

Thinking About Iraq: Revisiting Durkheimian Anomie on Religious Violence, Sectarianism and Geo-politics

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Abstract

The increasing challenges and complexities engendered by socio-economic and cultural dynamics inherent in modern society have been inundated with pockets of violent conflict in religious content. The current political impasse in Iraq has gravitated towards (anomie) in which sectarian killings, religious crisis and violent conflicts have become more profound in the post Saddam Hussein epoch. This paper uses an interesting and rather neglected theoretical discussion of Emile Durkheim's exposition on socially constructed causes of Suicide in order to shed light on the season of anomie that pervades contemporary Iraqi society vis-à-vis ethno-religious and sectarian violence. This is a potentially useful model for the case discussed, and it also makes eminent sense to locate the root of present anomie in Iraq at the behest of the discourse of power relations at global level, and in the context of manipulation and defiance at the level of the United Nation system. In this article it is envisioned that the appropriate social sanctions and statutory reprimands be enforced on erring members and actors who tend to violate or manipulate the sanctity of the United Nation system for hegemonic economic interest, and that appropriate mechanisms be put in place to ensure that the task of nation-building is left to the Iraqi peoples themselves rather than being teleguided externally, as this is the only recipe for peace and stability for the Middle East in general, and for Iraq in particular.

1. Introduction

The modern era has been overwhelmed by a tidal wave of global insecurity and complex social problems in which the presence of ideological rivalry has been replaced with political and religious violence. With the end of the Cold War, the international community has taken a much more active role than previously in seeking to re-solve conflicts around the globe. This endeavor, which brewed out of the complexities and multiplicities inherent around the globe, including unremitting crusades of ethnic cleansing, religious violence and sectarian killings, have given rise to current centrifugal trends in Iraq. These theatre of absurdities implicit in the contemporary Iraq can be attributed as ‘‘anomie’’.

Following the wave of suicide that characterized European nations in the latter part of the 19th Century, prescient French scholar, Emile Durkheim introduced the concept of anomie to describe an emerging state of suicide arising from social deregulation and normlessness. Durkheim believed that anomie is common when the surrounding society has undergone significant changes in its economic fortunes, whether for good or for worse and, more generally, when there is a significant discrepancy between the ideological theories and values commonly professed and what was actually achievable in everyday life.

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Many decades after the observation of this thinkers, development within international community has been burdened by a dangerous centrifugal force of anomie in which the military and economic status of some members of the United Nations (UN) Security Council continue to fuel anomie within the International system in general, while religious violence and suicide attack² has continued unabated in Middle East especially in Iraq and Afghanistan. The trickle of studies spawned by this quest of anomie has developed into a flood of normative and empirical analyses of various aspects of religious crisis and violence.

Recent scholarly works by Entessar (1989), Al-Marashi, (2007), Falah et all (2006), Akbar (2002), Iraqi Study group (2006) tend to reveal how cleavages of people's cultural and religious identities will be the source of violence in the post Saddam Hussein era in Iraq. However, the experience of recent times, punctuated by the incessant suicide bombings in Afghanistan, religious unrest in Pakistan, and intra-religious violence in Iraq, suggests that what has been achieved so far is no more than the laying of foundations for future work. These recent reorientation of scholarly interest in the stability of Iraq vis-à-vis 'Iraqisation' of military and police forces, radical decentralization of concentrations of power, and the transfer of sovereignty to the people through multi-party democracy, seems to suggest that scholars have not fully explained the causes and dynamics of the religious crisis and sectarian violence in Iraq, and how this portends a dangerous trend for democratization, remains a subject of intellectual contention.

This paper uses an interesting and rather neglected theoretical discussion of Emile Durkheim's exposition on socially constructed causes of anomie and suicide in order to shed light on the season of disorder that pervades contemporary International system (focusing on UN) and how the dynamics of power relations at international system fuel ethno-religious and sectarian violence in Iraq.

In this paper, brief history of Iraqi religious nature will be explored in section two; section three will focus on Religious violence and power-relations in the Middle East. Subsequently, section four will be devoted to applying Durkheimian construct in the connections between the religious violence and global power-relations in the Middle East. Section five will focus on the discourse of anomie within the United Nations system, while section six will be devoted to explaining anomie and the role of the west in Iraq political impasse. This paper will conclude in the Seventh section.

Religious Nature of Iraqi Society

The contemporary nature of Iraqi society cannot be divorced from its religious domination by the Ottoman Empire. Iraqi society has been fractionalized along religious lines from the very moment the British installed the Hashemite Faizal, the commander of the Arab forces that contributed to the defeat of the Ottoman armies in the Middle East, as the king of Iraq in 1918 (Wimmer, 2003). However, British colonial rule later ended after the Sunni and Shiites united against it. Available evidence suggests that ethnic and linguistic solidarity was prevalent among Iraqi people prior to British intervention in gulf region, however this was not as observably pronounced as the religious splits that characterized the relationship between the **Sunni** and **Shia** (Shiites) factions in the country, the two major denominations of Islam (Nasr, 2006). This religious split which underpins the schism that occurred when the Islamic prophet Muhammad died in the year 632(CE), leading to a dispute as to who would succeed Muhammad as a caliph of the Islamic community spread across various parts of the world, and have come to account for differences in religious practice, traditions and customs as well as the varied religious beliefs in Muslim countries, which has especially been the case in Iraq until present day. The Sunnis hold that Abu Bakr who remained a friend and confidante of Prophet Muhammad was Muhammad's rightful successor and that the method of choosing or electing leaders (Shura) endorsed by the Qur'an is the consensus of the Ummah, (the Muslim community). Shī'īs believe that Muhammad divinely ordained his cousin and son-

² A suicide attack is when an attacker perpetrates an act of violence against others, typically to achieve a military or political goal that results in his or her own death as well

in-law Ali (the father of his grandsons Hasan ibn Ali and Husayn ibn Ali) in accordance with the command of God to be the next Caliph, making 'Alī and his direct descendants Muhammad's successors. (Entessar, 1989). This religious split has contributed to the rising tension not only in Iraq but also in other parts of the Muslim world owing to the demographic strength of both religious sects. In Iraq, the population was made up of 21% Sunni Arab speakers, 14% mostly Sunni Kurdish speakers, 53% Shiite Arab speakers, 5% non-Muslim Arab speakers, most importantly the Baghdad Jews, and 6% other religious-linguistic groups such as the Sunni Turkmen of Northern Iraq, or the various Christian sects speaking Assyrian (Makiya, 1998).

A study conducted by Nasr Vali in 2006 argued that Shiite-Sunni discord in Iraq started with disagreements over the relative population of the two groups, in which the majority of Iraqis are Shiite-Arab Muslims (around 65%), and Sunnis represent about 32% of the population. Vali further posited that the Sunni sect is split ethnically between Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen. Despite the religious divisions, it can be argued that Iraqi society was stable and devoid of any religious conflicts prior to Saddam Hussein accession to power in 1979, whose policy and political appointment tended to favour his Sunni Arabs and placed emphasis on Pan-Arabism. This spate of the palpable marginalisation of other ethno-religious groups encouraged the separatist activities which started to gain precedence among Kurdish nationalists and Shiites Muslims. However, the success of the 1979 Islamic Revolution of Ayatollah Khomeini, which resulted in a Shiite Muslim theocratic state being established in Iran, changed the power equation among Sunnis and Shiites in the region. This was seen as a dangerous change in the eyes of the Iraqi government, as Iraq too had a Shiite majority and was ruled by Hussein's government which, apart from having numerous Sunnis occupying leading positions, had a pan-Arab but non-religious ideology. This development left the country's Shiite population split between the members and supporters of the Saddam's Ba'ath Party, and those of Kurdish nationalists who sympathized with the Iranian position on pan-Islamism. The Ba'ath of Saddam Hussein massively persecuted the religious Shi'ite of the south. It especially feared the al-Da'wa al-Islamiyya Party, founded around 1958, which aimed at establishing a Shi'ite-dominated Islamic state. The rise of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1978-79 frightened the Ba'ath, which launched a war against the Khomeinist state there, and simultaneously, cracked down hard on the radical Shi'ite clerics in Iraq such as Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, who theorized an Islamic state of Iraq (Ismael and Ismael, 2005)

Sociologically speaking, the balance of political force in Iraqi society is a reflection of the ideological conflicts between the agents of secularization and the forces of religious conservatism, which has traditionally altered the existing social bond between different ethnic groups in Iraq. Thus, it is obvious that Saddam Hussein's notion of pan-Arabism conflicted with that of other Arab governments, especially those in Iran, which tended to lean towards pan-Islamism and theocracy. The sectarian conflict between Iraq's Sunnis and Iran's Shiites made war inevitable in 1980 (Wright, 1985).

Religious violence in Iraq and power relations in the middle east.

To explain the evolution of the violent instability in the wake of Saddam Hussein's rise to power and the installation of pan-Islamism in Iran, are of greater significance than the ineptitude of Iraq's new Sunni ruling elite or the supposedly trans-historical existence of tribal and ethnic antipathies. The Shia majority was long a source of opposition to the government's secular policies, and the Ba'ath Party was increasingly concerned about potential Shia-Islamist influence following the Iranian Revolution of 1979. The Kurds of northern Iraq (who are Sunni Muslims but not Arabs) were also permanently hostile to the Ba'athist party's pan-Arabism. To maintain power Saddam tended either to provide them with benefits so as to co-opt them into the regime, or to take repressive measures against them. Studies suggest that the Iraqi state under Saddam, justify the necessity of its internal and external legitimacy by waging a war against Iran and its entire sympathizers in Iraq in a bid to curb a pan-Islamist revolution (Ismael & Ismael, 2005). This however, culminated in the highly popularized Iran-Iraq war where Iraq was alleged to have used chemical weapons against Iranian forces fighting on the southern front and Kurdish

separatists who were attempting to open up a northern front in Iraq with the help of Iran. The religious tensions between the Sunnis and Shias further worsened under the Saddam regime.

Nasr Vali (2006) opined that: “the Shia suffered indirect and direct persecution under post-colonial Iraqi governments since 1932, especially that of Saddam Hussein. Under Saddam, public Shia festivals such as Ashoura were banned, for instance. It has also been said that every Shia clerical family in Iraq had tales of torture and murder to recount under the regime. From 1979-1983 Saddam's regime executed 48 major Shia clerics in Iraq. They included the Shia leader Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr and his sister. Tens of thousands of Iranians and Arabs of Iranian origin were expelled in 1979 and 1980 and a further 75,000 in 1989. Shia opposition to the government following the first Gulf War was suppressed’ (Nasr 2006a: 45). Despite the fact that Saddam’s regime was supported by most governments in the Middle-East who feared the potential spread of the Iranian revolution, the Iraqi regime invaded and annexed Kuwait and confronted his Gulf neighbors in the name of Arab nationalism and Islam.

Esposito (1997) observed that the U.S. had provided assistance to Saddam Hussein in the war with Iran, but with Iraq's seizure of the oil-rich emirate of Kuwait in August 1990, the United States led a United Nations coalition that drove Iraq's troops from Kuwait in February 1991. The ability for Saddam Hussein to pursue such military aggression was due to a "military machine paid for in large part by the tens of billions of dollars Kuwait and the Gulf states had poured into Iraq and the weapons and technology provided by the Soviet Union, Germany, and France. Esposito’s analysis is crucial to the understanding of how the dialectics of power relations at an international level tend to fuel violence among ethno-religious sects in Iraq.

Similarly, recent scholarly work suggests that religion and religious sectarianism were not important factors in the ethno-religious conflicts which resulted in the war between Iran and Iraq (Wright, 1985:839). Wright’s observation was right in explaining that religion provided ideological support to the clerical and secular factions in Iran and Iraq respectively who were struggling for power in the 1980s.

This was because Islamic fundamentalism, as it is currently understood, has been both a challenge to the Arab regimes, and has been characterized as a movement against secular doctrine. This no doubt suggests that religious sectarianism has been one of the ingredients of these ongoing conflicts, even though it can not be ascribed as the sole or even preeminent cause being that the discourse of power struggles among different religious sects, coupled along with the dialectics of the geopolitical interests of Western nations, have tended to pit one sect over another

Durkheimian Construct: The Connections Between The Religious Violence And Global Power-Relations In The Middle East

Renewed interest in the study of religious violence especially in Iraq is not novel phenomenon. Although contemporary scholarship on the subjects laid much emphases on how to restore order in Iraq, while begging the question of what is out of order and why is Iraq out of order? It is quite obvious that violent conflicts in Iraqi violate the axiomatic understanding of social cohesion in society. Classical sociological writings on social cohesion locate the sources of disorder from the social structure themselves. Prominent among these scholars is Emile Durkheim whose work on suicide and anomie (1897) helped to provide guidelines towards understanding how the discourse of violence especially in religious life has permutated over the course of history.

His work on Suicide is particularly useful in that it offers a vivid explanation of the religious violence in contemporary Iraqi society. The intellectual milieu that characterized Durkheim’s pattern of thought in *Suicide* can be seen as a response to the doctrine of ‘imitation theory’ put forward in the works of Gabriel Tarde, whose social theory at the time in France had many followers and against whom Durkheim waged a decisive “war” within the bounds of scholarly and academic amenities. In *Suicide*, Durkheim was careful to appreciate the connections between the ‘Individual’ and their interactions with social structures,

and how these exchanges could potentially play out in suicidal acts. This analysis was purported as an alternative to the notion of seeing such actions as resulting from individual and insular experiences. According to Durkheim, *Suicide* could not be explained by focusing on imbalances and malfunctions within individuals, and in light of the prevailing suicide rates at the time of his writing, suicide for him was a distinct phenomenon in its own right, which he identified using sociological facts, and ascribed as its aetiology, factors that were socially embedded and structurally entrenched. As such, in this paper, religious violence within the context in Iraq coincides with Durkheim's theory of suicide such that the insurgents and other individual terrorists engaging in violence under the guise of religion, do not engage in it as an individual problem, but rather as a problem emanating from Iraqi social structure vis-à-vis dynamics of a group consensus and a collective consciousness.

In *Suicide*, Durkheim explains that societies originate in a moral order, and they remain stable because of social solidarity. In other words, solidarity is an integrative device that holds people together and binds them to the moral order (Durkheim, 1955[1897]:18). Solidarity is a product of a collective conscience emanating out of the set of beliefs and sentiments held by most people in a single society, and these beliefs together form a religious, moral and intellectual system that spreads ubiquitously throughout the society on the basis of a religious affiliation and competing ideologies.

The Middle East is such a highly integrated society where there is a strong sense of social and religious solidarity, although with many competing ideologies. Individuals in these societies are for the most part tightly bound into a highly integrated group with a strong sense of religious solidarity such that individual(s) accept the value and norm of the group to which they belong as their own. In this case, the individual does not distinguish between his own interests and those of the group nor is he likely to think of himself as a unique individual with a life separate from the group. It is under these circumstances that individuals are prompted to engage in religious violence as a response and method of defending the group's interest and objectives. Suicide in this paper can be seen as a sacrificial act of daring consequences, with a view to attaining one's objectives.

The operationalisation of the act of suicide in Durkheim's work can be seen in his explanation of social solidarity and the two types of bonds which sharpen modern society: social integration and social regulation, and how this featured as the basis for his categorization of suicide. The application of this act of suicide in light of religious violence in the Middle-East follows Durkheim's logic of anomic suicide:

Anomic suicide: Anomie is a state in which there is weak social regulation between the society's norms and the individual, most often brought on by dramatic changes in economic and/or social circumstances. This type of suicide happens when the social norms and laws governing the society do not correspond with the life goals of the individual. Since the individual does not identify with the norms of the society, suicide seems to be a way to escape them³

The most salient point in Durkheim's argument here is that anomie occurs as a result of weak regulations on the part of the society or due to the inability of the society to enforce its decision. This however, has consequences for the society itself as people flaunt its order with impunity.

Understanding Anomie: The United Nations As A Social Structure And System

Anomie, according to Durkheim, comes from the breakdown of social norms, and lack of regulation of the individual in society. The 'watershed' events that triggered the end of the Cold War coupled with the impregnable forces of globalization, has ushered a partial breakdown of the social and cultural barriers internationally, whereby the everyday lives of individuals have come to be shaped by forces outside of their own country's and independent of their own volitions. In this case, Durkheim's anomic suicide is no longer limited to local situations but has been extended to the global arena. Francesco Stipo in 2007

³ See Durkheim, E. 1952[1897] *Suicide: A study in Sociology*. Pp.25

argued that globalization has ushered in the creation of a world government which regulates the relationships among governments and guarantees the rights arising from social and economic globalization. He further posits that the creation of a world confederation would not supersede the authority of the State governments but complement it, as both the States and the world authority would have power within their sphere of sovereignty. Francesco's observation, no doubt helps to pinpoint how the decline of the traditional authority of nations-states will be consolidated by regulations and laws at the world confederation. The world confederation which Francesco referred to was the United Nations (Francesco 2007:67).

Anomic suicide (or anomie) in this paper will be seen in the context of actions perpetrated by the United Nations (UN) and its agencies in particular, and how this action tend to breed anomie within states or microcosms. This stem from the fact that the UN as a social and political construct and system, has segments or subsystems (members' states and agencies) working together for the overall functioning of the whole system. It can be argued that the dynamics of power relations and interactions within the overall structure of UN system, will no doubt affect the sub-systems or parts of the entire system (members' states). This dynamics help to shape the statutory assertiveness of the UN with respect to geopolitical issues, and has also given it occasion to be used as a springboard for unilateral undertaking by the strong members of the organization.

Another features that may define the UN as a system include its interrelatedness or interconnections, independence or reciprocity, a network of roles and, or interactive relationships. (Onyeonuru, 2002). Implicit in the concept of systems, therefore is of patterned relationship between a number of elements, which enable the system to form a related whole. This however suggests that a minimal degree of integration among component parts (Members' states) is requires if there is to be harmony. Since it has been argued here that UN is the overall whole system (Macrocosm), part of the overall whole (each country or society) can be also treated as microcosms of the overall system. Such that each microcosms can be treated as having relative sovereignty, independence and autonomy, while exploring how it meets the functional requirement of the larger whole (UN system). It is these microcosms that lay the ground work for the establishment of organs such as the General Assembly, Security Council, International Court of Justice (ICJ), and other specialized agencies are vital to the performance of its roles and objectives of maintaining international peace and security, and to preventing war and the threat of war among its member states.

In recent times, the UN organs and agencies has been dominated by the Super-Powers who played key roles in its formation, and as such have come to use to determine and define what is acceptable international norms or formulating set of intersubjective understandings and collective expectations, regarding the proper practices of states and other actors in a given context, thereby defining what appropriate practice ought to be. Practices of prominent actors with international legitimacy, such as the great powers, the US, Britain and France are particularly influential and may contribute to upholding existing norms or construct and diffuse new norms in order to maintain their normative influence and legitimacy or share of world power and in quest for their own geopolitical advantage.

This dynamics of power relations among these great-powers has been so prominent that it has been used to shape and dictate what is to be done, while compelling other members' states to conform in the process. This was evident during Gulf war in the 1990s, when the UN Security Council passed Resolution UNSCR 660, which condemned the invasion and demanded a withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwait.

The manner in which the UN Security Council passed the resolution demonstrated that the UN was a forum for the domination of these great western powers which can sometimes solve secondary issues where fundamental interests are not at stake. The politics of the UN Security Council resolution shows how relevant Kuwait was to the West, and especially the United States and Britain in quest of their own geopolitical advantage. It was quite obvious that the UN resolution never authorized the deployment of

troops by the US-Western led coalition in the war against Iraq, but only condemned the invasion and demanded a withdrawal of Iraqi troops⁴. This clearly suggested that the Gulf war was nothing more than a Western attempt to support its allies - Kuwait and Saudi Arabia - whose importance in the region and as key suppliers of oil made them of considerable geopolitical importance. The impulses of these fledging power relations and economic interests that have been fostered by the West have tended to undermine the previously held social solidarity and stability in the Middle East on the basis of religion.

Accordingly, shortly after the Gulf War ended in 1991, Shia Muslim and Kurdish Iraqis engaged in protests against Hussein's regime, resulting in an intifada⁵. Saddam Hussein's regime responded with a violent wave of repression against Shia Muslims, consequently ending the protests. The UN again passed a resolution UNSCR 688⁶ decreeing that the Iraqi government to cease the violent acts of repression against its ethnic and religious minorities (Cole, 1998). The huge question here is that what is the interest of UN Security council member about Iraq? This beg for answer as the role of the UN as world body established to maintain international peace and security, is nothing more than a puppet of the super-power needed to protect and consolidate their economic interests. This is because the UNSCR 688 also contradicts the UN charter on non-interference in the internal affairs of members' states.

Available evidence suggests that the US, UK and France, claiming authority under UNSCR 688, established the Iraqi no-fly zones to protect Kurdish and Shiite populations from attacks by the Hussein regime's aircraft (Ibid). While the enforcing powers (US, Britain and France) had cited the United Nations Security Council Resolution 688 as authorizing the operations, where as the resolution contains no explicit authorization. It can therefore be suggested that these enforcing powers used UN Security Council resolutions as cannon-folder to advance their hegemonic interests in the Middle East. Despite these medleys of manipulation of UN Security Council resolution by these enforcing powers, the Security Council never debunked the violation and manipulation of its resolution by the enforcing super-powers. This however connotes that the UN has lost its regulatory power, owing to its inability to effectively enforce its decision, without being manipulated by the US, Britain and France for their selfish economic and hegemonic interests especially in Middle East.

Sequel to the incapability of the UN to check the excesses of these great powers in manipulating its resolution for individualistic purposes, translates into a situation where the UN has lost its regulatory power. Other instances have abounded in the aftermath of the September 11 Terrorist attack in United States, in which the UN Security Council immediately passed resolution: UNSCR 1267, which calls on all states to bring to justice the perpetrators, organizers and collaborators of the attacks, and in practice gives the USA a free hand to carry out any actions it sees fit⁷. The implication of the UN resolution is that it has already surrendered its power to the dictates, whims and caprices of the US, such that the latter now abrogates to itself the right to intervene militarily in any country where it perceives its interest to be threatened. The consequences of this avails that the UN is equally on its former track (of League of Nations) as some countries tend to dominate perpetually all mechanisms of power, influence and might over others.

In this regards, the UN have lost the grip of the firm control of its member states especially the great-powers and it regulatory powers cannot curb the excesses of great-power's demand, even though it

⁴ See UN Security Council resolution 660 which can be accessed from <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/575/10/IMG/NR057510.pdf?OpenElement>

⁵ Intifada is an Arabic word which literally means "shaking off", though it is usually translated into English as rebellion or uprising

⁶ See UN security council resolution 688 from Council of Foreign Relation <http://www.cfr.org/content/publications/attachments/SC688.pdf>

⁷ See UN security Council resolution 1267 available at <http://www.un.org/sc/committees/1267/index.shtml> ,

means overheating tensions, conflict and crisis in the world especially in the situation in the Middle East. As Ogunrotifa argues in 2008 noted that the 'inability of the UN to call these super-powers – and especially the US - to order is due to the obvious fact that the UN regulation is loose, weak and non-functional'⁸. This however makes Durkheim's analysis of Suicide relevant in this case, such that the inability of a particular regulatory structure of the society to enforce order within its domain will lead to anomie or anomic suicide. In this case, anomie occurs when a particular social structure (such as the UN), which is seen as having higher powers and means of coercion, fails to regulate and call to order, the activities of dominant actors in violating its order within the system. In other words, when the power of a particular institution that is saddle with the responsibility of regulating the social behaviour or social regulation is collapsed or breakdown, the controlling force of such institutions on its sub-structure or sub-system is no longer effective and each actor is left to their own devices. This can be seen in the contemporary case of Iran, in which she was alleged to have used its media to generate anti-western sentiment in Southern Iraq, and support many insurgents who used artillery such as smart bomb devices against the US coalition soldiers and sponsor religious violence against weak US backed central government in Iraq.

This no doubt suggest that the more the regulations of the UN loosen, the more the super-powers manipulate its resolutions for their own interests, and the more members' state are more emboldened to be deviant to UN resolution and unleash terror under the religious pretext, the more the world peace is threatened.

Today, Iran has been emboldened not only in its ambitions of producing nuclear weapons, but also in the distribution of these weapons to various insurgent groups in Iraq, as Iran has felt that the US has been keeping silent about the nuclear status of its allies—Pakistan and India, which are very well known. Since the US, Britain and France are not obeying the UN resolution on the basis of this Non- Proliferation Treaty, the Iranian regime felt that she is not morally bound not to acquire and build nuclear weapons. This unstructured upsurge in the UN system has fuelled deviant imbalances to an unprecedented level, thus stockpiling social vices in the long term in which Iraq is not an exception.

Anomie and the Role of the West in Iraq Political Impasse

The resulting volatility of UN and International system has complicated the task of re-engineering deviant behaviour, social malaise and the growing discontent among the organizations members especially in Middle East. This is sequel to the argument in certain quarter that Islamic world are cynical about UN, who has been viewed as dominated by western powers⁹ who have considerable bias against the Islamic fundamentalism (Islamism). This love lost relationship is a counter-globalization in which Islam rather than Westernization is to be the dominant force (Reuven-Paz 2002:2), or the battle waged by a 'brotherhood of the oppressed' (Mustadh'afin) against Western conspiracies and the 'betrayal' of secular-oriented Muslim societies and nationalist regimes¹⁰. The prevalence of these conflicts within the UN and international system reveal a 'deviant' behaviour against the established international norms. This deviant is what a French Sociologists, Emile Durkheim regarded as deviant behaviour in anomic situation¹¹. In the course of explaining anomic behaviour, Durkheim was concerned primarily with how societies could maintain their order and coherence in the modern era, when things such as religious and ethnic differences could trigger up violence and disorder. While studying the prevalence of Suicide in Europeans' society in 19th century, he observed that that lack of norms or accepted limits on behavior in a

⁸ See Ogunrotifa A.B 'Systemic frustration Paradigm: A new approach to explaining Terrorism, 2008: 5

⁹ Brynjar Lia, Islamist perceptions of the United Nations and its peacekeeping missions: Some preliminary findings *International Peacekeeping*, 1743-906X, Volume 5, Issue 2, 1998, Pages 38 – 63

¹⁰ See Omar Abu Qutadah, Al-Ru'ya al-Shar'iyyah li-ahdath 11 Aylul, (The view of Islamic law on the events of September 11th), April 2002 available at <http://www.aloswa.org>

¹¹ See Durkheim, E. 1952[1897] Suicide: A study in Sociology. Pp.14

society will lead to deviant behavior. He further argues that deviant behaviour would translate into anomie when there is a sudden and unforeseen economic growth and wealth:

With increased prosperity desires increase. At the very moment when traditional rules have lost their authority, the richer prize offered these appetites stimulates and make them more exigent and impatient of control. The state of de-regulation or anomy is thus further heightened by passions being less disciplined, precisely when they need more disciplining¹²

Durkheim argument is that the catalyst of economic affluence to stimulate human desires carries with it dangers of anomic conditions. This is because the rapid outset of prosperity may lead some people to a quick upward mobility and hence deprive others of the social support needed in their new styles of life. Such rapid movement in the social system that upsets previous networks in which life styles are embedded carries with it a chance of anomie” (Labinjoh, 2002:4).

Durkheim’s observation is analytically useful in mirroring the dynamics of contemporary politics and power relations within the UN, in which the economic affluence of major dominant actors (especially the super-powers) in the Security Council carries with it the danger of anomie. The quest for expansion of economic and political base around the world will give room for conflict to other actors to which their interest and rights are being encroached. Since the inception of the UN, its security council has been dominated by the five permanent members, who are all super-powers. The intervention of the Security Council in many disputes around the world can be seen at the behest of the western bloc (US, Britain, and France), which often tend to draw the attention of the council to the prevailing social situations. As I have argued earlier that the western bloc in UN Security Council used their influence when and how to intervene militarily in any country under the pretext of defining what is acceptable international norms.

The economic strength and prosperity of the great powers especially the US avails her with the opportunity to control and manipulate the UN for western hegemonic interests, and to also dictate the orientations and capricious political standpoints of the UN. This economic affluence of the great powers especially the US, according to Durkheim carries with it the chance of deviant to the UN Security Council as far the military intervention in a country that is strategic to their economic interest is concerned. A classic example can be seen in the case of the Kosovo conflict, where the vital interests of the United States were involved. Therefore there was no question of allowing the matter to be referred to the Security Council, where it would likely have been subjected to the vetoes of Russia and China. Therefore, the Americans simply ignored the Security Council and they went to war against Yugoslavia, using NATO, which is supposed to be a Western Alliance but in practice is an American- dominated military bloc. As Woods and Grants (1999) observed that:

Whenever the United States wishes to act, the UN is merely pushed contemptuously to one side. In any case, the UN depends heavily on America for its funds. The US frequently reminds the UN of this by forgetting to pay its dues. And it would no more dream of allowing the UN to dictate its international policies than to hand over control of its military budget on Green peace”. Nowadays, it is true, the USA is not only a member of the United Nations, but holds its purse-string firmly in its hands. But whenever it feels that the Security Council might impede its actions, it treats it with well-merited contempt. In this regards, the UN has not only lost the grip of its firm control of its member states especially the super-powers but it has been beaten to the ground by the latter to the extent that it regulation or regulatory power cannot pose a serious threat the super-power’s demand.

After the terrorist attack in the USA, the UN Security Council Immediately passed resolution No. 1267 which call on all states to bring to justices the perpetrators, organizers and collaborators of the attacks, and in practice gives the USA a free hand to carry out any actions it sees fit. And we can take it for granted that the UN will back the USA in everything it does. The implication of the UNO resolution is that it has already surrender its power to the

¹² Ibid, pp.241-243

sovereignty dictates, whims and caprices of the US such that the US now abrogates to itself the right to intervene militarily in any country where it perceives its interest to be threatened. The inability of the UN to regulate the activities of some of its member is an indication that it is on the edge of a precipice¹³.

The observation of Woods and Grants no doubt provides a useful analytic construct towards an understanding the politics of US influence in UN, as the forerunner of the western powers. This also reflects the fact that the United Nations as a system has largely failed to coordinate the activities of its component parts (member states). When the actions and influence of an actor is undermining the interests of others, without being checked, then the whole system is derailed in its oversight functions of coordinating its component parts and regulate individual actors' interest. The inability of the UN to call these western great powers to order is due to the obvious fact that the UN regulation is loose or that it does not have stringent rules, orders and authority/power to coerce its members especially the erring ones, to the proper compliance with its mandates and objectives. Thereby encouraging the great powers in encroaching on the rights of others and thus, rendering norms less the objective of the UN as an overall system.

This can be seen in the case of Iraq in which the UN never authorized the 2003 US-led invasion of the country. Although the UN Security Council resolution 1441 acknowledged that 'Iraq has been and remains in material breach of its obligations under relevant resolutions, including resolution 687 (1991), in particular through Iraq's failure to cooperate with United Nations inspectors and the IAEA, and to complete the actions required under paragraphs 8 to 13 of resolution 687 (1991)¹⁴. But gave Iraq a final opportunity to comply with its disarmament obligations under relevant resolutions of the Council; and accordingly decides to set up an enhanced inspection regime with the aim of bringing to full and verified completion the disarmament process established by resolution 687 (1991) and subsequent resolutions of the Council, and allow UN weapon inspectors from International Atomic Energy Agency to inspect and destroy 'the weapon of mass destruction'¹⁵. It is of common knowledge that Iraq agreed to the Resolution and allowed the UN Weapons inspectors to returned supposed nuclear site on November 27, 2002 led by Han Blix of The United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) and Mohamed El Baradel of the International Atomic Energy Agency. Despite the fact that UN security Resolution 1441 did not authorize war under certain circumstances, the US, UK and its allies did not allowed the weapon Inspectors co conclude their job before declaring war on Iraq in 2003. The British Broadcasting service of 16th September, 2004 quoted the Secretary General of the United Nations Kofi Annan, on, and Annan said 'I have indicated it was not in conformity with the UN charter. From our point of view, from the charter point of view, it was illegal'¹⁶

Similarly Han Blix, the chief Inspector of The United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) to Iraq complained that, 'to this day, the United States and Britain have not presented me with the evidence which they claim to possess regarding Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction'¹⁷.

¹³ See Woods A& Grant T. 1999. The new World disorder: world relation of the Dawn of the 21st century, Retrieved from www.marxists.com. Date visited June 2005

¹⁴ See UN Security Council Resolution 1441 available at <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N02/682/26/PDF/N0268226.pdf?OpenElement>

¹⁵ ibid

¹⁶ See Kofi Annan, Iraq war Illegal, BBC news Channel Thursday 16 September, 2004 available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/3661134.stm

¹⁷ See Han Blix interview with British Guardian Newspaper 'urging US and UK to hand over Iraq evidence' available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2002/dec/20/iraq.foreignpolicy> . Friday 20 December 2002, 2002

If Iraq could be punished for its invasion and aggression of Kuwait, the indifference of International community especially the UN to the US and its western allies led invasion of Iraq contrary to the UN Security Council resolution is double standard, hypocritical and a clear expression of anomie under the UN watch.

It has been argued that crisis and anomie at the international level has a tendency to fuel disorder at the group and community of state apparatus within the global microcosms¹⁸. This was evident in Iraq. The level at which anomie or anomic situation at the International level translate into Iraqi society came when the US-imposed interim government, disbanded the Iraqi police and Military forces and disqualified the Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath party from participating in Politics. Conventional wisdom prevail that non-functioning of the police and Military forces is an invitation to anomie and anarchy. In this case, the invasion of Iraq left with no central government in place, and the imposed interim governments are not legitimate, and as such any law made by this illegal contraption are illegal.

Since mechanisms for social control and law enforcement are non existent, this compels anybody or group to take laws into their hands and do whatever they like. The result is the growing number of insurgent and militant groups engaging in arson, terrorism and the killings of US coalition troops with impunity. The basis of instability, crisis, religious violence and anomie in Iraq today stem from the anomic situation at the International (UN) level.

The impulse of this invasion is having untold implications on the Iraqi social system as looting, killing, religious violence and suicide bombing against invading forces became a norm. Since the UN never authorized the 2003 US- led invasion of Iraq, but rather asks the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to inspect the weapons in Iraq, it was obvious that this act constitutes a flagrant violation of UN treaties, even though the UN was impotent at stopping the actions of the invading forces.

In as much as the UN's regulation and enforcement of its order is weak in this regard, it can be argued that the more the super-powers will violate its resolution and encroach on the rights of smaller states like Iraq and Afghanistan in Middle-East, and the more anarchy, anomie and religious violence pervades Iraq and Afghanistan.

The level of religious violence and anomie is so tense that everyday different insurgents and militant groups engaged in sectarian violence in which their Shiite and Kurdish brothers, on one hand and the US-led coalition troops and the weak central government in Iraq, on the other hand. Some of these terrorist groups who could not have raised their fingers prior to the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 have now become more emboldened to challenge the status quo thus holding social cohesion and stability in Iraq in ransom. This is nothing more than the product of an anomic situation at the international (UN) level, which is finding its expression in Iraqi society in the form of an ethno-religious crisis and violence.

The consequences of anomie at the International level are forcing divided Islamic groups to be united and integrated against the US-led coalition and the imposed central government. Most Sunnis in Sunni led regimes that hitherto supported US led coalition against the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and the 2003 US-led invasion had so far united against the US troops and Shiite dominated regime in Baghdad. Scholarly writing by Nasr (2006b:78) observed that Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia have so far supplied the bulk of Sunni-Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's army of suicide bombers to Iraq. A similar observation was made by Dawisha (2004) who posited that many violent Islamists from other Arab countries have infiltrated the porous Sunni borders of post-Saddam Iraq to strike at the U.S. 'infidels'.

¹⁸ See Ogunrotifa, A.B 'Systemic frustration Paradigm: A new Approach to explaining Terrorism', 2008. pp.9

Since 2005, political violence has been justified on religious terms, and these insurgencies has to some degree consolidated around four or five main groups: the Islamic Army in Iraq, the Partisans of the Sunna Army, the Mujahadeen's Army, Muhammad's Army and Islamic Resistance Movement in Iraq (Dodge, 2007:91). Over the last three years these main insurgent groups have found ideological coherence by fusing a powerful appeal to Iraqi nationalism with an austere and extreme Salafism. The attraction of the Salafist doctrine for the insurgents is that it allows a distinction to be drawn between those involved in the jihad or struggle (the true believers), and those who are not. Those not backing the struggle can be branded non-believers and as such be killed (ibid). This therefore shows that Arabs especially Sunnis are now more united and integrated in their insurrectionist approach against the Shiite-dominated central government and US coalition troops. In this case, the condition to which the latter were subjected becomes the basis for their integration and collective conscience, and thus responsible for solidarity with each other. These tales of a religious crisis and sectarian violence that currently ravaged Iraqi society could have been averted if all procedures especially at the UN were followed, and if the UN Nuclear weapon inspectors were allowed to do their work before the US-led invasion.

It can therefore be argued that this theatre of anomie, which flows from the UN vis-à-vis the role of the enforcing powers and the interest of the West is the springboard upon which the religious crisis and sectarian violence in Iraq festers.

Conclusion: What is to be Done

An analysis of religious violence and sectarian conflicts from an Iraqi standpoint cannot be divorced from the discourse of power relations at the global level. The flagrant violation of the UN treaty on each state's sovereignty exhibited by Iraq in the invasion of Kuwait, coupled along with the manipulation of the UN resolution by the US and its allies in the 2003 invasion of Iraq is the backdrop against which the current reign of instability and religious violence festers among various sects in the post-Saddam Iraq-era. The more there is anomie at an international (UN) level, the more it becomes entrenched in local societies (Iraq), and the more the society is torn apart by religious and sectarian crisis and violent conflicts. Therefore, the formulation of a viable social framework, with appropriate regulation and sanctions should be meted out to erring members of the UN irrespective of their economic and military clout is therefore bound to curb deviant behaviours, promote global responsibility and engender world peace.

Emile Durkheim's construct of anomie seems useful in explaining where the sources of ethno-religious-sectarian crisis and violent conflicts are located. Therefore, religious violence is a strain within the social system that dramatically alters the axiomatic sociological understanding of social cohesion in society. When the overall system cannot curtail the excesses of some people or the society is unable to provide for the people, then anarchy, violence and other variants of anomie set in. This will inevitably weaken the bonds and social relationships between the contending forces (individuals, groups, and societies) in the society.

It is apparent that rather than seeing the present political logjam and ethno-religious violent conflicts as a product of geo-political power play at the International level vis-à-vis the figment of the construct and imagination of a western conspiracy, the Iraqi religious sects and leaders see themselves as 'enemies' in the name of politics. Until Iraqi people understand the political manipulation and power play that envelops them, and how this discourse has pitted them against one another, the theatre of anomie and anarchy will continue to pervade Iraqi society. The Sunnis and the Shiites clerics should come together and see each other as significant partners in Iraqi progress, and use the present shade of democratization to find compromise among them, and initiate a viable central government that is suitable to local needs and aspiration, and be decisive in their diplomatic engagement with the rest of the world.

The hydra-headed social problems that came in the wake of economic sanctions and the 2003 invasion of Iraq are enormous and needs attention rather than engaging in insurgency and sectarian violent conflicts that may further worsened all ready broken down problems. After all what Sunnis are yearning is similar to what Kurdish and Shiites are looking for, they should be united and fight the neo-liberal capitalist system that tends to pitch them against one other.

The US and its coalition allies should take their hands off Iraq completely and allow the Iraqi people to put their destiny into their hands in terms of who governs them, how oil revenues should be allocated and distributed, and how social problems in the country should be addressed, without being teleguided from outside. Without a change of heart among the Iraqi political and religious leadership, ethno-religious and sectarian violent conflicts will not only lead to civil war and a collapsed state, but it will remain a major barrier to economic and political resurgence in a country that has permanently suffered from a haemorrhage of poverty, underdevelopment and infrastructural collapse.

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