, March 1949, No. 10110, “The Iraqi Communist Party,” prepared by MIS representative in Baghdad (possibly the Middle East Security Intelligence) to Foreign Office. See also FO 371/68481A, March 1949, “Iraqi Communist Party,” p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> FO 371/68481A, March 1949, “Iraqi Communist Party,” p. 6. <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> FO 371/75131, March, 1949, “The Iraqi Communist Party,” S. 91/0/9/248, Eastern Iraq, file number 10110.

arrested, including Tūma Shāba, an Assyrian bus driver.<sup>17</sup> Further investigation in Kirkuk led to the arrest of more ICP members, including two Assyrians – Yona William, a workman, and Ilyās Ḥannā, a secondary school student.<sup>18</sup> In Baghdad, Ḥannā Tūmās was believed to be the link between the central committee of the ICP and Party members.<sup>19</sup>

The personal account of Yūsif Ḥannā is quite revealing.<sup>20</sup> After finishing his education in 1947, Ḥannā held a couple of temporary jobs – first for the railway, then in a lawyer’s office – before moving to the north in search of better employment opportunities.<sup>21</sup> Prior to 1947, Ḥannā was not a formal Communist Party member, but had an interest in communism, and hence read literature issued by the Dār al-Ḥikma bookshop, as well as other communist publications such as *al-Qā’ida*. In Kirkuk he met Communists such as Ḥannā Elias, all of whom helped to further his interest in the Party. Ḥannā was eventually nominated as a Party member, and went on to lead Elias’s group, which included members who were non-Assyrian or Christian.<sup>22</sup> Seeking employment, Ḥannā left Kirkuk for Mosul, where he met a group headed by another Assyrian named Behnām (his last name is unknown).<sup>23</sup> The British knew less about this group, but it is interesting to note that at least one of the cell’s other five members, ‘Umar, was a Muslim, indicating the existence of confessionally mixed Communist Party cells.

Discussing the Assyrian community, however, the British noted in this same investigation, “No further evidence has emerged on this community’s connection with the Party.”<sup>24</sup> This analysis indicated that the British continued to subscribe to the argument they had postulated in 1948 – namely, that the Assyrian community’s attraction toward communism was a result of Russian influences. The persistence of this attitude is corroborated in another report issued a few years later by the British embassy in Baghdad. The report focused on Russian advances in Iraq, and suggested ways to combat them.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 2.      <sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 3.      <sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> FO 371/75131, March, 1949, “History of Yūsif Ḥannā from His Own and Other Statements,” p. 23.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.      <sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 24.      <sup>23</sup> Ibid.      <sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>25</sup> FO 1110/306, July 18, 1950, No. PR 31, “Secret,” from Mr Humphrey Trevelyan, British Embassy Baghdad, to F.R.H. Murray, Information Research Department, London, 2. Letter number: (G.2192/35/50).



On minorities, the report stated again that Russians had a “specialist appeal to minority communities.”<sup>26</sup> To prevent Russian advances in the country, the British were to “rub that Russian imperialism is far worse than Western imperialism, by repeating the facts about genocide, etc.” It is not clear which genocide they were referring to; perhaps they were blaming the Russians for their role in the genocidal campaigns against the Armenians and Assyrians in 1915. But British investigations provided conflicting accounts of the attraction of the Assyrian community toward communism. British reports on the Assyrian community minimized the attraction of Assyrians to communism, attributing it simply to Russian influences and to the Assyrians’ dissatisfaction with their “lot” in Iraq. But it is not clear whom they included or excluded in their conceptualization of the Assyrian community. On the other hand, British reports on communist organization and police raids of Party members revealed examples of Assyrians involved in the Communist Party who had been drawn to it by reading progressive and leftist literature and the communist press, and also through family members, friends, and coworkers, some of whom were also Assyrian. One might therefore wonder what the percentage of Assyrians in the Communist Party was.

Batatu provided useful statistics about the ICP’s makeup. In 1935 he identified sixteen leading Communists, five of whom were Christians (Chaldean), when Christians constituted only 5.9 percent of the Iraqi population in 1947.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, four of these sixteen leading members were Shi’ites, who also formed a political minority. To account for the overrepresentation of these two minorities, Batatu suggested, “This carries the implication that the exclusion by the existing order, not necessarily of the individuals themselves but of their religious group in general—from certain roles or benefits, may have been a factor in their proneness to communism.”<sup>28</sup> In the same section, Batatu included interviews with two Christian party members, Nūrī Rufa’īl and Jamīl Tūmā. Tūmā, according to Batatu, had had an unhappy childhood. His three brothers had been killed by “Turks” in Van in 1915, and he and his mother had been exiled and imprisoned

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, Table 14.3, p. 424. Batatu characterized Chaldean men as “Arabized Chaldeans.” It is not clear how he developed that identification.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 422.

in Jazirat Ibn Umar when they were caught trying to escape from Mosul to British-occupied Baghdad.<sup>29</sup> The theme of injustices experienced at an early age and the attraction toward communism recalls the writings of Tūma Tūmās and other communist Assyrians born in the early twentieth century. Between 1941 and 1949, a significant number of Christians (22.7 percent) were once again to be found at the leadership level in the ICP. Batatu posited that the “conspicuousness of the Christians in the Party can be essentially understood in terms of social disabilities to which religious minorities are normally subjected.”<sup>30</sup> However, the number of Christians in the Party declined between 1949 and 1951 to 3.1 percent. A reduction in the number of non-Muslim minorities within the Party’s high command was observed during this period. Batatu correlated these figures with the situation of the ICP in 1949. With most party cadres behind bars as the government succeeded in cracking down on Communist activity, non-Muslim minorities “belonged to a more physically exposed community and appear, perhaps on that account, to have been sufficiently impressed by the severe blows that fell upon the party.”<sup>31</sup> Between 1955 and 1963, only six out of seventy-five members of the central committee of the ICP (8 percent) were Christians. Of these, one was Armenian and the rest were Chaldeans. Christians constituted 8.4 percent of the Iraqi population, which equaled their representation in the Party. Other non-Muslim minorities remained numerically insignificant at the ICP command level.<sup>32</sup>

In the middle and lower echelons of the ICP during 1947–49, Christians also had a significant presence. In the middle echelons during this period, Christians made up 6.1 percent of local Party committee members in the provinces, while they constituted 5.4 percent of the total urban population outside of Greater Baghdad in 1947.<sup>33</sup> In the same year, the number of Christian communists in Greater Baghdad stood at 12.6 percent, while Christians made up 7 percent of the urban population of Baghdad. Across all communist

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 425–27.   <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 651.   <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 701.

<sup>32</sup> Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, Table 54.1, p. 996, “Summary of Biographical Data Relating to Members of the Central Committees of the Communist Party, June 1955 to February 1963.”

<sup>33</sup> Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, Appendix Two, Table A.28, “ICP (Fahd’s organization): Religion, Sect, and Ethnic Origin, Middle Echelons (1943–June 1949).”

organizations, 8.8 percent of members were Christians, while the total number of Christians in the urban population in 1947 was at 5.9 percent.<sup>34</sup> In the lower echelons of the ICP, Christians made up 5.8 percent of members in the provinces in 1947, 8.2 percent in Greater Baghdad, and 7.2 percent in all organizations.<sup>35</sup> The majority of these Christians were Church of the East adherents and Chaldeans, though Batatu lists Chaldeans separately from Assyrians, as well as a small number of Armenians. These numbers are significant enough to suggest that Assyrians were drawn to the Communist Party not only through Russian influence, but had other reasons to be attracted to it, as will be demonstrated by an examination of the activity of Kirkuki Assyrians between 1946 and 1963.

### Kirkuk, Oil, and Labor

The discovery of oil in Kirkuk led to the rapid urbanization of the city, and thus to the advancement of new communities who benefited from employment in the oil industry, and felt empowered by the left under Qasim's rule. In 1959 violent crashes erupted in Mosul, and then Kirkuk, that pitted disgruntled Arab nationalists and conservatives who felt marginalized against leftists and their affiliates, which included minority communities such as Kurds and Assyrians by virtue of their significance in the ICP. The violent urban clashes led to the killing of hundreds of people and the displacement of thousands, especially in Mosul. These events, and particularly the Kirkuk crisis, became significant turning points during Qasim's rule, signaling to Arab nationalists that the president was against them. The 1959 crisis is crucial for an understanding of sectarianism within Iraq under early republican rule; as the 1963 court-martial trials will show, it was vividly remembered by witnesses testifying against alleged Communists, as a result of which 10,000 people were detained and between 3,000 and 5,000 executed.

The first gusher at Baba Gurgur – an area just north-west of urban Kirkuk – flowed profusely on October 14, 1927, leading to the

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, Appendix Two, Table A.29, "ICP (Fahd's organization): Religion, Sect, and Ethnic Origin, Lower Echelons and Active Rank and File (1947–June 1949)."

discovery of an enormous oil field.<sup>36</sup> The discovery of oil in Kirkuk transformed the city at a significant rate. When oil started flowing in Baba Gurgur, Kirkuk's urban population was estimated at around 25,000. Two decades later, the population of urban Kirkuk had more than doubled, reaching approximately 68,000 according to the 1947 census. The British government estimated that in 1948 IPC workers and their families numbered 30,000, suggesting that "nearly half of the city's inhabitants were directly or indirectly reliant on the oil company for their livelihood."<sup>37</sup> By 1957 Kirkuk's urban population had doubled again, according to that year's census, to over 120,000.<sup>38</sup> IPC's influence therefore reached beyond labor matters impacting local politics as well.

### *Assyrians as Employees in the Iraq Petroleum Company*

The number of Assyrians also began to increase in Kirkuk from the 1920s onwards. In 1957 Assyrians made up 10 percent of the urban population, numbering 120,000.<sup>39</sup> It is difficult to determine exactly how many Assyrians were employed at the IPC, as the company did not keep record of their employees' ethnic backgrounds, but British sources allow one to speculate.<sup>40</sup> In 1943 approximately 1,300 discharged Assyrian levies were employed at the IPC.<sup>41</sup> In a conversation between Dr. Nāzīm al-Pāchachī, Iraqi Director-General of Economics and Mr. Furneaux of the IPC regarding the formation of an Assyrian battalion to aid in the war effort for Palestine, 1,000 Assyrian IPC workers were said to have volunteered.<sup>42</sup> These seem to have consisted mainly of ex-Levy soldiers, and do not take into account Assyrian IPC workers who were not interested in participating in the war effort.

<sup>36</sup> Arbella Bet-Shlimon, *City of Black Gold: Oil, Ethnicity, and the Making of Modern Kirkuk* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), p. 79.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90. <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Official Iraqi census from 1957 in Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, p. 913. See also Table A.2 of this book.

<sup>40</sup> Bet-Shlimon, *City of Black Gold*, p. 113.

<sup>41</sup> FO 624/144, August 18, 1948, No. 720, "Assyrians: Recruitment Palestine," from Air Vice-Marshal A. Gary, Air Headquarters, Royal Air Force, to Mr Richmond, British Embassy in Baghdad.

<sup>42</sup> FO 624/144, August 18, 1948, "Minutes," 720/4/48.

Assyrian workers were involved in organized labor activities at the IPC that ensued in the 1940s.<sup>43</sup> Between 1944 and 1946, sixteen labor unions were allowed to form in Iraq, twelve of which were controlled by the ICP.<sup>44</sup> The most significant unions were formed in the important industrial centers of Basra Port and the Iraqi Railways, both of which were under British administration.<sup>45</sup> In both centers, major strikes for increased wages took place – in 1945 at the railways, and in the late 1940s at the port. In Kirkuk’s IPC, however, unions were not licensed.<sup>46</sup>

As a result, the IPC workers in Kirkuk went on strike in July 1946.<sup>47</sup> Information retrieved from oral-history interviews and from Batatu’s work supports the claim that the labor organization in Kirkuk was guided by the ICP.<sup>48</sup> It was led by Ḥannā Ilyās, encountered earlier, who was known as Ilyās Gūhārī, using his mother’s last name (Alqoshis take their maternal last name if the mother comes from a well-known family).<sup>49</sup> Ilyās was twenty-three years old and a former member of the Supervisory Council of the Railway Workers. After moving to Kirkuk, he had been employed as an oil worker and became a member of the Kirkuk local ICP committee.<sup>50</sup> On July 2, Ilyās, with other communist IPC workers, helped organize the workers in forming committees and coordinating regular strikes.<sup>51</sup> Batatu, British sources, and oral accounts help us to form a more complete list of workers’ demands. Batatu’s list includes: the right to form a union, an increase in the minimum basic daily pay rate from 80 fils to 250 fils, an end to the arbitrary firing of workers, and social security.<sup>52</sup> The British reports list some of these issues, but also include workers’ demands for housing, transportation, and bonuses.<sup>53</sup> A.Q. offers a vivid oral account of this turbulent period, drawing on the experiences of an

<sup>43</sup> FO 371/52456, August 1, 1946, No. E 3860, “Minutes,” by P. Garran.

<sup>44</sup> Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, *Iraq since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2003), p. 38.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 38–39. <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, p. 622; A.Q. interviewed by author, Toronto, Ontario, July 10, 2013.

<sup>49</sup> E.O. interviewed by author over the phone, May 28, 2013. E.O. resides in Chicago, IL. Also, Tūma Tūmās uses this last name in reference to Ilyās in his memoirs, “Awraq Tūma Tūmās (1),” 2006.

<sup>50</sup> Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, p. 622 <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 623–24. <sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> FO 371/52456, July 20, 1946, No. 456, “My dear Doctor Jamali,” from British Embassy Baghdad to Dr Muhammad Fadhil al-Jamali, Minister for Foreign Affairs.

active participant in the strike and member of the Communist Party who went on to become instrumental in founding the Oil Workers' Union under Qasim. His list of demands includes a social club for workers and an increase for the needs of desert workers.<sup>54</sup>

On July 3, about 5,000 workers went on strike.<sup>55</sup> This number included approximately 700 Assyrian workers, according to A.Q.<sup>56</sup> The workers would meet in the gardens of Gāwur Bāghe. Their diversity was indicated by the use of Arabic, Kurdish, Turkomen, Aramaic, English, Armenian, and even Hindi by the various speakers in their addresses to the workers.<sup>57</sup> Edward Odisho recalls:

As a child, I remember my illiterate father used to sing out those slogans at home before joining the rest of the demonstrators at the field in Gāwur Bāghe. One of the slogans said: "What do you want?" ... The response from the masses came: "We want our bread and our children's bread." ... Another slogan said: "What do you want?" The response came: "We want naphtha for our houses."<sup>58</sup>

The *mutaşarrif* of Kirkuk refused to use force against the demonstrators, and was consequently replaced by one who proceeded to do so. On July 12, mounted police began firing at the workers in Gāwur Bāghe, killing between ten and sixteen workers, and injuring twenty-seven.<sup>59</sup> In addition, about ten workers were detained, including Aprim 'Ama, who was a Communist at the time but would go on to become an important mentor to the younger generation that formed the Assyrian Democratic Movement in 1979. A.Q. remembers participating in a silent demonstration the next day, where the workers demanded the release of the detainees and that the police be brought to justice. Both demands were carried out, and the police eventually faced court trials. Following this, A.Q. was detained for his role in the strikes, and his house searched. His case was forwarded to Baghdad, and in a search of his house progressive literature was found. The judge eventually authorized his release, stating that such material was present

<sup>54</sup> A.Q. interviewed by author, Toronto, Ontario, July 10, 2013.

<sup>55</sup> Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, p. 624.

<sup>56</sup> A.Q. interviewed by author, Toronto, Ontario, July 10, 2013. <sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Edward Y. Odisho, "City Of Kirkuk: No Historical Authenticity without Multiethnicity," *Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies* 16: 1 (2002), p. 8.

<sup>59</sup> Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, p. 264. A.Q. estimates the number of workers killed at sixteen.

in many homes.<sup>60</sup> The company eventually conceded some of the workers' demands, such as higher wages, but refused to allow them to form a union. The workers returned to their jobs on July 16.<sup>61</sup>

Another decade would pass before the oil workers were able to establish a union. A.Q. was instrumental in its formation in 1959, under Qasim's rule. In honor of the workers killed in Gāwur Bāghe in 1946 and their struggle to form a union, a statue of a worker representing those killed was erected near the oil workers' club in Kirkuk, close to Gāwur Bāghe.<sup>62</sup>

Some Assyrian employees of the IPC who were active within the labor movement eventually joined the ranks of the ICP. One of these was Tūma Tūmās, whose memoirs we have already encountered. The path to both the IPC and ICP for this soon-to-be-communist leader had begun, ironically, in the Iraqi Levies. After failing to be accepted into high school in 1941, Tūmās went without schooling or employment until an opportunity presented itself in 1942,<sup>63</sup> when the British began enlisting Assyrians ( Church of the East and Chaldean members) and Kurds into the Iraqi Levies. According to Tūmās's memoirs, a colonel came to Alqosh and enlisted the seventeen-year-old Tūmās as an officer in the Iraqi Levies. Tūmās remained with the Levy forces until 1948. In that year, the Iraqi army decided to form a special brigade composed of Assyrian volunteers to participate in the war effort for Palestine.<sup>64</sup> Along with hundreds of Assyrians in the Levy forces, Tūmās signed up with the new brigade.<sup>65</sup> The continuation of the Iraqi Levies into the 1940s contradicts the widespread notion that they were disbanded in 1932. In the Iraqi Levies, Tūmās, together with Kurdish, Armenian, and Assyrian officers, "accepted democratic principles," and some joined the ICP. Tūmās reflected on his reasons for joining the Party as follows:

<sup>60</sup> A.Q. interviewed by author, Toronto, Ontario, July 10, 2013. <sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Tūma Tūmās, "Awraq Tūma Tūmās (1)," *Thekriat*, 2006, originally published at [www.al-nnas.com](http://www.al-nnas.com).

<sup>64</sup> Tūmās identifies the colonel by the name of "Mack Qeen." Tūmās, "Awraq Tūma Tūmās (1), 2006."

<sup>65</sup> Tūmās, "Awraq Tūma Tūmās (1), 2006." See also FO 624/144, August 18, 1948, "Assyrians: Recruitment Palestine," from Air Vice-Marshal A. Gary, Air Headquarters, Royal Air Force, to Mr Richmond, British Embassy in Baghdad.

As for me, it was a result of the arrogant stances of British officers, the rising democratic tide, my communication with martyr Ilyās Ḥannā Gūhārī,<sup>66</sup> and our exposure to the Iraqi press, especially the newspaper *al-Ahālī*, the most influential in the progression of my political awareness. I began to feel the enormity of my error in joining the Levy army. This feeling deepened for me further in my years of employment at the IPC in Kirkuk. I often collided with British officers who considered themselves higher than local [native] officers.<sup>67</sup>

In 1950 Tūmās began working for the IPC in Kirkuk. He also started receiving Communist political publications, and paying a monthly membership fee to the Party.<sup>68</sup> Tūmās described a heightened political awareness on the part of IPC workers as a result of communist activities. In addition, he believed that the arbitrary politics of the company, and its refusal to accept the “simplest requests of workers,” also contributed to their politicization. Tūmās was further frustrated by the contempt shown by the British to Iraqi workers and staff. For instance, Iraqi employees at the company were required to use the phrase “Yes, Sir” when addressing English men employed at the IPC. The president of the IPC, according to Tūmās, enjoyed absolute power in Kirkuk; even the police and security officials obeyed his command.

In his memoirs, Tūmās identified various events that had led him toward the Communist Party in his early life. The labor movement in Kirkuk had heightened his political activism, but this activism exacerbated socioeconomic and ethnic tensions between the various Kirkuki communities, which reached a boiling point in 1959.

### *Urban Violence in 1959*

The July 1959 crisis in Kirkuk was a watershed event whose lasting repercussions resurfaced in 1963. Though this crisis played a significant role in how Communists and their sympathizers would be treated by nationalists and state authority figures in Kirkuk following Qasim’s toppling, the events that transpired in Mosul a few months earlier shed light on the ways in which Assyrians were treated due to their

<sup>66</sup> Ilyās Ḥannā Gūhārī, who was discussed above, was Tūma Tūmās’s paternal cousin. In a footnote, Tūmās reveals that Ilyās Ḥannā was killed following the 1963 coup, after being horrendously tortured. Tūmās, “Awraq Tūma Tūmās (1),” 2006.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. <sup>68</sup> Ibid.



membership or assumed affiliation with the Communist Party, foreshadowing events in Kirkuk.

On March 6, 1959, the Partisans of Peace, supported by the ICP, organized a rally to showcase the strength of the left in Mosul. This was probably a response to rumors of a revolt by Mosul's armed forces, which was allegedly to be orchestrated by the disgruntled Free Officers.<sup>69</sup> A strong anti-Qasimite group in Mosul comprised Nasserites, nationalists, Ba'athists, and the Muslim Brotherhood, alongside tribal leaders whose interests had been threatened by the fall of the monarchy.<sup>70</sup> With the exception of Christian and Kurdish neighborhoods in the city of Mosul, which favored the left, the population generally seemed to follow a "vague form of Sunni-pan-Arabism."<sup>71</sup> Following the commencement of the rally, confrontation ensued in particular after Colonel Shawwāf announced the rebellion over the radio on March 8. For the next four days, chaos reigned. According to Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, much of the violence was primarily based more on "long standing ethnic and inter-tribal rivalries between Arabs and Kurds and between different Arab tribal factions and with the hatred of peasants for their landlords [rather than on] strictly party political matters."<sup>72</sup> Abu Baz claims in an interview that, of the 600 communists killed, 200 were Assyrian. Furthermore, 500 Assyrian families escaped Mosul and the surrounding area for other parts of the country – probably Baghdad in most cases.<sup>73</sup> Abu Baz's account is supported by an entry on "Martyrs of Telkaif" in an ICP publication on its martyrs.<sup>74</sup> The entry claims that "great tragedies" were endured by the residents of the Telkaif district at the hands of a "regressive coalition" of nationalists, conservatives, and chauvinists.<sup>75</sup> The events of these days are not clear, but according to this entry eight men from Telkaif were charged with killing two people, and sentenced to be executed by the first courts-martial.<sup>76</sup> The sentences were carried out after the 1963 coup.

<sup>69</sup> Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq since 1958*, pp. 66–67. <sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66. <sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>73</sup> Abu Baz interviewed by author, Alqosh, Iraq, December 18, 2011.

<sup>74</sup> Hizb al-Shuyū'ī al-'Irāqī. Lajnat Maṭbū' Shuhadā' al-Hizb, *Shuhadā' al-Hizb, Shuhadā' al-Waṭan: Shuhadā' al-Hizb al-Shuyū'ī al-'Irāqī, 1934–1963*, 2nd ed. ([Beirut?]: Hizb al-Shuyū'ī al-'Irāqī, 2008), p. 300.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* <sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 300–4.

The effects of the Shawwāf massacre on the Assyrian community, both in the city of Mosul and in Telkaif, confirmed the fragile position of the community, and the consequences of the increased political engagement of its members and their affiliation with communism. The large number of Assyrian Communists killed, even in a city with a high concentration of Assyrians was significant (14 percent in the city of Mosul: see Table A.6). This incident led to the displacement from their native city of Assyrian families who were evidently fearful of continuing to live in Mosul after centuries of coexistence. The attacks were a result of ethno-sectarian and socioeconomic factors, and underlined the sense of disenfranchisement felt by Arab nationalists and traditionalists that came with the political mobilization of a newer segment of their society. This form of violence was to be repeated a few months later in Kirkuk.

On July 14, 1959, violent clashes broke out between Kurds and Turkmens in Kirkuk during a procession celebrating the first anniversary of the revolution. The overwhelming majority of the victims were Turkmens who were apparently also unarmed.<sup>77</sup> As in the case of Mosul, scholars agree that the conflict in Kirkuk was based on ethnic rather than political tensions – albeit exacerbated by social factors – caused by growing animosity between the more established Turkmen community and the newer, Communist-affiliated Kurdish one.<sup>78</sup> The oil industry had attracted more Kurds from surrounding villages, increasing their numbers to one-third of the population by 1959, whereas the numbers of Turkmens had declined to half of the overall population of 120,000. Assyrians accounted for about 10 percent of the population, and Arabs made up the rest.<sup>79</sup> Changing demographics, and the appointment of Kurds to many important posts in the city traditionally held by Turkmens, contributed to the conflict by causing the Turkmens to feel marginalized.<sup>80</sup> Regardless of the issues underlying the conflict, the Communist Party was held responsible. Furthermore, members of the People's Resistance – a “popular militia” organized by the government in 1958 but heavily influenced by the

<sup>77</sup> Bet-Shlimon, *City of Black Gold*, pp. 145–54.

<sup>78</sup> Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, p. 912; Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq since 1958*, p. 71.

<sup>79</sup> Official Iraqi census from 1957 in Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, p. 913.

<sup>80</sup> Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, p. 914; Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq since 1958*, p. 71.

ICP – also shouldered some blame.<sup>81</sup> Like the Shawwāf massacre in Mosul, the Kirkuk incident highlighted the disgruntlement of traditional nationalists and other established communities in Kirkuk city. The emergence of new communities, and in particular their political and economic mobilization, exacerbated ethno-sectarian and socioeconomic tensions that led to the eruption of violence. The association of the ICP and its affiliate organizations with the 1959 crisis is significant for the courts-martial that were held in Kirkuk in 1963. For the majority population, the crisis evoked the memory of the Qasimite regime; like Qasim's presidency, it was referred to by his adversaries as the "chaotic tide," following which the Ba'athists, presenting themselves as the vanguard of the revolution, would proceed to restore order.

I have attempted thus far to understand the role of Assyrians in the Communist Party of Iraq during the monarchical period. During the five years in which Qasim held power (1958–63), the Assyrians enjoyed a relatively positive situation. From the 1950s, Assyrians had begun a process of integration into major urban centers, as will be discussed in the following section. During the 1950s, Assyrians moved to cities in large numbers, in search of employment and education. Assyrian refugees from the World War I who were still living in the Habāniyya camp purchased land and began building a new neighborhood on the outskirts of Baghdad city.<sup>82</sup> As the city grew, the Dora district was eventually incorporated into Baghdad, attracting more Assyrian families over the decades, who migrated to the capital from their villages in the northern provinces. In 1959, with their growing presence in Baghdad, Assyrian members of the Church of the East opened their first church in the capital since the creation of the republic. In a sign of official support, Qasim and other government officials attended the church's opening ceremony.<sup>83</sup> At the same time, however, Assyrian aspirations to form secular cultural and political organizations were dashed. For instance, April 1961 saw the formation of *Khuyada w Kheirūtha Athōrayta* (Assyrian Unity and Freedom), known by its acronym, Kheith Kheith Allap II. When its application to register was denied by the government, its organizers were

<sup>81</sup> Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq since 1958*, pp. 62–63.

<sup>82</sup> AIR 19/764, May 29, 1958, No. A123817/52/Pr. III, "Confidential," from P.S. to S. of S., signed K.C. MacDonald, pp. 1–2.

<sup>83</sup> FO 371/141092, April 27, 1959, "Opening of an Assyrian Church in Baghdad."

prompted to move their activities to the north. Such advances led to the strengthening of ties between Assyrian organizations and the Kurdish resistance, especially following Qasim's toppling in 1963. Assyrians within the Communist Party, or sympathetic to it, probably felt ambivalent about Qasim. Although communists expected more from Qasim than they received, they were generally loyal to him until the very end. For instance, A.Q. described how difficult it was to receive a permit for the formation of an oil workers' union even under Qasim's rule. A.Q. and other organizers discovered that Qasim wanted to block their efforts to form a union, and instead bestow rights upon workers in a paternalistic fashion. Qasim also allowed Dā'ūd al-Šā'igh, a member of Fahd's first central committee (November 1941–42), and editor of the *al-Mabda'* newspaper (founded in 1959), who had split from the Party, to establish a rival Iraq Communist Party in 1960 that enjoyed legal status.<sup>84</sup> While the main ICP remained illegal, Qasim eventually allowed the formation of the union, after some skillful maneuvering on the part of its activists. AQ, reminiscing about the president, suggested that he "had a good heart."

Regardless of Communists' ambivalent feelings about Qasim, his toppling in 1963 – mainly by Arab nationalists and Ba'athists – was catastrophic for their party.

### *What Happened in 1963?*

On February 8, 1963, an army coup led by Ba'athists and nationalists toppled the Qasim regime and began a violent campaign against Communists and their sympathizers. On the same day, the new government broadcast Proclamation 13, which stated:

<sup>84</sup> Ismael, *Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Iraq*, pp. 98–101; Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, p. 494. Al-Sa'igh is identified by Batatu as a Christian teacher and lawyer, born in 1907 in Mosul (p. 494). After the toppling of Qasim, Sa'igh was among the accused Communists brought forth for martial-trials. The evidence connecting him to Qasim and the Communists related to financial assistance he had received from the regime, mainly for his newspaper. Sa'igh was eventually acquitted in 1967 due to lack of evidence against him. One of the witnesses considers him insignificant and believes Sa'igh weakened the ICP by registering a rival party and newspaper to it. Following Qasim's toppling, he had been convicted as a dangerous communist leader and sentenced to ten years of prison with hard labor, and stripped of his Iraqi citizenship (INLA, First National Security Court, January 1st, 1967, Dossier Number 65/337, Dā'ūd al-Šā'igh).

In view of the desperate attempts of the agent-communists—the partners in crime of the enemy of God, Qasim—to sow confusion in the ranks of the people and their disregard of official orders and instructions, the commanders of the military units, the police, and the National Guard are authorized to annihilate anyone that disturbs the peace. The royal sons of the people are called upon to cooperate with authorities by informing against these criminals and exterminating them.<sup>85</sup>

House to house arrests of alleged Communists followed, apparently facilitated by lists provided by the CIA.<sup>86</sup> During this campaign, close to 10,000 people were detained, and between 3,000 and 5,000 executed.<sup>87</sup> Those arrested were tortured by “special committees” and by the National Guard, which was a Ba‘thist militia.<sup>88</sup> Ismael suggests that the campaign of terror “mixed personal, sectarian, and tribal hatreds,” while Batatu emphasizes socioeconomic factors.<sup>89</sup> The campaign against the Communists and their sympathizers continued throughout the ensuing months. In May, as the Ba‘thists felt more isolated, having fallen out with the Nasserites and Nasser himself in July, and due to the rekindling of war with the Kurds, they began to be more violent toward their enemies. This violence was exacerbated in July, as communist-inclined soldiers and officers unsuccessfully attempted to take over the Iraqi military camp of al-Rashid and liberate its communist prisoners. Another wave of Ba‘thist aggression was then unleashed upon Communists.<sup>90</sup>

This violence also affected Assyrians. In response to an inquiry from the British Foreign Office regarding complaints from Assyrians in the diaspora about the discriminatory practices faced by Iraqi Assyrians, the British embassy in Baghdad confirmed having heard reports that the National Guard and the army were searching the Assyrian quarter for Communists, and in the process raping Assyrian women.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>85</sup> Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, p. 982.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 985; Ismael, *Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Iraq*, p. 107.

<sup>87</sup> Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, pp. 985–88; Ismael, *Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Iraq*, p. 107.

<sup>88</sup> Ismael, *Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Iraq*, p. 108.

<sup>89</sup> Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, pp. 983–85; Ismael, *Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Iraq*, p. 108.

<sup>90</sup> Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, pp. 985–88.

<sup>91</sup> FO 371/170509, July 11, 1963, “Dear Goodchild,” from R.W. Munro, British Embassy Baghdad, to D.L.N. Goodchild, Eastern Department, Foreign Office.

The more progressive elements within the Ba‘th Party criticized the level of violence used against Iraqi Communists by Ba‘th Party members and the National Guard.<sup>92</sup> They were likely concerned at the way in which these events reflected on their party within Iraq, as well as with the response of regional and Western audiences. For instance, Michel ‘Aflaq, Founder and Secretary-General of the Party, gave a speech on this subject on February 2, 1964, at the Extraordinary Congress of the Syrian Ba‘th.<sup>93</sup> Ten days later, on February 10, 1964, Amnesty Law 16 was issued, pardoning those involved in what they called the uprising movement in the northern region, likely referencing the Kurdish uprising, from September 10, 1961 to February 10, 1964.<sup>94</sup> In its efforts to reorder society following Qasim’s ouster, the Ba‘th regime attempted to normalize the violence and chaos experienced during the 1959 incidents in Mosul, and especially Kirkuk, and the massacres of Communists and their affiliates in 1963, which had expanded to include Assyrian villages outside Mosul, with public trials.

### **Assyrians in the Courts**

The cases illustrate how Communists, and especially Assyrians accused of being members of the ICP or an affiliate organization, were treated by the judicial system, while also revealing conceptions of ethnic differences and expectations of gender roles on the part of state institutions and society.<sup>95</sup> Most cases involved more than one person. Those grouped together were accused of being members of a cell, or were connected through family relationships, friendships, employment in the same company or department, and so on. The largest case involved fourteen people. Not all of the accused within any given group received the same verdict and some were released on bail or acquitted. Although most people in the same cell were usually

<sup>92</sup> Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, pp. 990–91; Ismael, *Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Iraq*, p. 109.

<sup>93</sup> Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, p. 991.

<sup>94</sup> The Ba‘th’s concerns related also to lost government property in the north, where some was still held by those involved in the uprising, according to the file. See court-martial source, INLA, 421101/175, General Ministry of Finance, “General Amnesty Law for Those Involved in the Movement,” 1968/12/16–1963/3/17.

<sup>95</sup> I reviewed about twenty cases from the court-martial records.

Assyrians, some contained one or two individuals of a different religious or ethnic background. Moreover, almost all witnesses were neither Assyrian nor Christian. Most witnesses knew the accused in some capacity, generally having worked or lived in close proximity with them. A few court cases for Assyrian towns were listed in the records of the Iraqi National Library and Archives, but the files are missing.

The trials for which I have records took place in Baghdad and Kirkuk, the latter also including cases from Erbil. All of the accused were men, with the exception of two women. The accused were between twenty and sixty years of age, and included students, teachers, IPC workers, members of the military, and a housekeeper. The investigation for these cases began in March 1963, and the trials were scheduled between July 1963 and the end of the year. One case from 1962 serves as a good comparison to the cases following the 1963 coup. Most cases were completed in a matter of months, while others were followed in later years by processes of appeal. Charges issued usually included membership in the ICP, or an organization believed to be affiliated with it, including students' and women's unions, workers' and oil syndicates, and the People's Resistance, especially in Kirkuk. Acts considered to be incriminating included involvement in the 1959 Kirkuk crisis; public expressions of attitudes toward the 1959 Shawwāf uprising in Mosul; the reading of communist newspapers; ownership of illegal communist-related books; collection of membership fees for the Communist Party or any of its syndicates or affiliated organizations; talking about the Communist Party and inciting others to join it; and, finally, insulting the Ba'ath party, Gamal Abdel Nasser, or the Turanians – Turkmen pan-nationalists in Kirkuk.

## Procedure

The procedure usually involved the testimony of witnesses followed by the questioning of the accused. Investigative information gathered in local police stations was later sent to the courts-martial in Baghdad and Kirkuk. Most northern cases were also sent to Kirkuk. In some cases the accused were released on bail in amounts of hundreds of dinars. Sentences ranged from a year to fifteen – some including harsh manual labor. The most dangerous of Communists in the cases reviewed were military cadres, in some cases leadership positions in affiliate

organizations to the ICP, such as the Iraqi Women's League, were also considered highly dangerous. The accused were tried according to the Baghdad Penal Code of 1919 (Arabic: *Qānūn al-'Uqūbāt al-Baghdādī* that was identified with the acronym: Q. 'A. B.). The Baghdad Penal Code had been amended a number of times since 1919, most recently for the cases discussed in 1961. The Military Penal Code of 1940 was used with military officers (Arabic: *Qānūn al-'Uqūbāt al-'Askarī*; acronym Q. 'A. 'A.).

### Witnesses

Witnesses tended to know those they accused well, and as a result their testimonies were emotionally charged and personally descriptive. This is one way in which the case pre-dating the 1963 coup differs.<sup>96</sup> Witnesses prior to 1963 were careful in their testimonies not to make inaccurate accusations of the crimes investigated, whereas in 1963 witnesses were more accusatory and more freely revealed their racial, ethnic, religious, and gender biases. This was due to the fact that, in 1962, Communists were associated with the regime, and witnesses did not want to be held accountable to higher powers – political, governmental, or even professional – that were aligned with the Communists. Making accusations against possible Communists may have had real consequences for witnesses, even though the case I encounter deals with the use of explosives by what appears to be a communist cell in Kirkuk.<sup>97</sup>

This was not the case following Qasim's toppling. Witness charges and claims revolved around three important themes: the accused being anti-nationalist, anti-religious, and dishonorable. All three were charges related to causing chaos in the community, and disrupting the established order. Cases in Baghdad involving military figures who made public statements against the Shawwāf uprising of 1959, were taken to signify an anti-Arab nationalist stance. In Kirkuk, 1959 was an equally pivotal year in its remembrance, and, most importantly, participation in the 1959 parade-turned- incident in

<sup>96</sup> INLA, Ministry of Defense, Fourth Military Court-Martial, 4206069/389, 1962, Yū'ārīsh Hūrmiz.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.



Kirkuk. The accused were also believed to be atheists and anti-religion, and dishonorable either as women or as men allowing women under their influence (as their sisters) to act in dishonorable ways.

The accused responded to the charges in three ways. The first and smallest group admitted to being part of the ICP, but either claimed to have changed their affiliation and quit following certain positions taken by the Party (for example, its support for the Kurdish uprising in 1961), or supported their position and that of the Party. The majority of the accused either denied membership of the ICP itself but admitted to being members of one of its affiliates, or denied membership of any affiliated party. Denying membership of the ICP usually involved making ideological dispositions against an atheist party. Those admitting to membership of an affiliate denied knowledge of the Party being affiliated with their group, and also denied participation in anti-nationalist activity, in particular the 1959 Kirkuk incident. Denial of participation in that incident was supported by claims such as that the accused was on honeymoon, or was vacationing outside of Kirkuk. With regard to support for and participation in anti-Arab nationalist activity, or the display of such sentiments, those affiliated with the army claimed that they feared that Arab nationalists would tamper with the sovereignty of the nation by excluding non-Arabs and causing them to revolt, as demonstrated by the Kurdish uprising.

The rest of this chapter examines cases mainly from Kirkuk – one involving a housewife who was also the branch president of the Iraqi Women's League. Josephine Warda was convicted for her activism for and membership of the Iraqi Women's League – an affiliate organization of the ICP – and for “causing chaos” in her community. In 1963, Warda was considered to have crossed the gender, ethnic, and confessional boundaries for an Assyrian Christian woman that were widely accepted in this turbulent period. For this, and for her membership within the League, Warda was sentenced to one year in prison. Other cases of men from Kirkuk and a few from Baghdad who were accused of belonging to the Communist Party or one of its affiliated organizations will follow. Those who were incriminated were said to have caused chaos in their community through their political activism, disruption of gender roles, and undermining of nationalist causes, and in one case, by highlighting their Assyrian identity. As a result of the increased mobility enabled by their political affiliation with, and

employment in, the modern professions such as the IPC, these men were deemed to have disrupted the established socioeconomic order, heightening the fears of Arab nationalists by asserting their ethnic identity. Those men who were sentenced were given ten, five, and two years in prison where one died mysteriously while serving his sentence.

### The Case of Josephine Warda

Josephine Warda was an Assyrian woman from Kirkuk who was the branch president of the Iraqi Women's League in the city. Largely due to the League's close association with the ICP, Warda was accused of being a Communist. In this case, we reveal information on women, which we generally know less about. Batatu focuses on leftist men, while Bashkin and Efrati use journals.<sup>98</sup> Warda's story tells us about the choices available to women, and how these women negotiated their case with the state. Warda's case shares similarities with other cases, especially of Kirkuki Assyrians in relation to its format and court regulations. As in many other cases, Warda's membership of the Communist Party was never established, but traces of personal animosity can be detected between her and several of the witnesses against her. Moreover, her case is amenable to an ethno-sectarian analysis in the context of the "chaotic tide" of revolutionary Iraq. Warda's case is distinctive, in relation to the cases concerning men, in the gendered tone characterizing the testimonies of witnesses and of Warda herself, and also in relation to the guilty verdict issued by the court. The use of gender by the courts complicates the court-martial records of 1963, and allows one to examine the way in which Iraqi women, and specifically women associated with the Communist Party, were treated by the Iraqi courts, as well as to understand some of the attitudes toward women widely held by society during this period.

Though Warda admitted to being associated with the Iraqi Women's League, she rejected charges of communist affiliation. However, the League's close association with the Communist Party cast doubt on Warda's case. In order to make sense of why such an association was made between a women's organization and the Communist Party, and

<sup>98</sup> Bashkin, *New Babylonians*, pp. 141–82; Noga Efrati, *Women in Iraq: Past Meets Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

to understand the position of the Iraqi Women's League during this turbulent period, a short summary is required of the Iraqi women's movement, and of the League's position within it. This history enables Warda's actions to be placed in their historical context starting from the 1940s.

### *A History of the Iraqi Women's Movement*

In December 1944, female delegates of various Iraqi organizations concerned with issues relating to women and children, and to general societal welfare, attended the Arab Women's Conference in Cairo. Inspired by the conference's call for the formation of a women's organization in the Arab states, the participants founded the Iraqi Women's Union in 1945. The union was an amalgamation of the women's branches of five associations: the Red Crescent Society, the Child Protection Society, the Houses of the People Society, the Women's Temperance and Social Welfare Society, and the Women's League Society.<sup>99</sup> Three members of each society became part of the executive council of the Iraqi Women's Union until 1947, when the leftist Women's League Society was excluded following government attacks on leftist groups.<sup>100</sup> Nevertheless, this union quickly became a powerful medium for the advancement of Iraqi women's social, civil, and economic rights. Among its goals were the welfare of the family and society and women's role in their elevation. In the 1950s, the Union led the campaign for women's suffrage.<sup>101</sup> Alongside a national aspiration for cooperation with other women's organizations, they also sought regional (mainly Arab) and global cooperation. This transnational approach was especially stressed in their support for Arab nationalist causes, such as that of Palestinian national rights.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>99</sup> Noga Efrati, "Competing Narratives: Histories of the Women's Movement in Iraq, 1910–58," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 40 (2008), p. 456.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 557.

<sup>101</sup> Noga Efrati, "The Other 'Awakening' in Iraq: The Women's Movement in the First Half of the Twentieth Century," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 2 (2004), p. 169.

<sup>102</sup> Efrati, "Competing Narratives," p. 557.

But members of the Iraqi Women's Union were affiliated with the monarchical ruling class at the time.<sup>103</sup> The more revolutionary, younger women involved in the student movement were therefore drawn to the League for the Defense of Women's Rights, founded in 1952.<sup>104</sup> This organization, renamed the Iraqi Women's League, was closely affiliated with the ICP, having as one of its founders and leaders, Naziha al-Dulaymi. Al-Dulaymi became a minister in Qasim's cabinet, elevating the positions of both the ICP and the League.<sup>105</sup> Female lawyers within the Iraqi Women's League, such as Naziha al-Dulaymi, were instrumental in changing women's legal status in Iraq. In 1959, with the support of Qasim's revolutionary government, "one of the most progressive family laws in the region" was passed.<sup>106</sup> Although still based on Shari'a principles, the law specified a new personal status code encompassing both Shi'i and Sunni men and women. Among other things, the code was more progressive in its interpretation than previous laws, giving women equal rights of inheritance, restricting polygamy and unilateral divorce, and requiring women's consent in marriage. Opposition to the personal status code – and specifically its inheritance provision – was instrumental in uniting Sunni and Shi'a religious authorities behind Arab nationalist rhetoric, leading them to support the Ba'athist coup against Qasim in 1963. As a result, the first measure taken by the Ba'athists was to revoke the inheritance provision of the 1959 personal status law.<sup>107</sup>

Although Qasim's government supported the demands of the Iraqi Women's League for women's rights, this association was short-lived. Demonstrations, violence, and ensuing conflict between Arab Nationalists and Communists escalated after the revolution. On one hand, some of this violence was clad in personal, ethno-sectarian, and socioeconomic garb; on the other, changing gender roles, including women's involvement in the public sphere during the revolutionary

<sup>103</sup> Nadjé Al-Ali and Nicola Pratt, *What Kind of Liberation? Women and the Occupation of Iraq* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2008), pp. 24–26.

<sup>104</sup> Efrati, "The Other 'Awakening' in Iraq," p. 168.

<sup>105</sup> Al-Ali and Pratt, *What Kind of Liberation?*, p. 26. <sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>107</sup> Sara Pursley, "A Race against Time: Governing Femininity and Reproducing the Future in Revolutionary Iraq, 1945–63," PhD diss., City University of New York, 2012, p. 5.

period, contributed to what opponents of the Qasimite regime would come to call the “chaotic tide.”

During this period women were occupying an expanding social space situated between the private and public spheres.<sup>108</sup> Beginning in 1959, and especially after 1960, societal perceptions of the roles of men and women within the revolution were rigorously questioned, uncovering “deep divisions in Iraqi society over questions of sexual equality, family law, and women’s political activism.”<sup>109</sup> This resulted from two contentious items introduced by the Iraqi Women’s League: the 1959 personal status law – more specifically, its equal inheritance clause – and the rural literacy program for women.<sup>110</sup> The government and anti-communist organizations, including the Ba‘th, believed that the literacy program intensified “social promiscuity,” endangering the country’s vulnerable political and economic sectors,<sup>111</sup> primarily because of the difficulty of examining women’s activities associated with the literacy program. Women operated in ways that limited the scope of surveillance both by men in their community and by the government. Since most women associated with this program were teachers, they offered lessons during their summer breaks, or in the evenings, in unused public school classrooms. Moreover, they relied on “existing female homosocial networks and rural modes of hospitality.”<sup>112</sup> Finally, the program was funded by donations, some of which came from international communist organizations.<sup>113</sup>

In the midst of this contention, although Qasim realized that he needed the support of the ICP, he was wary of its influence on the masses, and fearful of the mounting opposition to both the ICP and his own regime from nationalists and conservatives.<sup>114</sup> As a result, Naziha al-Dulaymi was removed from his cabinet, along with two other Communist sympathizers. These three individuals had been given ministerial positions to bring the ICP closer to the regime, and their removal in the winter of 1960 was followed by the closing down of

<sup>108</sup> Jacques Donzelot refers to this space as the “social.” Jacques Donzelot, *The Policing of Families* (New York: Pantheon, 1979). For Sara Pursley’s conceptualization of the “social” in the revolutionary Iraqi context, see Pursley, “Race against Time,” p. 259.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 262. <sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 262–63. <sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 305. <sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> Al-Ali and Pratt, *What Kind of Liberation?*, pp. 28–29.

organizations associated with the ICP – including the Iraqi Women’s League, which thereafter had to operate underground.<sup>115</sup>

The association between the ICP, the Iraqi Women’s League, and an increasingly gendered political sphere complicated matters for Warda. Her personal conflict with a convincing witness during an especially tumultuous period in Iraqi history, and a gendered investigation and trial committed to reinstating the patriarchal order needed to restore the revolution, eventually led to her conviction.

### *The Case*

In February 1963, the investigation into the case of Josephine Warda, initiated by security officers in Kirkuk, concluded that there was enough evidence to accuse Warda of being a “dangerous communist,” and forwarded her case to the criminal courts.<sup>116</sup> Warda was a twenty-four-year-old housewife and mother of three children aged between two and seven.<sup>117</sup> She resided in Kirkuk with her family. Her husband, who is mentioned in the court record only briefly, appears to have been an employee of the IPC.<sup>118</sup>

Numerous witnesses testified against Warda, including a few convicted communists. The witnesses accused Warda of being the president of the Iraqi Women’s League, of collecting membership fees on behalf of the League, and of handing out its publications, along with communist ones. Some of them also believed she was a member of the ICP. The witnesses further raised questions regarding her reputation, her marital fidelity, and the repercussions – both personal and organizational – of her actions on the community in which she lived. Communist witnesses were mainly brought in to establish her relationship, and by extension that of the League, with the ICP.

Warda’s problems with the law began in 1961, following a quarrel between her and Majid Ḥamīd, a twenty-five-year-old Sunni Muslim

<sup>115</sup> Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, pp. 154–55.

<sup>116</sup> INLA, Ministry of Defense, Fourth Military Court-Martial, 4206064/253, No. 963/45, February 19, 1963, “Honorable Judge of Investigation in Kirkuk,” 29/46.

<sup>117</sup> INLA, “The Honorable Military Judge for the Northern Region,” 38/56; INLA, March 27, 1963, “Testimony of the Accused Josephine Warda,” 28/44 (numbers illegible).

<sup>118</sup> For instance, under her signature in INLA 38/56, it states that she lived in homes reserved for IPC employees.

schoolteacher, and one of the main witnesses in her case. This conflict led to what can be described as a vendetta with sectarian and gendered dimensions, which lasted into 1963, leading to Warda's conviction. During this time, Ḥamīd testified against Warda twice – in 1961 and 1963 – and, according to her, convinced other witnesses to testify against her as well.<sup>119</sup>

### *Witness Testimonies*

According to Ḥamīd, the story began in 1961 at his in-laws' house. Warda lived near his in-laws and would visit them often. After spending a night with them, Ḥamīd woke up in the morning and stepped outside their door to find Warda standing with three women. Warda, in Ḥamīd's testimony, was carrying magazines belonging to the League; she also held a piece of paper on which she had written the names of subscribers. Warda was handing out copies of the magazine, and also collecting funds. Ḥamīd was not sure whether the funds had been given in exchange for the magazine, or were membership fees to the organization.<sup>120</sup> The distinction was probably important, as it would alter the seriousness of the conviction. At this point, Ḥamīd interfered, showing his dissatisfaction, and stating, "You are a woman. Why are you committing such actions that are in conflict with a woman's role?" In clarification he added, "[T]his is because the League was illegal at the time." According to the witness, Warda daringly responded, "I curse this time, this government and its president that has allowed you [plural] to speak to us [in this manner]." The witness described Warda as being bold, loud, and aggressive in her manner, which he took to mean that she was not only a member of the League but also of the Communist Party.<sup>121</sup> Ḥamīd went directly to the authorities and testified against her.<sup>122</sup> Following his testimony, Warda was detained and her case forwarded to the courts-martial in Baghdad, according to Ḥamīd.<sup>123</sup>

<sup>119</sup> INLA, May 21, 1963 (date based on another document from the court), "Testimony of the Accused," given in court, 9/9.

<sup>120</sup> INLA, March 26, 1963, "Testimony of Witness Majid Ḥamīd," 28/39 (citation numbers not clear).

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*; INLA, May 11, 1963, "Sworn Witness Testimony for Prosecutor or Defense," Testimony of Majid Ḥamīd 9/13.

<sup>122</sup> INLA, Testimony of Majid Ḥamīd 9/13. <sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

The use of the plural by Warda in addressing Ḥamīd might suggest that the witness was himself politically motivated, perhaps belonging to the nationalist tendency. This cannot be confirmed from the court documents, but it provides an alternative explanation of the animosity between the witness and the accused. If, besides this personal conflict, the two individuals belonged to two different political tendencies – for example, Arab or Turkish nationalism versus communism – one can understand why the relationship between them became so charged, and caused him to be determined to testify against her twice.

Furthermore, Warda's house visits were in line with the League's activities during the period. Under its slogan "Defending the Republic," the League organized door-to-door campaigns, sending its members to Iraqi households to collect the signatures of women on issues of relevance to both the ICP and the defense of the Iraqi republic. Through such activities, the League strived to politicize and educate Iraqi women.<sup>124</sup>

As the investigation against Warda proceeded, Ḥamīd was supported in his testimony against Warda by his friend 'Uthmān Murād, a twenty-four-year-old production observer at the IPC, who was Warda's neighbor and also a Sunni Muslim.<sup>125</sup> Murād recalled observing Warda in the neighborhood as she sold the League's magazines. For example, he recounted an instance at the residence of Ḥamīd's father-in-law, stating that one day, while Ḥamīd and Murād were seated, Warda had come into the residence and called Ḥamīd's sister-in-law and began talking to her. After Warda had left, the two men inquired about the conversation, learning that Warda had been seeking donations on behalf of the League, and tried to recruit Ḥamīd's sister-in-law to join the League.<sup>126</sup>

Warda was maneuvering in this social space that temporarily allowed for a conversation uncensored by male surveillance between Warda and Ḥamīd's sister-in-law. These women exchanged a culturally acceptable form of hospitality, mingling as neighbors usually do at each other's homes. But their conversations had not focused on their

<sup>124</sup> Pursley, "Race against Time," p. 299.

<sup>125</sup> INLA, March 26, 1963, Testimony of Witness 'Uthmān Murād, 28/37.

Ḥamīd's father-in-law was also his paternal uncle. Hence, one can assume that Ḥamīd had been visiting his father-in-law/uncle for a long period of time, and had acquaintances such as Murād in his uncle's neighborhood.

<sup>126</sup> INLA, March 26, 1963, Testimony of Witness 'Uthmān Murād, 28/37.



families or other accepted female topics, as far as Ḥamīd, Murād, and the political elite were concerned. Warda was trying to recruit and politicize her neighbor's daughter at a time when Qasim's regime and the other Iraqi political parties had agreed to suspend political mobilization in order to establish a secure national space with room for modernization and development.<sup>127</sup> By interacting with a Muslim neighbor, Warda, as an Assyrian Christian, was transgressing into an intercommunal space that had recently been inflamed by the memory of the 1959 Kirkuk incident.

In addition to gender, ethnic, and sectarian boundaries, Warda had defied culturally acceptable modes of behavior by interacting with men outside her family. Murād raised questions about Warda's morals while speculating on whether she was a Communist since she always carried the ICP's newspaper, *Ittiḥād al-Sha'b*, and had relations with Mu'ayyad Shukrī, a Communist whose home she had often visited.<sup>128</sup> He also recalled that in 1960 she had attended the League's second conference in Baghdad, but returned from it angry with Qasim because the president had not attended the conference. Predictably, according to Murād, Warda was cursing the government and Qasim.<sup>129</sup>

The court tried to establish a connection between Warda and the ICP by admitting testimony from three convicted Communists. The men were questioned about the communist women's branch and the Party's connection with the Iraqi Women's League – and, more specifically, about whether Warda was herself a Communist. The witnesses denied knowing whether she was an organized Communist or not. It was important for the investigators, however, to establish a connection between the League, its branch president, Warda, and the Communist Party, which would have enabled them to make further connections in the future.

### *Warda's Testimony*

In her own testimony, Warda denied being a Communist, calling the party an anti-religious, atheist organization that went against her

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 262.

<sup>128</sup> INLA, 28/37, and INLA, May 11, 1963, "Sworn Witness Testimony for Prosecutor or Defense," Testimony of 'Uthmān Murād, 9/15.

<sup>129</sup> INLA, March 26, 1963, Testimony of 'Uthmān Murād, 28/37.

beliefs.<sup>130</sup> To stress this further, she referred back to her case in 1961, during which she was detained for cursing Qasim, “the criminal,” and to the charges of Communist Party membership of which she had at that time been cleared, and released on a 200-dinar bail.<sup>131</sup> She continued her attacks on Qasim, “I thank the Lord that ‘Abd al-Karim Qasim was arrested. I am loyal to the blessed government of 14 Ramadan which saved us from the oppression [of Qasim’s rule].”<sup>132</sup>

Warda admitted to being a member of the Iraqi Women’s League, but played down her role in the organization. She denied collecting membership fees for the League or handing out its magazine to subscribers, stating that Ḥamīd had only seen her carrying a personal copy of the magazine.<sup>133</sup> More significantly, she used conventional gender roles to defend her position in the League.<sup>134</sup> For instance, she claimed to have been nominated to attend the League’s second conference because she was a seamstress – an acceptable job for woman, and one that she apparently carried out on the side while caring for her family as a housewife. She also claimed to have joined the League to learn “sewing, childcare and cleanliness,” clearly downplaying the League’s struggle for women’s rights.<sup>135</sup> Trying to normalize her behavior, she insisted, “I used to go to the League as any other women went to the League.”<sup>136</sup>

<sup>130</sup> INLA, March 16, 1963, Testimony of the Accused Josephine Warda, to Nūrī al-Khayāt, Security investigator (in Kirkuk), missing document and page numbers.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid. <sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> INLA, March 27, 1963, Testimony of the Accused Josephine Warda, 28/44.

<sup>134</sup> Denize Kandiyoti, “Bargaining with Patriarchy,” *Gender & Society* 2: 3 (September 1, 1988), pp. 274–90.

<sup>135</sup> INLA, March 27, 1963, second page of Warda’s testimony, 28/45.

<sup>136</sup> INLA, May 21, 1963, “Testimony of the Accused,” continuation of Warda’s testimony to the court, 9/10. The use of accepted gender roles – such as sewing and childcare – by Warda during this period of extreme violence can be understood through Elizabeth Thompson’s notion of a “crisis of paternity.” Thompson argues that social, political, and economic problems after the World War I led to the “destabilization” of the patriarch’s authority, and to changing female roles. As a result of this destabilization, Syrian women negotiated with their patriarchy by adopting gender roles associated with patriotic motherhood in the 1930s. Women accepted conventional gender roles, including domestic responsibilities and charitable work, as their national duties. Thompson’s conceptualization seems appropriate for the Qasimite period of revolutionary Iraq. Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal*

The gendered nature of Warda's trial relates to another reality of the Iraqi political arena. The client-patron relationships that had long defined the Iraqi political sphere were organized hierarchically, differentiating between various interest groups. Gender, ethnic sectarianism, and socioeconomic differences were among the dividing elements that shaped this hierarchy. In Warda's case, traces of these divisions appeared in the proceedings of the trial, and in the guilty verdict issued by the court on June 3, 1963:

It has been confirmed to the council on the basis of the proceedings that the accused Josephine Warda was the president of the Iraqi Women's League [in Kirkuk] during the chaotic tide. The League was one of the fronts for the Communist Party. In addition she incited women to join the League and collected membership fees and donations illegally on its behalf. She also distributed the League's magazines. Furthermore, with the support of the security directorate of Kirkuk, it has been proved that she was responsible for causing disturbances and chaos in the community.<sup>137</sup>

The last sentence of the verdict proves that the court agreed with the way in which Ḥamīd and 'Uthmān had represented Warda, holding her responsible for "causing disturbances and chaos in the community." Warda had disrupted the patriarchal order through her increased political and social mobility as a member of the League, and probably also the ICP. Moreover, as an Assyrian Christian, she had crossed ethnic and sectarian boundaries that had recently been exacerbated by violent clashes in a newly urbanized oil city.

Contributing to the "chaotic tide" that came to define the Qasimite regime, a "marriage crisis" had been exacerbated partly due to Iraq's small population, which was believed to be detrimental to the country's economic development and military defense.<sup>138</sup> This "marriage crisis" in turn aroused interest in issues concerning women, children, and singlehood, the last being associated with mental and sexual disturbances. Both of these crises – of marriage and singlehood – were closely linked to "discourses of excessive mobility, disorder and ungovernability of non-marital interpersonal relationships in Iraq."<sup>139</sup>

*Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), pp. 6, 142.

<sup>137</sup> INLA, June 3, 1963, "Criminalization Decision," issued by the court, 3/2.

<sup>138</sup> Pursley, "Race against Time," p. 284. <sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 287.

During Qasimite rule, the political elites had tried to reinstate their own patriarchal control over the nationalist movement. One way to accomplish this was through the political immobilization of various segments of the population – an objective shared by most political parties. The League clearly defied this accepted political bargain by refusing to demobilize its members and political activities. As a consequence, its literacy program was shut down, and opposition began to form against the personal status law – opposition for which the League had petitioned. The proceedings of Warda’s trial present an example of the repercussions experienced by a member of the League shortly after the 1963 coup. Warda’s excessive mobility in the neighborhood on behalf of the League invoked the disapproval of her male neighbors. Warda was not only aiming to politicize women in her neighborhood, but also soliciting these women’s attention in a social medium that was partially closed to men. In this uncontrolled social space, whose accepted activities included neighbors’ conversations at each other’s door or home visits, Warda would approach her female (Muslim) neighbors, perhaps while sewing clothes for them, and in the process try to politicize them by asking them to join the League, collecting donations, and distributing reading material. As an Assyrian Christian woman, she also crossed ethnic and sectarian boundaries that were insistently asserted during this chaotic period, and entered into inappropriate relations with men. Her political mobility resembled that of her community; Warda’s activism was possible because of the emergence of a political space enabling communities such as the Assyrians and women to become empowered through alignment with the Communist Party.

Finally, Warda identified the personal animosity between her and Ḥamīd as the root cause of her current predicament.<sup>140</sup> When asked about the causes of this animosity, she identified her reputation as the issue.<sup>141</sup> Ḥamīd suspected – wrongly, according to Warda – that a “dishonorable relationship” existed between her and Shukrī because she would visit his house.<sup>142</sup> Murād brought this relationship up in his

<sup>140</sup> INLA, May 21, 1963, “Testimony of the Accused,” beginning of Warda’s testimony to the court, 9/9.

<sup>141</sup> INLA, March 27, 1963, second page of Warda’s testimony, 28/45.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

testimony, alluding to Shukrī also being a Communist.<sup>143</sup> In his testimony, Shukrī rejected accusations of an affair between himself and Warda, and stated that she had visited his home because she was a neighbor, and because his family used her services as a seamstress.<sup>144</sup> It is not clear what kind of relationship existed between Shukrī and Warda. What is revealing is the way her reputation became an issue in a criminal investigation, where it was both implicitly and explicitly questioned almost as much as her political involvement in these two organizations. It is interesting to note that Ba‘thists had been accusing Communists of destroying the family structure and promoting the sexual promiscuity of European Communists during this period. Since both Warda and Shukrī stood charged as Communists, such accusations would have seemed appropriate. According to Warda, Ḥamīd had also insulted her physical appearance, calling her a “skel-eton.” Following the guilty verdict, the court-martial sentenced Warda on June 4, 1963. According to article 3/13 Q. ‘A.B. Warda was to be imprisoned for one year under a “simple sentence.” Her detention period would be counted toward that year.

In other cases primarily involving men, the 1959 incidents in Mosul and Kirkuk became pivotal turning points for the accused; their actions and statements during those troublesome events would be used to incriminate them.

### **Adīb George: The Most Dangerous of Communists**

Adīb George, born in Kirkuk and a resident of Baghdad, was a 1st lieutenant with a modest monthly wage of forty dinars.<sup>145</sup> On June 16, 1963, he was convicted of being an organized Communist based on court evidence gathered from the testimony of witnesses who were his military colleagues, as well as his own testimony. The court went a step further, labeling him a “dangerous communist,” for actively spreading communism within the army, and encouraging officers, as well as students in the college of engineering, to join the Party. Witnesses

<sup>143</sup> INLA, March 26, 1963, Testimony of Witness ‘Uthmān Murād, 28/37.

<sup>144</sup> INLA, May 11, 1963, “Sworn Witness Testimony for Prosecutor,” Testimony of Mu‘ayyad Shukrī, 9/16.

<sup>145</sup> INLA, Ministry of Defense, First Military Court-Martial, 4206061/622, Adīb George Shuyū‘ī [Communist], 1963–1967, folder 2 [microfiche for file 1 not identified, or both 1 and 2 combined in number 2], 29/55.

accused him of supporting the Party financially, and of giving talks on communism within the army.<sup>146</sup> The sentence he received, which included ten years of hard labor, was one of the harshest I have seen under article 12/31, according to article 131 of the Military Penal Code (Q. 'A. 'A.); it was to be followed by an additional five years of hard labor under the terms of article 113 of the Baghdad Penal Code (Q. 'A. B.). In addition to this ruling, he was expelled from the army under article 30 of the Baghdad Penal Code.<sup>147</sup>

Adīb George was sent to serve his sentence in Hilla Central Prison. In 1965, his father, George Sa'īd, appealed his case before of the Second Audit Committee for State Security<sup>148</sup> under the terms of the National Safety Act of 1965.<sup>149</sup> This committee found that the younger George should have been sentenced to only five years according to article 113, based on the Baghdad Penal Code, which carried the maximum sentence of five years with hard labor. The Investigation Committee for Court Martial Trials,<sup>150</sup> supplied with the Audit Committee's verdict, requested the exact time George had spent in prison while awaiting trial and sentencing, which turned out to be about forty days. It was recommended that his holding period should count toward his final sentence of five years. Although his prison release memo is not included in the file, it seems that he was indeed released earlier.

The case demonstrates how the failure of an officer to embrace Arab nationalism became problematic during the Qasimite period, leading this individual to be disciplined after the coup. It appears that George leaned closer toward the Iraqist camp in the army – a loose ideology

<sup>146</sup> INLA 17/42.

<sup>147</sup> INLA, 1965/7/6, "The Investigation Committee for Court Martial Trials," 8/ 13. Relations between communism and the Iraqi army became strained in the 1930s. In 1937, during a crackdown on communists, sixty-five non-commissioned officers were arrested; three were condemned to death before having their sentences stayed while the rest had heavy prison sentences imposed on them. Zakī Khayrī, the Party liaison with the army, was given two years in jail and two years of probation. Despite this crackdown, one hundred officers maintained their membership in the ICP, pressing the government to adjust the Iraqi penal code by adding Article 89a, imposing the death sentence on anyone propagating communist ideas within the party (Ismael, *Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Iraq*, p. 25).

<sup>148</sup> Arabic: *Hay'at Tadqīq Amn al-Dawla al-Thāniyya*.

<sup>149</sup> Arabic: *Q. al-Salāma al-Waṭaniyya*.

<sup>150</sup> Arabic: *Hay'at Tahqīq al-Iḥkām al-'Urfiyya*.

that embraced an Iraq-first policy and celebrated the country's diversity, attracting minorities to its camp. Although George's confession to being a Communist was enough to incriminate him, his colleagues felt the need to address his other misdeeds in their testimonies, which in their view were objectionable. These included George's antagonism toward Arab nationalism; his father's work as a driver to Nuri al-Said, which linked his family to the monarchical regime; and his disdain for conservative values, betrayed by his "looseness" with his sister's honor. By addressing these misdeeds and interlacing them with the charge of communism, the witnesses, and by extension the state, set out to reclaim political space, and their place within its hierarchy, which people like George had grossly disrupted.

George was labeled the "most dangerous of communists" for spreading communist ideology within the ranks of the army. Witnesses gave examples of him taping "Ḥikmat al-Uṣbū'" (wisdom of the week) on the advertisement board, and preaching communist ideals to sergeant students.<sup>151</sup> His unit would recite the communist anthem "Nashīd al-Salām," which George defended by suggesting that many other units recited it as well. The witnesses were able to connect George to other known Communists,<sup>152</sup> linking him directly to the Shawwāf uprising of 1959, and claiming that he had gone to Mosul at the time of the uprising.<sup>153</sup> George, understanding how pivotal the March 1959 Shawwāf incident was for Arab nationalists, claimed to have held communist ideals until 1959, and to have joined the Party for a month or two around the time of what he called the "Shawwāf revolution." In his testimony, George described being introduced to

<sup>151</sup> INLA, Testimony of witness Ḥusayn Jamāl al-Dīn, on June 16, 1963, 16/30. Ḥusayn Jamāl al-Dīn was a twenty-six-year-old first lieutenant and resident of Mosul.

<sup>152</sup> INLA, 16/33, Testimony of witness Nūrī Ismā'īl, June 16, 1963. Nūrī Ismā'īl was a twenty-one-year-old retired first lieutenant and resident of Masib. He seems to have held a chief rank of "Ra'īs Rukn," as per the initial testimony of George, when the two men started their military training in Officers' College. Ismā'īl testified that, in 1959 and early 1960, he was involved in a correspondence between Adīb George and another officer, in which George told Nūrī Ismā'īl to let the unidentified man know that "Abū Sāmī, the friend of Ḥāsim Muḥammad 'Alī [suggested as known Communists] greets you." In the initial testimony of George, it was revealed that Ḥāsim Muḥammad 'Alī was a lieutenant in the army.

<sup>153</sup> INLA, Testimony of witness Shāhīn Yaḥyā, June 6, 1963, 16/31. Witness was a twenty-four-year-old first lieutenant and resident of Mosul.

communism while in engineering school, under the guidance of Lieutenant Ḥāsim Muḥammad ‘Alī. He narrated a brief account that diminished his own agency and enhanced ‘Alī’s, painting ‘Alī as the man who had the higher rank in the army, and who “brought him a paper” or membership form, told him to give a dinar and a half per month, and gave him the political name of Fakhri. Once George had set out along the military path, joining a training session in the use of light weaponry, and later holding a teaching position in the Officers’ College, his association with ‘Alī was cut off.<sup>154</sup>

But his colleagues, now incriminating witnesses against him, told a very different story, detailing not only his activism within the Communist Party, but his strong anti-Arab stances since the 1940s, going back to what they called the “triangular attack” – the failed military coup of Iraqi officers linked with the Arab nationalist bloc in 1941. According to them, George had defended Nuri al-Said, the influential minister within the monarchical regime, who had supported and was bolstered by the British. According to the witnesses, George, to excuse himself for not supporting Arab nationalist officers in 1941, had asked, “Do you want us to be bombed like Egypt?” and had later cursed the Egyptian president and strong proponent of Arab nationalism, Gamal Abdel Nasser.<sup>155</sup> Once the monarchy had been toppled, said his colleagues, they came to understand his actions. He was, in fact a Communist – a supporter of an ideology, in their view, that was antagonistic to Arab nationalism.

A clear turning point for these witnesses was the Shawwāf incident of 1959. Witness testimonies reported George’s actions during Shawwāf’s uprising, and his alleged happiness when Shawwāf’s coup failed and he was killed.<sup>156</sup> Not only did George oppose Shawwāf – an officer these witnesses regarded as a hero whose death they

<sup>154</sup> INLA, Initial Investigations, Lieutenant Adīb George, 30/56.

<sup>155</sup> INLA, Investigation Report with Nūrī Ismā‘īl, Initial Investigations, date not provided, INLA page number not clear. George was likely referencing the Suez Crisis of 1956, in which Egypt was attacked by Britain, France, and Israel for nationalizing the Suez Canal, though they withdrew their attacks under increased international criticism. Nasser’s reputation as a pillar of Arab nationalism was on the rise during this period, and especially after the withdrawal of the colonial powers. He was the Free Officer coup leader in 1952 credited with toppling the Egyptian monarchy and establishment of the republic. He became prime minister of Egypt in 1956.

<sup>156</sup> INLA 30/56.



mourned<sup>157</sup> – but, they claimed, he started torturing officers who held Arab nationalist views and had supported Shawwāf during this period. George would say, according to one witness, “I am tired from hitting the traitors.”<sup>158</sup> George denied this, pinning the physical abuse some of these pro-Shawwāf officers received on another officer. A second witness, 1st Lieutenant Ḥusayn Jamāl al-Dīn, took offense when George “curse[ed] the Arab nationality.”<sup>159</sup> Zuhayr ‘Abd al-Raḥmān claimed that George had told him, “You [Arab nationalists] want something while the people want something else.”<sup>160</sup> These testimonies were reflective of how the Arab nationalists within the army felt: taunted and marginalized by their communist colleagues, and by the Qasimite regime that enabled these leftists adversaries.

George either denied all of the charges, or provided explanations to appease the court. With regard to his disdain for the Shawwāf revolt, George claimed that he had not supported Arab unity because he feared that the Kurds would question their place within an Arab nationalist system, prompting them to revolt. Being from the north – he was born in Kirkuk – and a member of a minority community, George probably did not himself feel that he could fit into the Arab nationalist camp either. It was interesting that he referred to the Kurds both when giving reasons why he did not support Arab nationalism and also when describing why he had quit the Communist Party, which he blamed for supporting the recent Kurdish uprising. Communist backing for the Kurdish uprising was well documented. For instance, in the case of Ṣabāḥ Goriyya, Sālim Bahnām, and Ḥusayn Muḥammad (two Christians and a Muslim), witnesses accused the men of supporting the Kurdish uprising with communist slogans such as, “Peace in Kurdistan!” “Arab and Kurdish brotherhood!” and other pro-democracy statements.<sup>161</sup> George’s reasoning reiterates not only the

<sup>157</sup> For example, they refer to Shawwāf as *al-marḥūm* (meaning “the deceased,” but derived from the verb “mercy”) and Qasim as *al-maqbūr* (also “the deceased,” but the word more specifically means “the buried one,” without reference to mercy upon his or her soul).

<sup>158</sup> INLA 16/28.

<sup>159</sup> [DSC02866, INLA not clear]: testimony of First Lieutenant Ḥusayn Jamāl al-Dīn.

<sup>160</sup> INLA, The Testimony of Zuhayr ‘Abd al-Raḥmān; June 16, 1963, 16/37 [DSC02842].

<sup>161</sup> Ṣabāḥ Goriyya, includes Sālim Bahnām and Ḥusayn Muḥammad. INLA, Ministry of Defense, 4206062/1681, Ṣabāḥ Goriyya Yūsif, 1962–1962. One

fact that Communists supported, and were engaged in, the Kurdish uprising, but also that his level of awareness of his own place within the hierarchical system. As a military officer, thus a member of the vanguard of the nation, he opposed Arab unity not because of the ideology itself, but because he feared its impact on the territorial integrity of the Iraqi nation, with its diverse population, especially in light of recent evidence of one community revolting against the state – namely, the Kurds in 1961. This reasoning, he perhaps hoped, would resonate with fellow officers, given the special place of the Iraqi army with respect to anti-imperialism and Iraqi independence. Perhaps he could not use his own ethno-religious background to question his community's place within a pan-Arabist vision. Given the current purges by the Arab nationalist coup leaders of 1963 against minority communities – his own included – he used the example of the Kurds to detach himself from both his communism and his ethnic minority status. That is, communism now backed the Kurdish uprising, and the uprising adversely affected the integrity of the nation; hence, he was not in support of it, thereby demonstrating that he could fall back in line with the established patriarchal order that the Arab nationalists and conservatives were recreating.

As in other cases, a number of testimonies included personal attacks intended to denigrate his character and family honor. First Lieutenant Ḥusayn Jamāl al-Dīn was especially astonished that George would bring men to his Baghdad residence, allegedly for the purposes of advancing communist ideals – and even, on one occasion, left his sister

might question why not include Assyrians in such statements of “Arab and Kurdish brotherhood,” since Assyrians were also engaged in the uprising and the ICP. The answer would be to do with how the Communist Party, its newspapers, and the government framed the civil war. Assyrians were included indirectly when referencing the fight, but also, in Baghdad the Baghdadis would have been more familiar with the Arab/Kurd dichotomy; complicating it by including Assyrians would have diluted the message, from the point of view of a communist. Moreover, including Assyrians and Christians would have been problematic, given recent events in the northern region – the Shawwāf uprising and its consequences on the Assyrians in Mosul and neighboring villages. Finally, the Assyrians in the Communist Party would have believed in a non-sectarian narrative, at least in theory, and it would not have been important to Assyrianize every case. All these clarifying points are also excusing, and can call into question the ways in which Assyrians negotiated their place within the Communist Party.

alone with one of these men. This witness also claimed George did not respect the Creator. Charges of atheism against Communists were commonplace.<sup>162</sup> Jamāl al-Dīn's accusations wove together issues of gender, honor, and conservative values within this hierarchical system disrupted by leftists, communists, and members of minority communities.

### Lieutenant Ibrāhīm Tūmās: Communism as the Root of Humanity

The case of Ibrāhīm Tūmās is similar to that of George, as they were both military figures whose support for the Arab nationalist cause was brought into question.<sup>163</sup> In addition, both came from poorer backgrounds: George was the son of a driver, while Tūmās headed his family and took responsibility for their finances following his own father's death. Both men were accused by witnesses who were their colleagues, and in some cases below their military rank. Tūmās constructed a narrative that situated him within the Arab nationalist context, and claimed not to have supported communism. His accusers related statements made by him, such as, "Communism is the root of humanity," which argued that it helped individuals to rise and granted them equality. His efforts to open a library within the military were used against him on the basis that he would have included Marxist books. It was alleged that he supported works and student groups with communist leanings. Tūmās made no serious effort to deny his membership of the ICP, but claimed that he had left it after it had lent its support to the Kurdish uprising in 1961, like George before him. His main line of defense was to present himself as part of a vanguard defending the national integrity of Iraq.

### Yaldā Īliyā

With regard to the socioeconomic background of the accused, the case of Yaldā Īliyā yields more evidence.<sup>164</sup> Yaldā Īliyā and his colleagues

<sup>162</sup> INLA, Investigation Report with First Lieutenant Ḥusayn Jamāl al-Dīn, Initial Investigations, date not provided.

<sup>163</sup> INLA, Lieutenant Ibrāhīm Tūmās, Ministry of Defense, Fourth Military Court-Martial 4206064/281, 1963–1964.

<sup>164</sup> INLA, Yaldā Īliyā, Fourth Military Court-Martial, 4206064/145, 1963–1964.

were brought in for questioning in 1963 and released in 1964.<sup>165</sup> The case includes biographical information related to the occupation of the accused Assyrian men who were both employed in ETE, an electric company – one as a translator, whose brother was a teacher, and the second as a cleaner in the same company, who advanced to become a telephone manager.<sup>166</sup> The case referred back to 1959 once again, with more concrete allegations of attacks on the Turkmen community, reflecting ethnic tensions, according to the witnesses, which the accused again denied. The men were probably released because they had robust alibis demonstrating that they had not attended the 1959 incident. For instance, one of the siblings was honeymooning, and the other taking a summer break in Sulaymaniyya. There was also no strong evidence of their involvement with Communist-affiliated organizations, or with the Party itself. The accusations were reflective of the professional advancement the three Kirkuki men had experienced and the tensions that it had created for those around them.<sup>167</sup>

These cases call into question the role of recently urbanized communities and their struggle to achieve socioeconomic advancement in urban centers such as Baghdad and Kirkuk, where hierarchical relations and degrees of citizenship had been reestablished. George's father was a driver and Tūmās was the sole supporter of his family. What kinds of professions were available to Assyrians? Positions of servitude, such as cleaning, driving, and cooking were common for Assyrians during Ba'athist rule but also throughout the twentieth century. English families employed Assyrians, but political Iraqi figures such as Nuri al-Said and Saddam Hussein did so as well. It has been argued that Assyrians were favored as household employees by Saddam because of their cleanliness and trustworthiness.<sup>168</sup> What were appropriate occupations for certain ethnic, regional and religious communities? Christians advancing in the army opposing Arab nationalist ideals, minorities with leftist tendencies, and leftist social norms and behaviors – for example, allowing a sister to be alone with a nonrelated

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> ETE is likely the original English acronym, it is also called the National Electric Company. The name was changed in 1958.

<sup>167</sup> Yaldā İliyā, 963/78, 1974/12/12, addressed to Kirkuk Police Directorate. The document seems to suggest the cleaner advanced to become a telephone manager.

<sup>168</sup> Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath Party*, p. 103.

man – disrupted the social fabric curated by nationalists and conservatives.

### The Case of Barkhū and His Colleagues

The case of these four men shared many elements with that of Warda – though in general it was more representative of the cases involving Assyrian men affiliated with the ICP.<sup>169</sup> Where Warda’s case had been preoccupied with the issue of her gender, Barkhū’s focused on his ethnic identity, and questioned his status as an Iraqi. Barkhū and his three colleagues were employees of the Iraq Petroleum Company and residents of Kirkuk. They were accused of being members of the ICP and its closely associated militia, the People’s Resistance. Barkhū was a twenty-nine-year-old electrician with a leadership role of some kind in his department.<sup>170</sup> Bābājān was twenty-one, worked as an electrician in the same department, and was also a bandage dresser at the IPC hospital.<sup>171</sup> The two Sahakians were father and son; the father was a forty-seven-year-old stock clerk at the IPC,<sup>172</sup> while his son was a twenty-seven-year-old employee of the electrical department.<sup>173</sup>

The investigation was initiated on March 4, 1963, with the questioning of seven witnesses, most of whom were employed in the electrical department of the IPC, while some held positions in its hospital. The witnesses accused their colleagues of being members of both the People’s Resistance and the Communist Party, leading to their arrests.<sup>174</sup>

<sup>169</sup> A version of the “Case of Barkhū and His Colleagues” appeared in Alda Benjamen, “Assyrians and the Iraqi Communist Party: Revolution, Urbanization, and the Quest for Equality,” in *Minorities and the Modern Arab World: New Perspectives*, ed. Laura Robson (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2016): 106–21.

<sup>170</sup> INLA, 79/122.

<sup>171</sup> INLA, 79/122, April 16, 1963, “Testimony of the Accused Gharīb Bābājān,” 79/121; INLA 72/107.

<sup>172</sup> INLA, March 5, 1963, “Testimony of the Accused John Sahakian,” 79/124.

<sup>173</sup> INLA, March 5, 1963, “Testimony of the Accused Farīsh John Sahakian,” 79/123.

<sup>174</sup> INLA, Ministry of Defense, Fourth Military Court-Martial, No. 963/196, March 4, 1963, “To the Honorable Investigation Judge of Kirkuk,” 78/119. The arrests were made under article 12/31 Q. ‘A. B.

استشارة طبع الاصابع رقم (٩)  
تعلأ في فرع سوابق الجرمين

استشارة طبع الاصابع رقم (٩)  
الى  
سأمر مركز الشرطة  
في \_\_\_\_\_

شركة الجمهورية العراقية  
استشارة طبع الاصابع (للفحص) لطالبي شهادة  
عدم الحكومة وتحقق الهوية

الى  
مدير شرطة التحريات الجنائية  
في بغداد

٢٧٤  
٤/٤

١ - الاسم \_\_\_\_\_  
٢ - اسم الاب \_\_\_\_\_  
٣ - الجنسية \_\_\_\_\_  
٤ - الدين \_\_\_\_\_  
٥ - محل الإقامة مع بيان مركز الشرطة \_\_\_\_\_  
٦ - محل الإقامة كما بينه المستدعي \_\_\_\_\_

تفاصيل الحكومات السابقة اذا ظهرت  
للمستدعي حكومات في سجل المكتب

المحكومات السابقة التي ظهرت له

عدد الحكومات متتلسلا	اسم المحكمة والبلد	تاريخ الحكم	المادة القانونية	الحكم	رقمه في السجن الجزية	محل وقوع الجرمة

لا توجد له سوابق

١ - اذا اترك المستدعي حكوماته السابقة فيقتضى طلب خبير من مديرية شرطة  
التحريات الجنائية لاجل انك ذلك .  
الخبر الاقدم لفرع سوابق الجرمين . بغداد في المحضرين يوم الاثنين  
١١/١١/١٩٦١

١ - الاسم المغطى من قبل المستدعي \_\_\_\_\_  
٢ - اسم الاب \_\_\_\_\_  
٣ - الجنسية \_\_\_\_\_  
٤ - الدين \_\_\_\_\_  
٥ - العنصر \_\_\_\_\_  
٦ - محل الإقامة كما بينه المستدعي \_\_\_\_\_  
٧ - المهنة \_\_\_\_\_  
٨ - الشهادة المطلوبة \_\_\_\_\_  
٩ - الغرض من طلب الشهادة \_\_\_\_\_  
١٠ - هل سبق للمستدعي ان قدم طلبا كهذا وصى \_\_\_\_\_  
١١ - رقم اللواء المتسلسل لاستشارة الحفظ اذا كانت محفوظة في فرع سوابق الجرمين .  
\_\_\_\_\_  
١٢ - تاريخ تدوين طبقات الاصابع \_\_\_\_\_  
١٣ - تاريخ ارسالها الى مديرية شرطة التحريات الجنائية  
المكان \_\_\_\_\_  
التاريخ \_\_\_\_\_

توقيع المعارض

Figure 1.1 Police record from Barkhū's case  
Image credit: Alda Benjamen

On March 5, 1963, the four accused men were questioned in turn. All were asked whether they were members of the Communist Party, whether they owned a firearm, whether they had participated in the 1959 Kirkuk crisis, and whether they had insulted Ba‘thists, Nasser, or Turanians. In their responses, the accused men denied being members of the Communist Party, owning firearms, and having insulted the Ba‘thists, Nasser, or the Turanians. Each also denied participating in the violent events of 1959, Barkhū claiming he had been in Baghdad vacationing with his family during that week. They were asked whether they had any animosity toward the witnesses, or could suggest reasons for such accusations being made against them. The Sahakians were surprised by these accusations; Barkhū believed that the senior position he held in the department was the root cause of the resentment; and Bābājān questioned the idea that membership in the People’s Resistance should be assumed to include membership in the Communist Party:

I joined the People’s Resistance without being a Communist. My purpose [in joining] was patriotic [*waṭani*]. I did not know that every Resistor [*muqāwim sha‘bī*] becomes [identified as a] communist. No one [asked me] to become a Communist. I did not commit any crimes, and these accusations against me are not true.<sup>175</sup>

The house search did not yield any evidence of prohibited items – either firearms or illegal publications.<sup>176</sup> On March 16, 1963, the Investigation Committee forwarded the cases to the military court of the northern region.<sup>177</sup> The report indicated that there was incriminating evidence against Barkhū, Bābājān, and Sahakian Junior for acts committed during the “chaotic tide.” They would continue to be detained, and their case would be forwarded for further investigation. It was determined, however, that not enough evidence was available against Sahakian Senior, and he was released on bail of 500 dinars.

The three remaining men – Barkhū, Bābājān, and Sahakian Junior – were questioned further, along with the witnesses. Sahakian Junior still

<sup>175</sup> INLA, March 5, 1963, “Testimony of the Accused Gharīb Bābājān,” 79/121.

<sup>176</sup> INLA, March 5, 1963, “Record of Release,” 79/120.

<sup>177</sup> INLA, March 3, 1963, “Case Transfers,” from Muḥammad ‘Alī Bandar, head of the Investigation Committee in Kirkuk, to the Honorable General Military Judge for the Northern Region, 74/111.

denied being part of the ICP or any related organization.<sup>178</sup> Barkhū denied being part of the ICP, but admitted to collecting membership funds for the Workers' Syndicate,<sup>179</sup> and to being a member of the People's Resistance – though he said he had carried arms only during practice. He had joined the People's Resistance with a large number of people out of a patriotic commitment to defending the nation. Bābājān continued to avow his membership in the People's Resistance, but not the ICP.<sup>180</sup> Witnesses had testified that he had distributed ICP newspapers to patients at the hospital; Bābājān claimed he had only distributed newspapers given to him by the company.

On July 15, 1963, the fourth court-martial in Kirkuk was formed, issuing a guilty verdict that declared:

- (1) Barkhū was part of People's Resistance and carried an armed gun during the chaotic tide. He insulted the Ba'th party and Gamal Abdel Nasser. He collected memberships for the Workers' Union. He attacked all nationalists, and supported the Kurdish rebellion. He claimed to be a descendant of the Sumerians [or an Assyrian]. [Note: witnesses made this accusation, Barkhū did not provide a clarification.] Therefore article 12/31 from Q. 'A.B. applies to his actions and he will be tried according to it.
- (2) It has been proved to the court that Bābājān was part of the People's Resistance. He distributed Communist newspapers to the sick at the Iraq Petroleum Company's hospital. Therefore article 12/31 from Q. 'A.B. applies to his actions and he will be tried according to it.
- (3) Sahakian Junior used to carry a weapon in his private car [during] night patrols under pressure from the People's Resistance. Due to the lack of evidence against him, the court has decided to release him according to article 155 and [illegible] the bail, which was taken from him.<sup>181</sup>

As a result, Barkhū was sentenced to five years of hard labor, plus one year of parole following the completion of his sentence, and Bābājān

<sup>178</sup> INLA, April 4, 1963, "Testimony of the Accused Farīsh John Sahakian," 72/106.

<sup>179</sup> INLA, April 16, 1963, "Testimony of the Accused Aprim Barkhū," 72/108.

<sup>180</sup> INLA, April 16, 1963, "Testimony of the Accused Gharīb Bābājān," 72/107.

<sup>181</sup> INLA, July 15, 1963, "Criminalization Decision," issued by members of the Fourth Military Court-Martial, headed by Colonel Aḥmad al-Khawja, 15/17.



was sentenced to two years of hard labor and one year of parole. The sentences were carried out in Suleiman prison.

In 1964 and 1965, the Ministry of Justice apparently reinvestigated some Communist Party members and sympathizers. These crimes became known as “crimes of intellect.” In Barkhū’s case, an appeal initiated by his wife was denied in 1964 by the Investigation Body for the Martial Law Cases, although recommendations to reduce his sentence were advanced by the Ministry of Defense.<sup>182</sup> The appeal appears to have been raised again in 1965, which seems to have triggered further negative consequences, as a new investigation into his citizenship was now requested. The report issued an inquiry into Barkhū’s citizenship, specifying that if he had acquired Iraqi citizenship through naturalization instead of birth, he should be sent back to his country of birth upon the completion of his sentence.<sup>183</sup> On April 29, 1965, Barkhū was proclaimed dead in al-Diwaniyya hospital.<sup>184</sup> No cause of death was specified, and the case was closed.

Through these court cases, it is possible to witness the experience of ordinary individuals within a broad societal conflict. In the Kirkuki cases, the accused had crossed ethno-religious, gender, and ideological boundaries. The case of Barkhū brought into question the “Iraqiness” of Assyrians, triggering an inquiry into his citizenship, and specifically tested how the new political elites would deal with the identity of Assyrians, whose claim of descent from ancient Mesopotamians was included as incriminating evidence by the fourth court-martial. The subsequent sentencing of various Assyrians in Kirkuk offers an example of this patriarchal socio-political system correcting itself. As members of an ethno-religious minority, some of these Assyrian men and women benefited from the new political and economic opportunities available to them. Some, such as Barkhū, held positions of leadership within the IPC, while

<sup>182</sup> INLA, June 12, 1965, “Auditing Body for Martial Law Cases,” issued by members of the Auditing Body for Martial Law Cases, headed by Judge Ibrāhīm Waṣfi Rafīq, 21/23.

<sup>183</sup> INLA, December 12, 1964, “File Number: 63/196,” from the General Military Judge Muḥammad Nāfi’ Aḥmad, Ministry of Defense, to the Forth Military Court-Martial, 28/31.

<sup>184</sup> INLA, May 2, 1965, “Wireless Telegram,” from Selmān Prison, to General Prisons, 2/2.

others joined the ICP or its affiliated organizations. Members of these organizations were visible in the Kirkuki public sphere and, together with the Communist Party, were held responsible for the 1959 incident in the city. These men and women had contributed to the “chaotic tide” by crossing ethnic and confessional boundaries, and claiming a degree of citizenship not available to members of their community. In addition to their political mobilization, some were accused of highlighting their Assyrian identity in a way that inadvertently exacerbated Arab nationalist fears of being further sidelined by the Qasimite regime.<sup>185</sup>

The cases of Assyrian men and women would have had numerous similarities with those of Iraqis of other ethno-religious backgrounds. Although many of the accused would have been Communists, or members of an affiliate organization, false accusations motivated by personal grudges, as well as by gender, socioeconomic, and ethno-sectarian differences, were also possible, as we saw earlier. Further analysis of court-martial trials and of the history of early Ba‘thist rule is needed to deepen our understanding of this under-examined period in Iraqi history.

## Conclusion

In the second half of the twentieth century, Iraqi Assyrians were attracted to the ICP, as well as to organizations closely associated with it. Urban Assyrians were exposed to political ideologies that appealed to various segments of the Iraqi population through their common experiences in mixed neighborhoods, schools, and places of employment. Assyrians associated with the ICP negotiated the ethno-religious and socioeconomic grievances they encountered, either as a community or individually, within the larger Iraqi context. The ICP’s emphasis on socioeconomic issues, secularism, and minority rights especially appealed to the Assyrian community.

Following the toppling of Qasim in 1963, violence erupted in the country as thousands of Communists and their sympathizers were arrested and killed. The Assyrian community also suffered, as British

<sup>185</sup> INLA, Ministry of Defense, Fourth Military Court-Martial, No. 963/196, March 4, 1963, “To the Honorable Investigation Judge of Kirkuk,” 78/119; INLA, July 15, 1963, “Criminalization Decision,” issued by members of the Fourth Military Court-Martial, headed by Colonel Aḥmad al-Khawja, 15/17.

sources and Iraqi court records indicate. According to A.Q., who was also imprisoned in 1963, many Assyrians were interrogated and temporarily imprisoned. Out of 500 convicted Kirkukis, one hundred were Assyrian. If the Kurdish farmers from beyond Kirkuk are included, the number of prisoners in Kirkuk increases to 1,500.<sup>186</sup> Not all of those arrested were Communists. Membership in an ICP-affiliated organization, personal grudges, and differences based on socioeconomic, ethno-religious, and gender status also motivated people to testify against each other.

In Kirkuk, all alleged Communists were questioned, and eventually tried, on the basis of their involvement in the 1959 Kirkuk crisis. Accusations of being anti-Ba'athist and anti-Nasserite were to be expected, but in Kirkuk the charge of being anti-Turanian was also added, emphasizing the alliance of conservatives with Arab and Turkmen nationalists. By 1963, this pointed to the enduring memory of the July 1959 crisis, and to the ethno-sectarian divisions in Kirkuk during that period.

In 1963, Arab nationalist leaders proceeded to reclaim the Iraqi sociopolitical space from the leftists and Communists whom the Qasimite regime had supported. The representation of Qasimite rule as the "chaotic tide" signified the chaos driving a crisis of paternity, which resulted not only from the overshadowing of Arab nationalists by leftists and Communists, but also from the "chaotic" forces these groups represented for this new Iraqi sociopolitical space.

The marriage crisis allegedly increased promiscuity, and adversely affected both traditional family relations and the modernization project intended for Iraq. In combination with this, the activities of the Iraqi Women's League threatened the revolution and the modernization project that the Ba'athists and nationalists had worked hard to achieve. Women of the League not only ignored calls to cease their political activities for the sake of the revolution, but threatened male authority with their excessive mobility, political campaigning, and social programs, such as the literacy project for peasant women and the personal status law. Conservatives and Ba'athists joined forces to halt the literacy program while Qasim was still in power. Following his toppling, the

<sup>186</sup> A.Q. interviewed by author, Toronto, Ontario, July 10, 2013.

Ba'athists reasserted their patriarchal control over Iraq's political space by amending the personal status law – specifically its equal inheritance provision.

This new political space, like those that had preceded it, was not equally available to all. The various communities were ranked according to a hierarchy segregating citizenship on the basis of gender, class, ethnicity, and religious affiliation. The 1963 coup corrected this disruption that the Qasimite regime had failed to harness – mainly leftist and communist groups, and their affiliates. Minorities and women in general, and especially in Kirkuk, operated under the umbrella of the Communist Party and organizations closely linked to it: the Iraqi Women's League, the Workers' Union, student and youth organizations, and the People's Resistance.

Kirkuk's rapid economic and urban development, resulting from the discovery of oil, exponentially increased its population. As new communities flocked to this new urban space in search of employment, the demographic makeup of the city changed in favor of newer migrant communities coming from the rural surroundings of the city. Novel political affiliations and employment at the IPC empowered some of these communities by increasing their political or economic mobility. The Assyrians benefited from employment at the IPC and some held positions of leadership within it, but their association with the IPC was not without complications. The Assyrians, like the Kurds, were attracted to the IPC, within which they formed unions, organized strikes, and mobilized politically in the new space that development had opened up. Their activities disrupted the existing patriarchal order, igniting socioeconomic tensions and an associated gender crisis.

These trials and convictions had severe consequences for the Assyrian community. In cities, the families of the arrested would have been devastated. Barkhū's wife appealed the case of her husband years after his conviction and imprisonment. Warda, recalling her three young children who needed her, pleaded with the court to release her. Moreover, although Assyrians were arrested for a variety of reasons, the fact that some cases involved personal conflicts and identity issues would have caused the community to feel targeted. This impression is reinforced by complaints from the Assyrian community in England to British officials about the treatment of Iraqi Assyrians in 1963.

Although the British investigation focused mainly on Baghdad, the court cases, ICP publications, and oral interviews indicate that Assyrians in Kirkuk and other areas also felt threatened. For instance, on June 30, 1963, the army and the Juhūsh forces – a Kurdish militia affiliated with the state – advanced toward Alqosh, threatening to attack it. The residents escaped to Alqosh’s mountain and were saved by Communist forces, some of whom were probably Alqoshis and Assyrians from neighboring villages.<sup>187</sup> On July 2, executions were carried out of six of the eight Telkaifi men sentenced in 1959; their families and townspeople were forced to watch. According to ICP reports, a campaign of terror ensued when friends and family members of the executed men were arrested, including the religious figures who presided over the burial ceremonies.<sup>188</sup> Meanwhile, in Alqosh, the National Guard planned a second attack on July 9 – this time equipped with artillery and tanks. The intention appears to have been the arrest of Communists and their families – but Alqoshi residents were attacked and injured and two elderly men killed. During the battle a number of communist Alqoshis died as well. Some of their bodies, and those of others killed in similar battles that year, were eventually transported to the martyrs’ cemetery in St. Hurmizd monastery, a seventh-century religious and cultural site that is of significance to both Alqoshis and Assyrians. This indicates that the townspeople did not think of these slaughtered men only as politically motivated individuals who were members of the Communist Party, but also took pride in them as Alqoshi community members, commemorating their deaths by burying them in one of the community’s most sacred places.<sup>189</sup>

It seems that such attacks on Assyrian villages were not isolated incidents but a common practice affecting other communities as well, including the Kurds.<sup>190</sup> Given that they were combined with the arrests of Assyrians in urban centers and attacks on some Assyrian quarters, it is reasonable to assume that the community felt threatened. It seems that, in certain cases, and especially when the attacks extended to majority Assyrian villages, the Assyrians were being targeted as a community; whereas in others they were

<sup>187</sup> *Shuhadā’ al-Ḥizb, Shuhadā’ al-Waṭan: Shuhadā’ al-Ḥizb al-Shuyū’ī al-’Irāqī, 1934–1963*, p. 344.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 300–4. <sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 344–46; Tūmās, “Awrāq Tūma Tūmās (4).”

<sup>190</sup> Bet-Shlimon, *City of Black Gold*, p. 163.

tried narrowly on the basis on their activism within the Communist Party and its affiliated organizations. Regardless of the aftermath of the 1963 coup, Assyrians' membership of the Communist Party should not be explained in terms of communal factors only – although it was doubtless an indication of Assyrians' interest in being better integrated within Iraq. Ironically, due to their association with the ICP, the Assyrians instead felt isolated and targeted after the 1963 coup.

At the state level, the trials highlight the level of internal dissatisfaction on the part of the more progressive elements within the Ba'ath Party, who criticized the intense violence used by their party colleagues. The public trials may therefore have represented the Party's attempt to appease its dissatisfied members and show Iraqis and the world that the new regime was committed to the rule of law. Whether the trials achieved this end in practice is another question. Since there was room for appeal against convictions on "crimes of intellect" following the ousting of the Ba'athists in November 1963, it seems that the new regime, too, was concerned with its public image. Ḥamīd and Warda's relationship underscores the relationship between accuser and witness: In 1959, people held grudges, and grudges were animated and focused along lines of intercommunal division.