



SAMHÄLLS-
VETENSKAPLIGA
FAKULTETEN

Centre for Middle Eastern Studies

Anticolonial Resistance in the Post-Ottoman Mashriq: Examining the Iraqi Jazirah

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Author:	Rebecca Irvine
Advisor:	Dalia Abdelhady
Examiner:	Rola El-Husseini Dean
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Abstract

The anticolonial uprising in 1920 against the British occupation of the provinces of Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra marked an unprecedented escalation in resistance and opposition to the colonial forces. While most narratives of this uprising focus on the more significant events across the lower and middle Euphrates, earlier, unsuccessful episodes of anticolonial resistance also emerged in the Jazirah region of north-west Iraq. This thesis situates these episodes of Iraq's contentious history within their broader regional context. Iraq's anticolonial resistance did not take place in isolation; rather I contend that it was part of a broader, regional period of uprisings against the European powers that sought to impose a post-Ottoman order on the Middle East. Through a close analysis of events in the Jazirah region, this thesis argues that anticolonial resistance took the form of revolutionary contentious politics. Utilising a spatial history framework that accounts for the liminal nature of the Jazirah region, this thesis argues that the forms of mobilisation were grounded in and shaped by local realities, while the discourses with which they engaged were both nationally focused and evocative of the Arab nationalist moment in their anticolonialism.

Acknowledgements

I want first to thank Vittorio, for his early advice as my supervisor, and Dalia, for her invaluable insights and for pushing me over the line in the last few months.

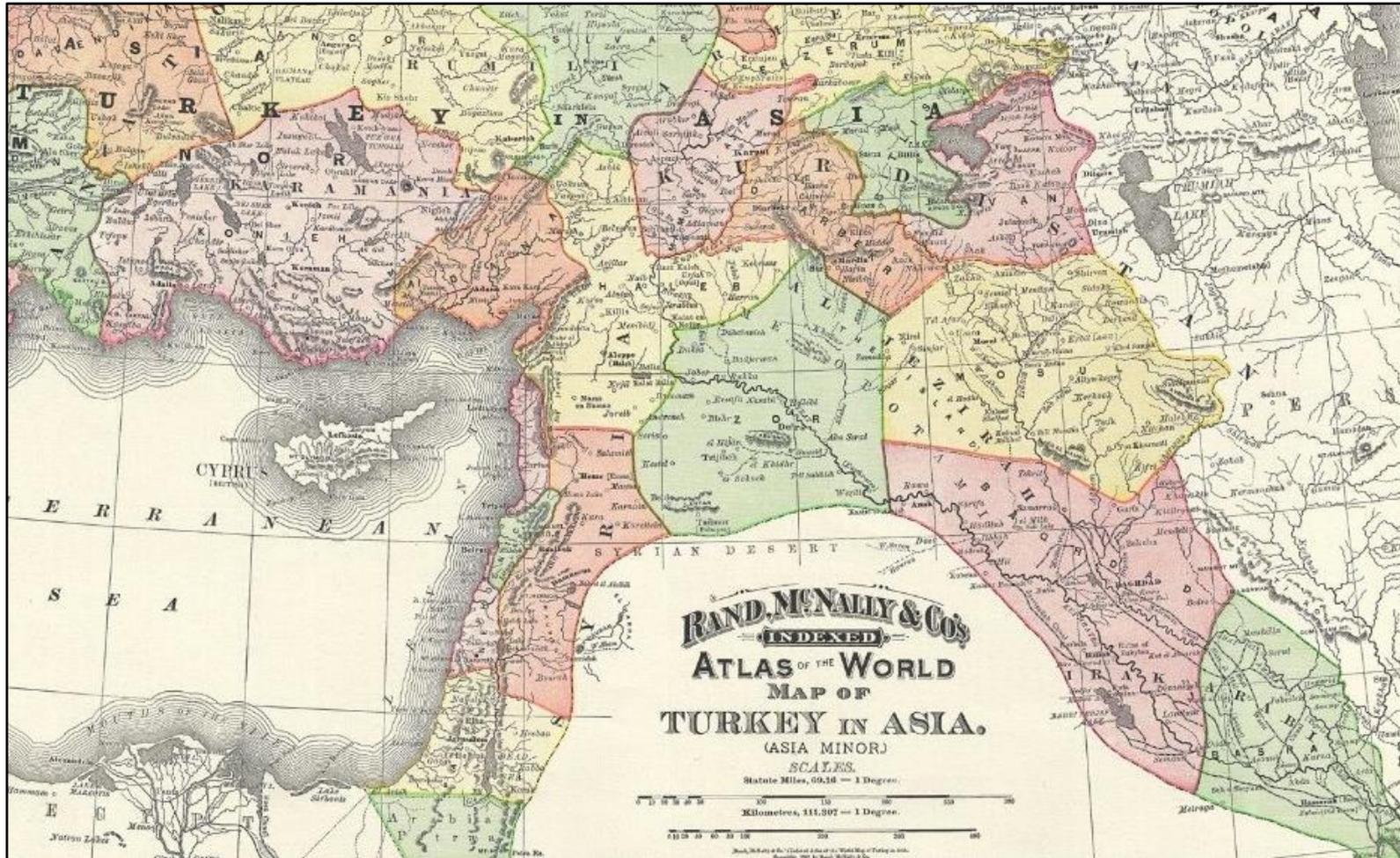
Thank you to the friends I met in Iraq who were there when this project began, and the friends I met in Lund for their endless encouragement and laughter as it finished.

Finally, most importantly, thank you to my family, and most of all my mum, for always supporting and being there for me, whatever unusual choices I seem to make.

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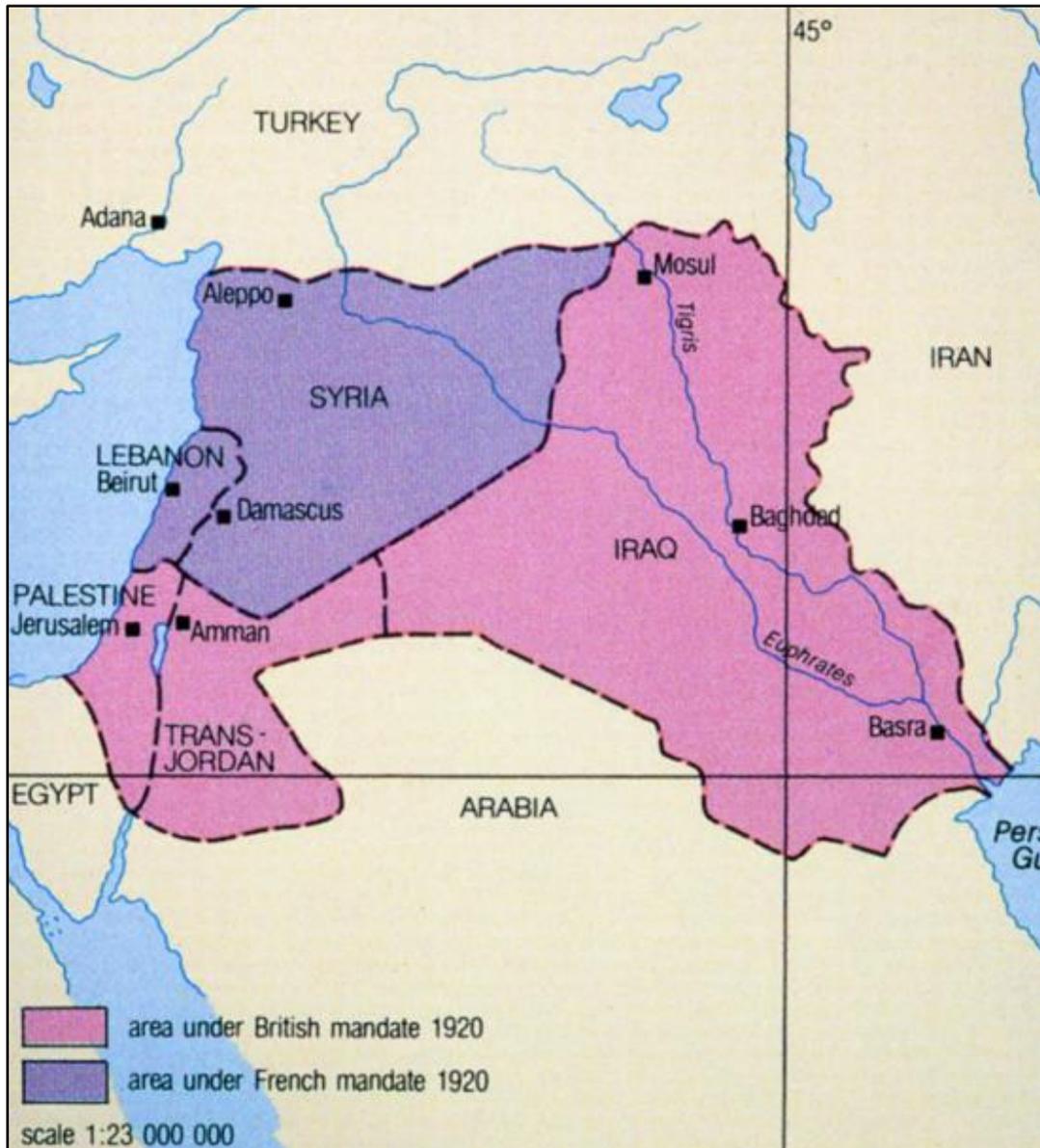
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Maps



Map 1: Portion of 1892 map showing Ottoman provinces and districts. Note Mosul and Zor (Dayr al-Zur), designated as ‘Al Jazirah.’¹

¹ Crop of Rand McNally map ‘Turkey in Asia’, (1892), accessed online [9/11/2018] at: <https://www.geographicus.com/P/AntiqueMap/TurkeyAsia-randmcnally-1895>



Map 2: The British and French mandates in 1920.²

² Map of 'British and French Mandates in 1920' from University of Chicago, Center for Middle Eastern Studies collection, accessed online [9/11/2018] at: <http://cmes.uchicago.edu/sites/cmes.uchicago.edu/files/uploads/Maps/Map%20-%20British%20and%20French%20Mandates.pdf>



Map 3: The governing districts of Iraq during the mandate period, established by the British administration.³

³ Source: Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation Building and a History Denied*, (New York: CUP, 2003), ii.

Chapter One

Introduction

‘It may be that no modern state has been called artificial more times than Iraq.’⁴

On 30th June 1920, Sheikh Abu al-Jun was arrested in Rumaitha, Iraq. Later that day, the prison was stormed by Dhuwalim tribesmen, who killed two guards and released Abu al-Jun.⁵ The situation quickly mobilised surrounding tribes into action; attacking railways, communication lines and British garrisons across the Lower Euphrates. By the middle of July, the uprising had already killed nearly 100 British and Indian soldiers.⁶ The uprising continued throughout the summer, spreading across the south and causing significant devastation to around one third of the total countryside.⁷ It was not until well into the autumn that the colonial forces were once again in control of the region.

This narrative of tribal aggression spreading quickly and fiercely across the lower and middle Euphrates forms the traditional narrative of the Great Iraqi Revolt and the revolutionary activity of 1920. Both the archives and contemporaneous accounts offer plenty of evidence for such an account, as indicated in the above vignette. However, as I demonstrate in this thesis, my findings offer an additional, underexplored perspective to the anticolonial contention in that year. With a focus on the dynamics of the nationalist fervent in the Jazirah region of Syria and Iraq, I shift the analytical gaze to another area of political contention and revolutionary activity.⁸

Furthermore, in this thesis, I situate Iraq’s contentious history of this period in its broader regional context. Iraq’s anticolonial resistance did not take place in isolation; rather I contend that it was part of a broader, regional period of uprisings against the European powers that sought to impose a post-Ottoman order on the Middle East. The aim therefore is to more deeply understand this anticolonial resistance that the European powers faced when

⁴ Sara Pursley, ‘Lines Drawn on an Empty Map: Iraq’s Borders and the Legend of the Artificial State’, *Jadaliyya*, (2 June 2015) accessed online [29/10/2018] at: <http://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/32140/%60Lines-Drawn-on-an-Empty-Map%60-Iraq's-Borders-and-the-Legend-of-the-Artificial-State-Part-1>

⁵ FO 371/5227, ‘Allenby to FO and CC’, 1 July 1920.

⁶ FO 371/5228, ‘Davidson to IO’, 18 July 1920; FO 371/5228, ‘Bonar Law to Curzon FO’, 15 July 1920; FO 371/5228, ‘Parliamentary Question from Ormsby-Gore to Churchill’, 19 July 1920.

⁷ GB 186/GB ‘Gertrude Bell to her father’, 26 July 1920.

⁸ Meaning ‘the island’ in Arabic, in reference to the space between the two rivers of the Euphrates and the Tigris. See Maps. See also, Encyclopaedia Britannica ‘Al-Jazirah’, accessed online [30/10/2018] at <https://www.britannica.com/place/Al-Jazirah-region-Middle-East>.

establishing the mandates in the Mashriq.⁹ I use the case study of Iraq's Jazirah to do this for several reasons: to engage with the ongoing lively debate in Iraq's historiography, to contribute to the incomplete narrative of the uprising as encompassing only the action across the south of the country, and, as will be shown throughout, to integrate Iraq's history more closely into that of the wider post-Ottoman region. Ultimately, I am asking: in what ways can anticolonial resistance in the early mandate era be understood and theorised?

An important point of note concerns the different use of the terminology throughout the literature. On the first mention above, I referred to the 'Great Iraqi Revolt', a common term in the scholarship.¹⁰ The respective use of 'revolution', 'revolt', 'uprising' or 'rebellion' when exploring contention of all kinds, but in particular anticolonial contention, is not without its challenges or even controversies. The question of terminology in this thesis is further explored in the theoretical framework in chapter four, during which the argument is made for utilising the concept of revolution, or revolutionary. However, outside that and when referring to the events in general, I choose to use the word 'uprising' for clarity and consistency.

The events of 1920

When the events in Iraq in 1920 are explored, the uprising that spread from the south is the focus. The central event with which this thesis is concerned is not incorporated into the same narrative or is done so only fleetingly. However, when the town of Tal Afar fell to the myriad of nationalist forces that entered it on 4 June 1920, it marked an unprecedented escalation in the anticolonial movement that had been slowly building. The brief narration of the key events below is intended to facilitate and provide context for the exploration of the actors' rhetoric, mobilisation and regional position throughout this thesis.

The declaration of the mandate in April 1920 after the San Remo Conference increased the rising discontentment among the general population since the British occupation in 1917–18. Urban nationalists in Mosul and Baghdad met the announcement with derision, and their calls for an Arab government intensified.¹¹ Despite attempts to insist in some of the British documents that there was 'no desire for Arab rule in Mesopotamia', they also conceded that there was 'non-existent' loyalty to the British occupiers, even in the

⁹ I use this term, rather than others such as Levant, to refer to the wider region including Egypt and Iraq.

¹⁰ Most the scholars discussed in chapter four use this term, or just 'Iraqi Revolt.'

¹¹ FO 371/5081, 'Baghdad Police Reports January–June 1920', 10 April 1920 and 8 May 1920.

northern levies they established.¹² In fact, in these areas, people were found to ‘dream of national independence’, demonstrating the popular reach of nationalist sentiment.¹³ The British’s awareness of such feeling became more clear from May onwards, as telegrams and memos began to make note of the concerns about raids on the frontier with Syria, and the strong potential for nationalist discourses to ‘agitate’ the population into ‘extremism.’¹⁴

The town of Tal Afar, situated about 50 km west of Mosul, had a population of around 80,000 people, including Turkmens, Kurds and Arabs, both Christian and Muslim.¹⁵ This diverse demographic were reportedly ‘cordial’ to the British forces who had toured the town as a precautionary measure during the increasing upheaval of late May.¹⁶ However, by the first week of June, the British garrison had been attacked, the gendarmerie killed and the town occupied, instigating a general rising of ‘all tribes in the region.’ First from Dayr al-Zur, and then Tal Afar, the coalition of different troops set out on the road to Mosul, while remaining in control of the area for almost a month. Their intended goal was to raise a nationalist uprising from within Mosul, and ultimately drive the British from Iraq.¹⁷

The large body crossed the Tigris river, cutting communication lines, blocking roads and raiding villages. They freely distributed notices and calls to action, further building their force as they progressed. Meanwhile, within the city, notices were distributed urging Moslawis to remain unified in the face of British attempts to cause rifts between Christian and Muslim peoples and emphasising that the planned uprising was for the benefit of Jews, Christians and Muslims.¹⁸ At the same time, nationalists within Mosul were in league with the external forces that commanded the wider effort.¹⁹ These intellectual classes continued to draw on the rights of Arabs to self-govern and the evils of the British occupation.

The result was several nights of unrest and sedition, as the arriving forces and the internal population attempted to storm the town.²⁰ However, the British response was swift,

¹² FO 371/5033, ‘CC Baghdad to IO’, 20 March 1920; FO 371/5076, ‘Memo from Officer Inspecting Arab and Kurdish Levies’, June 1920.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ FO 371/5226, ‘FO to IO London’, 20 May 1920; Tawfiq Suwaydi, trans. Nancy Roberts, *My Memoirs: Half a Century of the History of Iraq and the Arab Cause*, (Colorado: Lynne Reiner Publishers, 2013) describes in detail the growing unrest in Iraq throughout the spring months of 1920; FO 371/5227, ‘CC Baghdad Memo to IO’, 7 June 1920.

¹⁵ IOR MIL/17 15/42, ‘Military Report on Mesopotamia’, 1922, 32–35.

¹⁶ FO 406/44, ‘Report on the Recent Attack in Tal Afar’, 559.

¹⁷ CO 696/3, ‘Administration Reports’, 2–25: Haldane, *The Insurrection*.

¹⁸ FO 371/5130, ‘Report on the Recent Attack in Tal Afar by the PO Mosul to CC Baghdad’, 14 August 1920; CO 696/3, ‘Administration Reports’, 2–3.

¹⁹ CO 696/3, ‘Administration Report for Mosul Division’, 3–5.

²⁰ Aylmer Haldane, *The Insurrection in Mesopotamia, 1920*, (London: W Blackwood and Sons, 1922); FO 371/5310, ‘Statement of Hajji Yunis Agha on the Tal Afar Rising’, 18 August 1920.

and more prepared. The nationalists failed to gain control of the city, losing the battle to the larger British force and its air support. The leaders withdrew to Syria as a result.²¹ By July the situation remained critical, with armed remnants continuing to raid and smaller insurgencies ongoing inside the city, as disturbances spread to nearby Baqubah and Kirkuk. British officers even vocalised the potential need for a withdrawal.²² It was not until they regained control of the country towards the end of the year that the situation calmed.

Ultimately, this uprising failed; Mosul was not occupied by the nationalists and they were forced to accept defeat. However, the attempted overthrow of the British military occupation and administration of Iraq marked a significant development in the anticolonial process. While not achieving full independence, it was a step towards indirect rule.

Disposition

In answering my central research question, I seek to contextualise these events empirically and theoretically. This begins in chapter two, where I explain my methodological approach, rooted in a postcolonial historiography. I also explain the selection of the case study, and the sources on which the thesis is based. Next, chapter three presents a review of the relevant literature, situating this anticolonial contention within the events of Iraq itself and the wider region. In chapter four I outline my theoretical framework, which addresses both the type of contention engaged in, and the space in which it occurred. Turning then to the empirical argument is chapter six, which presents a detailed thematic exploration of the findings. This is followed by the analysis in chapter seven that examines these findings considering the theoretical framework and the literature, situating them in their wider context. Finally, in chapter seven, I conclude and summarise my key arguments and contributions. I ultimately demonstrate how anticolonial resistance to the establishment of the British mandates in the Arab world should be understood as constituting episodes of revolutionary contentious politics, in which popular nationalist movements sought to overthrow the colonial order and establish independent states. Utilising oppositional discourses of both Arab and, in this case, Iraqi nationalisms, these movements were shaped by both their spatial and temporal context.

²¹ Muhammad Yunis al Sayyid Abd al-Wahab, *Ahammiyat Talla 'far fi thawrat al- 'Iraq al-Kubra* [The Importance of Tal Afar in the Great Iraqi Revolution], (Mosul: Matba'at al-Jumhuriya, 1967), 51–55.

²² FO 371/5229, 'CC Baghdad to IO', 12 August 1920; 'CC Baghdad Memo', 12 August 1920; FO 371/5130, 'Director of Military Intelligence to IO', 23 June 1920.

Chapter Two

Methodology – A Postcolonial Approach

The purpose of this study is to explore anticolonial resistance in the mandate era, through the case study of Iraq's Jazirah. It analyses how this insurgency can be understood and theorised; how it can be explained and how it fits into the wave that swept across the region.

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the methodological approach taken to achieve this, in terms of the position of the study and the methods drawn upon in its execution. It is influenced by postcolonial historiography, and the case study is analysed in line with this approach. This relies upon and borrows from the ideas of the subaltern studies school and their approach to historical analysis. In this vein, the work of postcolonial historians of India, in particular, has been instructive in terms of their method of studying colonial archives during moments of resistance. Beginning with an exploration of this postcolonial paradigm, this chapter then describes the nature of the case study, the sources, and finally, outlines the limitations, scope and significance.

Postcolonialism

This study is underpinned by a postcolonial approach to historical inquiry. As a research paradigm, or rather as a historiographical method, this has several advantages, particularly in terms of examining anticolonial insurgency, revolution and resistance. While it would be incorrect to present postcolonialism as a single theory or approach, postcolonial critique can be understood as 'the moment where the political and cultural experience of the marginalised periphery developed into a more general theoretical position that could be set against western political, intellectual and academic hegemony.'²³ In other words, postcolonialism decentres western narratives and approaches to the study of the past, evolving initially in response to ethnocentric histories of colonialism.²⁴

As a theoretical and epistemological position then, postcolonialism ensures that critical approaches are taken, in which stagist histories and those that perceive nation states as inherent are avoided. The focus is on 'liberating subaltern meaning' by integrating

²³ Robert J C Young, *Postcolonialism: A Historical Introduction*, (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2001), 65.

²⁴ Ranajit Guha, 'On Some Aspects of the Colonial Historiography of India', in Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (eds), *Selected Subaltern Studies*, (Oxford: OUP, 1988), 37–43.

marginalised voices into the knowledge production of anticolonial moments.²⁵ This is facilitated by studying colonial encounters for their specificities, focusing on revealing the power relations inherent within them. Through an analysis of ‘interruptive events’ – moments of resistance or uprising – this can be most clearly achieved.²⁶ Importantly, this method has the clearest implications regarding the questions asked and the source analysis.

For the purposes here, postcolonialism is utilised in line with the subaltern studies approach. Subaltern studies is ultimately a postcolonial project of writing history. Drawing on a Gramscian conception of subalternity to denote those outside the hegemonic power structure, the project emerged in the 1980s.²⁷ Focused on South Asian history, it attempts to ‘recover’ subaltern narratives from within colonial history; namely, those who were erased and whose stories are not recorded. It notes how ‘other histories’ are perceived as merely variations on the master narrative, rather than subjects of inquiry in their own right. This is rooted in the idea from European philosophers who argue that only ‘Europe’ is ‘theoretically knowable’ (as opposed to empirically).²⁸ Subaltern studies scholars seek to challenge this Eurocentric nature of academic history; they ‘provincialise Europe.’ This avoids framing research with reference to Europe, to escape the production of knowledge that neglects to centre the experiences of those it purports to study.²⁹ In practice, this entails critically using what material is available, generally colonial records, in order to understand the lives and experiences of these peoples.³⁰

Several scholars of the Middle East have adopted this method.³¹ In doing so, they search for ‘small voices’ within colonial archives and acknowledge the ‘radical heterogeneity of subaltern subjects.’³² Put simply, they for complexity within the anticolonial experience, and accept that colonial archives should, and can, be used critically in order to find that complexity. Importantly, this questions what is political, and therefore, what can be

²⁵ Antonia Darder, ‘Decolonizing Interpretive Research: subaltern sensibilities and the politics of voice’, *Qualitative Research Journal* 18, no.2, (2018), 94–104.

²⁶ Alfred K Lopez, *Posts and Pasts: A Theory of Postcolonialism*, (New York: SUNY Press, 2001).

²⁷ Chakrabarty, ‘Subaltern Studies and Postcolonial History’, *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no.1, (2000), 9.

²⁸ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, (Princeton: PUP, 2000), 29.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Guha, ‘The Prose of Counterinsurgency’, in Ranajit Guha (ed.) *Subaltern Studies II: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, (Delhi: OUP, 1983), 45–84.

³¹ See, for example, Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1988); Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon*, (California: UC Press 2000); Michael Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt and the Rise of Arab Nationalism*, (Texas: UTP, 2005).

³² John Chalcraft, ‘What are the fruitful new directions in subaltern studies?’, *IJMES* 40, (2008), 376–378; Sabra J Webber, ‘Middle East Studies and Subaltern Studies’, *MESA Bulletin* 31, no.1, (1997), 11–16.

revolutionary. By departing from a Marxist approach to such histories, Guha stresses the importance of viewing rebellious groups – peasants, in his foundational study – as political, rather than pre-political.³³

For this thesis, the actors are not ‘subaltern’ in the traditionally understood sense that Spivak outlines.³⁴ Indeed, within the sources we can hear their words directly at times. However, I find this framework to be suitable for several reasons. Firstly, these words are found within the colonial archive, and therefore framed by that, even when we do hear them. As Scott argues, it is only by acknowledging this that we can turn the bias of sources into an opportunity.³⁵ Secondly, the relative position of the actors against the colonial administration, within that binary and at the point of the colonial encounter, adds relevance to the approach.³⁶ Finally, the endeavour of provincialising Europe and studying the specifics of the anticolonial experience itself fits with the aim of this thesis.

Case Study

The design of this thesis is that of a case study: the Jazirah in 1920. As Bryman discusses, a case study refers to a unit of analysis. It highlights a particular community, setting or time.³⁷ I find this to be appropriate for the close analysis it permits of the specifics of an event, while situating it within its context, both temporally and spatially. This allows me to explore more general themes within a specific location, and helps contribute to micro-level understanding, while also generating more widely applicable arguments, analysis, and historiographical and theoretical conclusions. It is a particularly relevant route as many previous studies of this type have focused on case studies, for example, of the 1919 Egyptian revolution, the Great Syrian Revolt 1925-27, or the 1936-39 Arab revolt in Palestine.

In terms of the case selection, this project began a year ago, when I arrived for the first time to Iraq for a research internship at a local institute in Erbil. For this thesis, I was initially interested in the 1920s and 1930s and the evolution of the Iraqi state under its period of semi-independence, with its roots in the anticolonialism of 1920. However, I became interested in the events of 1920 specifically, and particularly what happened in the north of the country, when I was given two books by friends in Erbil: *Kurds, Turks and Arabs* written

³³ Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, (Delhi: OUP, 1983). A similar approach can be seen in the study of peasant uprisings in colonial India undertaken by Arnold in ‘Rebellious Hillmen’.

³⁴ Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’, *Die Philosophin* 14, no.27, (1988), 42–58.

³⁵ James Scott, ‘Foreword’ of Guha, *Elementary Aspects*.

³⁶ Guha, ‘Preface’ in Guha and Spivak (eds), *Selected Subaltern Studies*.

³⁷ Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, (Oxford: OUP, 2016), 66.

by a British Political Officer based in the north-east of Iraq between 1919–25 and *Our Revolution in Northern Iraq*, written by a Mosul native and serialised in an Iraqi newspaper in the early 1950s.³⁸ Together, these turned my attention to what anticolonial contention took place outside the Euphrates region, something I realised was largely neglected from what I encountered in the historiography. That reason, as well as the material I was able to find in the archives, led me to select this case study, and to explore it in relation to anticolonialism across the region during the same period.

Sources and Archival Research

The material used in this thesis is qualitative and the sources that it draws on are historical documents. These were collected from a range of locations and archives in order to build the most comprehensive picture of the past events as possible. Any research into the history of Iraq faces more starkly than ever one of the most pressing concerns of any historian, that of the loss of important bodies of documents and difficulties in accessing local archives. During my own time in Iraq, I faced this issue and was unable to visit either Iraq's national archives in Baghdad (due to my lack of visa to federal Iraq) or archives at the University of Mosul (due to the recent end of the battle for the city causing ongoing security issues and a lack of reconstruction in the relevant areas).³⁹ I was able to visit a range of universities and institutes across the Kurdistan Region and meet with archivists and historians. While throughout this process I was provided with a range of predominantly secondary material, I was generally unable to access what I had initially hoped to.⁴⁰

Instead, I rely on both published and unpublished primary material, drawn from the UK National Archives, the British Library, Qatar Digital Archives (which houses the India Office archive), the League of Nations Archive, and the Gertrude Bell Memorial Archive. The types of sources therefore include: correspondence, reports, parliamentary questions, minutes, proclamations and newspapers; memoirs and contemporary accounts; and the work of mid-twentieth century local historians who accessed sources no longer available, including oral histories and regional newspapers. The collection of these took place over a number of

³⁸ C J Edmonds, *Kurds, Turks and Arabs: Politics, Travel, and Research in North East Iraq 1919–1925*, (London: OUP, 1957), and Abd al Munim Ghulami, *Thawratna fi Shamal al-Iraq 1919–20*, (Mosul: 1966).

³⁹ There is also concern that much of the material in the University of Mosul was destroyed by ISIS. See <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/mosuls-library-without-books>.

⁴⁰ For example, newspapers from the period in question, or personal memoirs. This kind of material has, at various times, been housed in the Kurdish region. These people who helped me with my research were surprised we couldn't find such sources. It appears to have been moved or lost in the relatively recent past.

months throughout 2017–18. All the events I describe have been cross-referenced across this large body of material.

On the subject of archival research, as Steedman noted: ‘The archive is made from selected and consciously chosen documentation from the past and also from the mad fragments that no one intended to preserve and just ended up there.’⁴¹ In other words, an archive is not a complete record of the past, but rather what is selected to retain. In the case of colonial government archives, the ‘selected and consciously chosen documentation’ presents an even greater task. On top of this, the volume of material available in the archives I accessed presented its own challenge. The number of documents studied and collected entered the thousands, while those directly referenced reaches into the hundreds. I seek to overcome these issues with the approach I take and my delimitations, discussed below.

Analysis

History as a discipline is inherently hermeneutical; the job of the historian is to interpret and draw conclusions based on the material available to them. As a result, historians largely agree that, ‘history is not, and never has been, systematic or scientific.’⁴² Instead, historical research should focus on criticism and synthesis of a range of materials in order to overcome their inherent partiality, and ensure that any tendency for the researcher to confirm their own expectations is avoided.⁴³ Guha, one of the founders of the subaltern studies method, focuses on the hermeneutic strategy of ‘reading’ colonial sources. In other words, on the content and textual properties of archival documents. In approaching history as a discourse, the possibilities for developing alternative narratives through subaltern voices arise.⁴⁴

I approach the process of criticism and synthesis through this lens. Moreover, I was conscious throughout of my own position as a white, British student, primarily educated in the UK. This not only permitted me easy access to this material – something Iraqis themselves do not have – but is something I endeavour to acknowledge with my critical methodology. I focus on ‘reading’ the documents within their context when identifying the central themes, of which the analysis presented in the following pages is the product.

⁴¹ Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*, (New Jersey: RUP, 2002).

⁴² Robert Connors quoted in Steedman, *Dust*.

⁴³ Alexander Lee, ‘The Library of Babel Problem: Hypothesis Testing with Archival Sources’, (2017), accessed online [29/10/2018] at http://www.rochester.edu/college/faculty/alexander_lee/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/archives3.pdf.

⁴⁴ K Sivaramakrishnan, ‘Situating the Subaltern: History and Anthropology in the Subaltern Studies Project’, *Journal of Historical Sociology* 8, no.4, (2006), 395–429.

Limits, Scope and Significance

The question this thesis is seeking to address is a large one. However, in the following pages, I am concerned with a narrow episode of violent contention, taking the view that in moments of resistance, we can most clearly identify agency and understand it. The short timeframe under consideration allows an exploration of these events in detail, stopping prior to the uprising as usually narrated. This thesis is therefore not a complete history of Iraq's anticolonial uprising(s), but of revolutionary moments in a particular space and time. That space does not extend east of Mosul into the Kurdish regions, which experienced their own uprisings in early 1919 and throughout 1922.⁴⁵ Furthermore, in Iraq today, the question of identities, particularly regarding sectarianism in history and politics, remains pressing. This has been dealt with elsewhere, with considerable debate over the historical roots of such issues.⁴⁶ This subject is less relevant to this study – with modern issues emerging after the establishment of a Sunni-dominated government in 1921 – something I only briefly touch on.

Beyond that, while I situate the case study within the literature on the Mashriq region, it was well beyond my scope to explore primary sources for these episodes. For that reason, I rely on the secondary literature and the ongoing debates that I identify in the following chapter. Finally, the study is bound by the constraints of time. While the archives are a snapshot, and necessarily always incomplete, they are equally overwhelmingly large and certain choices have to be made. Throughout the process, I endeavoured to be comprehensive and thorough, returning several times to explore gaps I felt needed to be addressed. However, there is undoubtedly always more to be discovered.

Therefore, in its conclusions, this study makes three distinct contributions to the empirical and theoretical literature. Firstly, to the historiography on Iraq, by expanding the narrative of Iraq's anticolonial period and demonstrating the importance of integrating the events in the Jazirah into the widely accepted picture of the uprising. Secondly, to the broader historiography of the Mashriq, I show parallels between this episode and others, particularly in terms of the use of Arab nationalist discourses. Finally, I outline a theoretical framework through which to understand such anticolonial resistance, integrating the spatial context.

⁴⁵ David MacDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, (London: IB Tauris, 2007).

⁴⁶ See *inter alia*: Fanar Haddad, *Sectarianism in Iraq: Antagonistic Visions of Unity*, (Oxford, OUP, 2011); Khalil Osman, *Sectarianism in Iraq: The Making of State and Nation Since 1920*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014); Reider Visser, 'Historical Myths of a Divided Iraq', *Survival* 50, no.2, (2008), 95–106.

Chapter Three

Literature Review – Resistance to the Mandates

The collapse of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War marked the beginning of a period of significant change for the Middle East region. After the mandates were announced for Palestine, Syria and Iraq at the San Remo conference in 1920, the repercussions were enormous. In each of these places, the decisions to place ultimate administration in the hands of European powers resulted in varying levels of resistance, throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s.⁴⁷ These episodes are studied by historians in terms of both the specific types of resistance that occurred, as well as considering the wider context in which they emerged. That is, the context of the post-Ottoman societies that were still in the process of formation, and the nature of the evolving political community. However, while anticolonialism in Iraq is studied with regards to the 1920 uprising, this context – and the potential for comparison it presents – is afforded less attention than in Palestine, Lebanon or Syria, in particular. As I show below, the themes that scholars of the Mashriq discuss offer important points of analysis for the Iraqi experience. I align myself with the approach of these scholars; undertaking close interrogation of short episodes of anticolonial contention in order to shed light on both the specifics of those episodes, and the broader themes of the mandate era.

Therefore, I am concerned with the specifics of Iraq's own anticolonial contention, and thematic points of comparison from other early mandate-era uprisings.⁴⁸ In particular, I focus on the events taking place in Iraq's Jazirah. This is a region that has been neglected from the common narrative but, as discussed in the previous chapter, the sources reveal experienced its own anticolonial episode. This is perhaps in part due to the unsuccessful nature of the campaign that took place there, as well as its transnational nature, making it more difficult to fit within state-focused narratives.⁴⁹ Underpinning this literature is the issue of post-Ottoman and Arab nationalism(s), with questions surrounding their origin, nature and influence. As such, in this chapter I first explore the historiography of modern Iraq, examining how scholars have analysed the uprising of 1920 itself, and its wider context. I demonstrate the need to more clearly understand all the anticolonial politics of Iraq at the

⁴⁷ This concerns Syria, Palestine and Iraq in terms of the specifics of the mandate experience, though similar anticolonial responses can be identified across the region, most obviously in Egypt in 1919.

⁴⁸ Some of these comparisons have been explicitly made. See, for example, Nadine Méouchy and Peter Sluglett (eds), *The British and French Mandates in Comparative Perspectives*, (Boston: Brill, 2004).

⁴⁹ I use the word transnational in reference to the modern states of Iraq and Syria.

beginning of the mandate. Turning then to the Mashriq region, I provide an overview of significant developments in the historiography on nationalism and revolution in the mandate era in order to situate this study in its broader context. Throughout this, I identify the dual contribution of this thesis to the literature: firstly, to historiography on the uprising in 1920 by offering an additional perspective, and secondly, to literature on nationalism in the early mandate period in the Middle East, through its consideration of an underexplored, popular form of nationalism that spread in the Jazirah region.

Historiography on Iraq

Many histories of Iraq examine the 1920 uprising within a wider survey of the country's history, taking it as their point of departure. This exemplifies an important trend in the historiography of modern Iraq; that of a country that did not exist prior to the uprising, which led to a drastic change in British policy. Others explore the 1920 uprising more narrowly, though largely fall into the same broad arguments that are discussed in this section. Together, these scholars highlight the importance of 1920 as a watershed moment, not least for its consequences towards the British approach to the mandate, and beyond that, for its somewhat mythic status as the moment Iraq was born. They also begin to touch on some of the intricacies of the different threads of opposition, though are limited by the ambition of their larger purpose. Importantly, these scholars of Iraq largely overlook the regional context surrounding these events.

Firstly, the position of the British forces as an occupying power plays an important role in many explorations of the dynamics of the anticolonial events. In his account of Iraq's political development, Dodge presents the uprising as the culmination of a catalogue of errors within the British administration, sparked by resentment towards policies of heavy taxation across the country.⁵⁰ Its significance lies in the impact it had on British policy; it highlighted to the colonial powers the precariousness of their position and inducted a policy of indirect rule and the strategy of controlling Iraq from the air.⁵¹ It is clear that the uprising itself was monumental, and the fallout from the events spanned a period of time larger than the short timeframe of the events themselves may suggest. Ulrichsen also attributes the 1920 uprising to the increased resource extraction of the British administration during wartime, and an

⁵⁰ Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*. Dawisha makes the same point in his analysis of Iraq's development from 1921–2003.

⁵¹ Priya Satia makes this point more explicitly in her article 'The Defence of Humanity: Air Control and the British Idea of Arabia', *The American Historical Review* 111, no.1, (February 2006), 16–51.

associated nationalist backlash.⁵² In his study of the British occupation, Ulrichsen, much like Ireland in his very early account from the 1930s, argues that mainly Shia tribes joined the uprising, while urban Sunni populations remained loyal to, or accepting of, the British authorities.⁵³

This raises the second dominant narrative, that of tribal violence. This is important considering the composition of the forces involved. Exemplifying such a focus most clearly is Batatu, for whom the uprising was ‘a sheikh’s affair,’ with no real national sentiment espoused.⁵⁴ He contends that despite the role of the increasingly influential intelligentsia, the uprising was largely a tribal insurgency, sparked and escalated by localised grievances. In many ways, this narrative is like the above arguments for the way in which it suggests the tribes became dissatisfied.⁵⁵ Vinogradov’s contribution around the same time as Batatu’s also explores the role of tribes in the ‘national politics’ of 1920.⁵⁶ He places the violence within its broader context and argues that the uprising was a ‘primitive’ but genuine national response to the fundamental dislocations brought about by the British administration and the end of the Ottoman Empire.⁵⁷ In doing so, Vinogradov characterises the uprising as a means for the tribes to express their opposition to the British. However, he notes that it marked the ‘debut’ of Iraqi nationalism through the national focus and the way in which the demands were made.

Thirdly, in contrast to some of the above, several accounts of Iraq’s anticolonialism highlight the period as a unique episode of cross-community cooperation. Fattah notes that the uprising involved ‘active solidarity’ from all Iraqis against the colonising power, which took the form of secret political societies in Najaf, Karbala and Baghdad. Furthermore, during the actual uprising itself there was mobilisation of Sunnis, Shias, some Kurds, urban and rural peoples.⁵⁸ Marr and Sluglett too, emphasise the ‘unprecedented cooperation’ between Sunni and Shia communities, who may have had disparate motives but were united in their desire to be free of British administration.⁵⁹ Marr argues there was growing

⁵² Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, ‘The British Occupation of Mesopotamia, 1914-22’, *Journal of Strategic Studies* 30, no.2, (2007), 349–377.

⁵³ Philip Ireland, *Iraq: A Study in Political Development*, (New York: Macmillan, 1938).

⁵⁴ Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movement in Iraq*, (Princeton: PUP, 1978).

⁵⁵ See also Adeed Dawisha, *Iraq: A Political History from Independence to Occupation*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003) for a discussion of the movements of the tribes in his portrayal of the revolt.

⁵⁶ Previous contributions throughout the same decade largely consider the occupation of Iraq in light of the British presence in India.

⁵⁷ Amal Vinogradov, ‘The 1920 Revolt in Iraq Reconsidered: The Role of Tribes in National Politics’, *IJMES* 3, no.2, (1972), 123–139.

⁵⁸ Hala Fattah, *A Brief History of Iraq*, (New York: Facts on File, 2009), 160.

⁵⁹ Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, (Colorado: Westview Press, 2012), 23; Peter Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq: Contriving King and Country*, (London: IB Tauris, 1976).

discontent with the British from tribes, urban nationalists and Shia leaders by mid-1920. However, she neglects to explore the specifics of their anticolonialism, beyond the desire to be ‘free from the British.’⁶⁰ Building on this, Tripp’s analysis of the uprising references the ‘nationalist awakening’ that took place in the early decades of the century, particularly from 1908. He discusses the role of secret political parties in spreading nationalist thought among urban intelligentsia, and Shia mujtahids in doing the same more widely. The strength of feeling demonstrated in the uprising can be attributed to the humiliation these groups felt after the mandate declaration.⁶¹ In these interpretations then, the revolt brought together the country’s diverse population due to their common enemy in the British occupation.

Finally, the nature of this nationalism and the question of what is meant by ‘national feeling’ in all of these discussions warrants further exploration. Franzén and Davis examine the evolution of Iraqi nationalism in light of the future developments of the state. Franzén argues that the uprising of 1920 grew from broad anticolonial roots and enabled the unity of all Iraqis against an occupying force. He suggests that Arab and Iraqi nationalisms were a modern construct, instigated and fomented by the process of state construction.⁶² Davis, meanwhile, argues the uprising was a moment of Iraqi nationalism that for all its potential, was unable to properly coalesce due to the British and Sunni domination in its aftermath.⁶³ These descriptions of a coalescence of different nationalist forces represents a further strand in the idea that all identities were represented in the uprising. Simon also takes a closer look at some of these elements and examines ‘the view from Baghdad’, considering the foment of nationalist thought within organisations and the fatwas issued that led to early mass demonstrations in the city.⁶⁴ Her account also touches fleetingly on the activities of nationalists in the north of Iraq, based in Syria, but comments merely that their role ‘was brief.’⁶⁵ As such, there are few adequate explorations of the nature of these groups or what underpinned their motivations.

Therefore, when the revolt is analysed broadly with Iraqi historiography, historians are concerned with the role of the colonial power, the extent to which the uprising was a tribal revolt, and the level of unity within the political community – including the influence

⁶⁰ Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*.

⁶¹ Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2005). Fattah largely reflects this argument.

⁶² Johan Franzén, ‘The Problem of Iraqi Nationalism’, *National Identities* 13, no.3, (2011), 217–234

⁶³ Eric Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq*, (California: UCLA Press, 2005).

⁶⁴ Reeva Spector Simon, ‘The View from Baghdad’ in Simon and Eleanor H. Tejirian (eds), *The Creation of Iraq 1914-21*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 36–50.

⁶⁵ Simon, ‘The View from Baghdad’, 46.

of nationalist ideologies. However, this discussion also points to several areas that warrant further exploration. Most notably this concerns the specifics of the nationalist movement and the way in which they sought to mobilise the wider population.

Recent Interventions

Perhaps the most significant recent work on the 1920 uprising is Kadhim's *Reclaiming Iraq*, which is worth dealing with at length. Kadhim explicitly states his desire to 'reclaim the narrative of the vanquished' from its 'tampered' portrayals throughout history.⁶⁶ Here he is referring to both nationalist political culture and academic analyses of the sort described above. Kadhim argues that the uprising was in fact a tribal, Shia revolution, and though the population lost the battle against the British, it was their efforts that ultimately won the war for Iraq's independence, rather than the Sunni elites who took the helm before and after Faisal's coronation in 1921. The forceful argument Kadhim makes is interesting for several reasons, not least the re-evaluation of the historical record he purports to undertake. Kadhim suggests that Iraqi nationalism drove the Shia tribal involvement and, importantly, he explores what some aspects of the nationalist ideology that motivated them looked like. However, while his analysis of the revolutionary networks operating in the south of Iraq is comprehensive, the attention he pays to those operating in Syria and the north of Iraq is limited to merely a number of paragraphs. As a result, Kadhim's book offers a comprehensive and compelling account of one important dimension of 1920. In the other, most recent exploration of the uprising, Hariri takes a broad view of the revolutionary activity, which she terms 'transgressive contention.'⁶⁷ She examines the 'contentious mobilisation' of forces both within Baghdad and the lower and mid-Euphrates, noting that the action was unprecedented and stemmed from new or nascent political actors. Arguing that the independence movement was comprised of a combination of urban and rural nationalists, she highlights the implications of the events for Iraq's subsequent state-society relations.

In light of all this, the question remains: what was happening in the north of the country during this period of unprecedented nationalist fervour and mobilisation? Some historians have attempted to answer this, including Shields with her study of the 'Mosul

⁶⁶ Abbas Kadhim, *Reclaiming Iraq: The 1920 Revolution and the Founding of the Modern State*, (Texas: UTP, 2012).

⁶⁷ Aula Hariri, 'The Iraqi Independence Movement: A Case of Transgressive Contention (1918-20)', in Gerges A. Fawaz (ed.), *Contentious Politics in the Middle East: Popular Resistance and Marginalized Activism beyond the Arab Uprisings*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 97-127.

Question' over the period of 1914–25. She demonstrates that it was unclear that Mosul would eventually be part of the Iraqi state due to its demography, economics, and geographical position, offering important insights for any study concerned with this time and place.⁶⁸ The region is also explored by Tauber in a series of articles and a book examining the formation of Iraq and Syria. Tauber, in contrast to all other studies discussed above, describes in meticulous detail the internal machinations of the nationalist parties and their activities.⁶⁹ He argues that it was real differences among the Arab peoples that led to divergent nationalisms and the independence of Iraq and Syria (among others), rather than imperialist efforts to divide them.⁷⁰ In other words, he suggests that the lack of cooperation between nationalists across different regions, led to country-focused efforts.

However, while comprehensive in empirical detail, Tauber fails to recognise the importance of multiple identities among nationalists, or to engage more widely with the regional context. This raises the further questions: With what discourses did these political actors engage? What identities did they ascribe to themselves and their activity? There remains, therefore, a need to further examine this period and position it within the context of the literature already concerned with the events of 1920. While Kadhim offers a rich account of the uprising in the Euphrates region, and Hariri points to a useful theoretical framework, the existing academic analysis of the events in the north leaves an important gap to address.

Arab Nationalism in the Mashriq

When examining anticolonial uprisings such as this, the concept of Arab nationalism cannot be overlooked.⁷¹ As the dominant ideology of the region by the 1920s, it formed the basis for the anticolonial movements that developed. In this final section, I explore its evolution in the Arab Middle East historically, arguing that both elite and popular elements need consideration, as well as the way the political community formed around these discourses.

Looking across the region, there is a growing body of literature that examines uprisings in the Mashriq in the post-war period. In doing so, it focuses on episodes in which Arab nationalism found physical expression and sought to shape the European-imposed

⁶⁸ Sarah Shields, 'Mosul Questions: Economy, Identity, and Annexation', in Simon and Tejirian (eds), 50–60.

⁶⁹ See, *inter alia*, Eliezer Tauber, 'The Struggle for Dayr al-Zur: The Determination of Borders Between Syria and Iraq', *JMES* 23, no.3 (August 1991), 361–385 and Eliezer Tauber, *The Formation of Modern Syria and Iraq*, (London: Routledge, 1991).

⁷⁰ Tauber, *The Formation*, 325.

⁷¹ Though this discussion is in some ways theoretical in nature, I am primarily interested in the historiographical debates around Arab nationalism and utilise the concept in this way.

settlement. These historians explore several important themes, including the composition of the uprisings, the level of popular engagement with nationalist discourses, and the nature of their demands. This scholarship forms the broader corpus of literature to which this study contributes, while offering points of comparison too. The crux of these arguments is articulated by Chalcraft. When exploring anticolonialism in the mandate era, he focuses on how armed movements, in complex alliances with ‘urban liberal nationalists that often hegemonized them’, moved towards the establishment of political communities.⁷² In this sense, anticolonial revolution, motivated by nationalism, pushed back against forms of direct imperial rule. While not achieving full independence, it made gains towards indirect rule.

Firstly, one of the central themes in the historiography on inter-war nationalism in the Arab world concerns the connection between the Ottoman period and Arabism. In other words, it explores the composition and nature of post-war Arab nationalisms – and indeed the Arab nationalists themselves. Hourani, Khoury and Dawn, among others, focus on the roots of Arab nationalism among political elites during the demise of the Ottoman state.⁷³ Hourani was the first to articulate the ‘politics of the notables’ as fundamental to this; a concept which dominated the historiography for many years. Inspired by Weber’s ‘patriciate’, this conception of Ottoman (and post-Ottoman) politics argues that relations of dependency, such as between urban notability and lower classes, or between landlords and peasant farmers, explain the structure of imperial authority in the Ottoman Arab provinces.⁷⁴ These vertical ties remained the influential points of mobilisation and patronage even after the end of the empire. Arab nationalism became the only option for elites trying to retain power in a post-Ottoman context and was shaped in these structures.

The implications of this argument are significant, particularly in terms of what it says about the mechanisms through which Arab nationalist discourses became influential. The elite nationalist thesis is also important when considering the composition of anticolonial

⁷² John Chalcraft, *Popular Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2016), 198–250. He uses the examples of the Arab revolt, the Egyptian revolution of 1919, the Syrian armed struggles, 1918 and 1925–27, the Arab Revolt in Palestine, and the Iraqi revolution of 1920, among others.

⁷³ This represented the first major challenge to approaches such as Antonius’ and his foundational text of Arab nationalism. Antonius argued 1916 was the first time that Arab nationalists found a means for political expression. The Arab Revolt was a fully-fledged national movement towards an Arab state, only to suffer betrayal at the hands of the European powers. See: George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening*, (London: Hamish Hamilton: 1938).

⁷⁴ Albert Hourani, ‘Ottoman Reform and the Politics of the Notables’ in Hourani, Philip Khoury and Mary C Wilson (eds), *The Modern Middle East*, (Berkeley: Berkeley University Press, 1993), 41–68. Khoury echoes this argument in *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism*, (London: IB Tauris, 1987), noting the continuity between Ottoman, mandate and independence periods at the local level.

movements that drew on these nationalisms to articulate opposition to European mandates. Indeed, the idea of Arab nationalism as a phenomenon among urban notables was influential for many years, particularly in studies of Syria.⁷⁵ Dawn offered some elements of refinement, suggesting that separatist Arabist trends were articulated in the pre-war period, though at that time they provided only dissident Arab elites with a framework through which to make challenges. Those who were excluded from Ottoman structures found Arabism offered an opportunity for political power within a new system.⁷⁶ In this way, their nationalism provided the ideology through which they could articulate rivalries and maintain influence. However, once the Ottoman state had truly failed by 1918, even the unconvinced Arab elites had no other option. This important point is echoed by Kayali who argues that Arab nationalism was the pragmatic choice for notables seeking to retain or gain power in the post-war period.⁷⁷

Therefore, this point centres on the idea that in the post-war period, Ottoman elites utilised Arab nationalist discourses to both challenge European influence and as a way to shape their future societies. However, recent developments in the historiography challenge this conception, and criticise its structural focus. Khalidi made some revisions in this direction, suggesting that lesser elites in fact played a more important part than previously articulated, acknowledging, for example, the role of journalists and military officers.⁷⁸ In his analysis, these lower elites were the first Arab nationalists, breaking away from the old Ottoman power structures. In a similar vein, Provence also argues that the anticolonial uprisings represented the first battle in the struggle for leadership between the old notables and new elites.⁷⁹ He frames the political actors of the 1910s and 1920s as the ‘last Ottoman generation’, an approach that trains the focus on the fluidity of the period and emphasises that these events lay in the shadow of the Ottoman Empire.⁸⁰ The sense of dislocation among the political class that Provence articulates was replicated, he says, across Syria, Iraq and Turkey.

Secondly, another theme in the literature contends that the inter-war period was shaped by popular nationalisms that had deep roots in shared identities. Writing on the Syrian

⁷⁵ Khoury, *Urban Notables and Arab Nationalism: The Politics of Damascus 1860-1920*, (New York: CUP, 1983); Benjamin Thomas White, *The Emergence of Minorities in the Middle East: The Politics of Community in French Mandate Syria*, (Edinburgh: EUP, 2011).

⁷⁶ CE Dawn, ‘The Rise of Arabism in Syria’, *Middle East Journal* 16, no.2, (1962), 145–168.

⁷⁷ Hasan Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks, 1908-1918: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire*, (California: University of California Press, 1997).

⁷⁸ Rashid Khalidi et al (eds), *The Origins of Arab Nationalism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

⁷⁹ Michael Provence, ‘Ottoman Modernity, Colonialism, and Insurgency in the Interwar Arab East’, *IJMES* 43, (2011), 205–225.

⁸⁰ Provence, *The Last Ottoman Generation and the Making of the Modern Middle East*, (California: University of San Diego Press, 2017).

mandate, Gelvin agrees that it is too simplistic to state that Arab nationalism came after the Arabism of the late nineteenth century, but also contends that lesser elites were motivated by more than solely a desire for power within a system of vertical patronage. Highlighting the important role of nationalist parties and societies, Gelvin's work emphasises the need to fully understand the evolution of these groups, their thought and its consequences in the formation of a political community that was deeply internalised, based on interests and shared identity.⁸¹ He focuses on the strong roots of popular nationalism and resistance during the early decades of the twentieth century, and the development of popular political organisations across the country. This reconsideration of Hourani's 'politics of the notables' emphasises the importance of popular nationalism, most significantly in its vocabulary and demands that sometimes ran contrary to interests and demands of the elite.

The way in which Arab nationalism found expression in nationally-focused anticolonial movements therefore provides another important lens of study. While this discussion focuses broadly on the nature of Arab nationalism, the moments of revolution themselves need particular attention. As Choueiri succinctly articulates: 'political Arabism' developed into the notion of national fatherlands, focusing on self-determination and independence, at the hands of indigenous elites. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire propelled these local Arab movements, which evolved into a series of Arab rebellions throughout the 1920s and 30s.⁸² In other words, the Arab nationalist movements found national focuses in the struggle for independence.

Gelvin again is also influential here. He argues that protests and resistance against the French mandatory power in Syria were brought about by a territorial loyalty that transformed Ottomanism into nationalist sentiments, working to maintain Syria in the face of French pressure.⁸³ Within this, he elaborates on the way in which the colonial administrations reinforced national boundaries and ideas and the contribution this made to coalescing Syrian national identity 'within its natural boundaries.'⁸⁴ This moves the focus away from only elite manoeuvres and onto the depth of anticolonial feeling within the wider population. Though different in its relationship to the Ottoman state, Egypt also offers an interesting case regarding the nature of its anticolonial resistance. Botman argues that the 1919 revolution

⁸¹ James Gelvin, 'Modernity and its Discontents: On the Durability of Nationalism in the Middle East', *Nations and Nationalism* 5, no.1, (1999), 71–89.

⁸² Youssef Choueiri, *Arab Nationalism: A History*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 83.

⁸³ Gelvin, 'The Social Origins of Popular Nationalism in Syria: Evidence for a New Framework', *IJMES* 26, (1994), 645–661.

⁸⁴ This was the common refrain of popular nationalist groups in Syria at the time.

was an upper-class movement in which the Wafd party focused on the national question. In contrast to Goldberg, who presents the uprising as one of Egypt's largest peasant revolts, Botman contends that the Wafd represented the hegemonic form of nationalism, and while there was popular urban nationalism, it was restricted in its reach.⁸⁵

This theme of popular participation can be found elsewhere. Swedenburg examines the Great Revolt of 1936-39 in Palestine through the lens of memory. This explores individual and collective memories of veterans, focusing on class dimensions. As a point of departure, this emphasises the peasant composition of the insurgency and the way in which they were mobilised and led by the Grand Mufti and Effendiya.⁸⁶ Thompson, meanwhile, explores the nature of citizenry in the 'colonial civic order' in her examination of the French mandates in Syria and Lebanon. She utilises the concept of 'citizens' in analysing the subaltern groups of peasants, women and workers. Arguing that they had degrees of agency and were active in clashes against the French power, she suggests that this population moved within an arena of interaction and was not directed or imposed upon.⁸⁷ As they both demonstrate, anticolonial uprisings went beyond the elite-led machinations earlier in the discussion. Finally, Provence built on Gelvin's work in his monograph on the 1925 revolt against the French, examining the political community more widely. He analysed expressions of nationalism that fomented into an uprising beginning first in Jabal al-Druze and spreading across the territory of modern-day Syria and Lebanon.⁸⁸ In doing so, he argues that common membership of the same (national) community and the insurgency participated in by the population provides a more important focus than whether that membership was rooted in entirely the same thought. In other words, identities can be reconsidered in specific contexts, but important conclusions can still be drawn from the instances of uprising or contention that those identities produced.

This brief survey highlights several important themes for the purposes of this study. One significant debate among historians concerns the level of continuity or dislocation at the end of the Ottoman Empire and in the years that followed under colonial occupation. During this time, mobilisation against the mandatory powers broke out into armed uprising or

⁸⁵ Ellis Goldberg, 'Peasants in Revolt: Egypt 1919', *IJMES* 24, (1992), 261–282; Selma Botman, *Egypt From Independence to Revolution 1919–1952*, (New York: SUNY Press, 1991).

⁸⁶ Ted Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt: The 1936-39 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

⁸⁷ Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon*, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1999).

⁸⁸ Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt*.

moments of revolutionary contentious politics. Important questions concern the composition of these uprisings, the elite that ended up in control, and the level of ‘national’ feeling or identity. As the more recent interventions demonstrate, the moments of insurgency are the moments in which ‘national’ identities were most clearly identifiable. This points to necessary avenues of exploration for the Iraqi experience, which goes largely unreferenced in these wider conversations, despite its parallel experience under a mandate power. This is a crucial point I address. This historiography also demonstrates the nuanced approach that is applied to studies of the other mandates. As the first of the mandates to gain independence, the nature of the resistance to the Iraqi mandate at its formation requires similar close exploration, as this chapter has shown.

Taking inspiration from scholars of Iraq and the Mashriq, I aim to address these questions. More precisely, I explore the revolutionary activity that took place across Iraq’s Jazirah region in 1920 and ask how it can be understood in both the context of the Iraq’s own anticolonial history and this wider post-Ottoman anticolonialism in the Mashriq. Through this, I contribute to the literature with a thorough understanding of this small episode of Iraq’s revolutionary past, while utilising these regional points of comparison.

Conclusion

This chapter’s aim is twofold: to explore the uprising of 1920 in the historiography of Iraq, and to highlight the broad trends in the historiography of post-Ottoman nationalism in the Mashriq. Through this, I have sought to demonstrate the wider themes with which the discussion of revolution and nationalism in this moment of flux for the region is concerned; namely, the composition of the elite class, the level of popular engagement with nationalist discourses, and the nature of the moments of violent contention. Strikingly, much of the scholarship on Iraq or the uprising itself neglects to engage with these broad themes. As such, in this thesis I ask: What did anticolonial resistance look like in the pre-mandate and early mandate era in the Jazirah region? I answer this through an examination of the trajectory of the actors and an exploration of their motivations. By examining this subject through the example of Iraq in 1920, and particularly the narrow focus on the understudied region of the Jazirah, I contribute a new perspective that highlights the importance of moving beyond analyses bound within the nation-state.

Chapter Four

Theory – Revolution in the Frontier

This thesis studies a period of anticolonial resistance in Iraq's Jazirah throughout 1920, examining the way in which actors involved articulated their beliefs and mobilised towards such goals. To this end, I draw on theoretical interpretive framework comprising two main bodies of thought – namely, theories of revolutionary contentious politics and frontier theory. This is intended to interpret and analyse the findings of this thesis in terms of the type of political activity engaged in, and the nature of its enactment, i.e. the ways in which the leadership elements mobilised themselves and others.

In explaining this, I first explore the dual concepts of revolution and contentious politics. Based on the work of historical sociology, I show how historians have understood revolution in anticolonial and anti-imperial contexts. I then explore the usefulness of contentious politics, drawing in part on Gramscian-inspired concepts of collective subjects, strategic leadership and mobilising projects. Moving then to a discussion of theories of spatial history, I present an overview of how frontier theory has been utilised by historians of primarily America and Europe, and increasingly the Middle East. This shows how this concept is applicable for the case in question. I explain the relevance of liminality within this, and how such approaches to frontiers and the space within them is useful. Throughout this discussion, historical examples from across the Middle East, and globally where relevant, are utilised to illustrate the ideas in question.

Revolutionary Contentious Politics

The concept of contentious politics was first articulated by Tilly, Tarrow and McAdam. Contentious politics is defined as 'episodic, public, collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects', or in other words, as collective political struggle.⁸⁹ Indeed, revolution *is* contentious politics. Integrating a conception of revolutionary movements into the framework of contentious politics therefore provides a useful framework for this study. It offers a less stringent framework than the social movement theory from which it emerges and has been increasingly embraced by scholars of the Middle East.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Charles Tilly, Doug McAdam and Sidney Tarrow, *Dynamics of Contention*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2001).

⁹⁰ See: Joel Beinin and Frederic Vairel (eds), *Social Movements, Mobilisation, and Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa*, (Stanford: SUP, 2011); Gerges (ed.), *Contentious Politics in the Middle East*.

Despite the fact that historical sociologists, including Skocpol, Goldstone, and others, have long debated the definition of ‘revolution’, no definitive theory of revolution has emerged.⁹¹ Instead, scholars’ steady move away from a focus on the ‘great revolutions of history’ – the French, Russian and Chinese, for example – and towards an examination of the nuances of non-European experiences has invigorated the field. Revolutions are now considered ‘emergent phenomena’, shifting the focus to the *process* of revolution (rather than the outcome), and placing ideology, leadership and networks in the lens of study.⁹² Importantly, this has led to the inclusion of unsuccessful revolutions in the same framework. The work of historians of the Middle East demonstrates this, particularly in terms of studies of the anticolonial and anti-imperial experience across the region.

Cole examines the Urabi revolt of 1879–1882, arguing it was an anticolonial revolution, despite its failure to end the British occupation of Egypt. For him, ‘revolutions typically involve movements of resistance by social groups and the masses, an ideological program or set of programs that enunciates positive objectives.’⁹³ His account describes the revolution as a deeply rooted movement that evolved as a result of the profound social and economic changes instigated in the preceding decades.⁹⁴ The revolutionary action that took place at the national level grew out of the social mobilisation of the population. Takriti similarly grapples with the definition of ‘revolution’ in the context of Dhufar rebellion – or as he terms it, revolution – from 1962–76. He argues against static definitions that identify beginnings and ends, as well as the distinction between revolutionary situations and revolutionary outcomes. This highlights the importance of understanding contemporary experiences and their articulations of events, studying types of resistance through the context in which they emerged.⁹⁵ Takriti argues that the Dhufar experience was a revolution due to the ambitious, revolutionary nature of the enterprise it involved. He further comments on the gap between Arabic and English scholarship on this question. While the events in Dhufar were unquestioningly afforded the name *thawrat Dhufar*, in English the labels insurgency,

⁹¹ Clifton B Kroeber, ‘Theory and History of Revolution’, *Journal of World History* 7, no.1, (1996), 21. See, for example, Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1979); Andrew G Walder, ‘Political Sociology and Social Movement’, *Annual Review of Sociology* 39, (2009), 393–412; Walter Goldfrank, ‘Theories of Revolution and Revolution Without Theory’, *Theory and Society* 7, no.1–2, (1979), 135–165.

⁹² Jack A Goldstone, ‘Towards a Fourth Generation of Revolutionary Theory’, *Annual Review of Political Science* 4, (2001), 139–87

⁹³ Juan Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East: Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt’s Urabi Movement*, (Princeton: PUP, 1993), 3.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 3–20.

⁹⁵ Abdel Razzaq Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution: Republicans, Sultans and Empires in Oman 1965–76*, (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 6.

rebellion or simply war are used.⁹⁶ As Williams notes, ‘Rebellion is still ordinarily used by a dominant power and its friends, until (or even after) it has to admit that what has been taking place – with its own independent cause and loyalties – is a revolution.’⁹⁷

Therefore, the concept of a ‘revolutionary movement’ can be used to understand complex, historically grounded oppositional movements. It offers a framework to examine a process in which collective actors articulate clear goals that lead to revolutionary ends. These ends include an ideological programme, underpinned by a discourse that seeks to achieve positive objectives. Furthermore, it ensures the analysis is responsive to the contemporaneous reality; in other words, the way in which the participants articulated their own actions and perceived their movement. Considering this in light of a ‘contentious politics’ framework reveals further important points of analysis. Chalcraft notably develops a theoretical framework that is responsive to the context that is being examined. He argues that a Gramscian-inspired focus on hegemony, strategic leadership and collective subjects allows greater meaning to be found in episodes of contentious politics.⁹⁸ Similarly, Tripp is concerned with how ‘atomized [and subordinated] subjects can transform themselves into collective actors’ in his study of resistance across the Middle East.⁹⁹ Rooting the analysis of mobilisation within a Gramscian framework of overcoming subordination ensures a wide focus on loosely defined ‘movements’, rather than limiting the perspective to the repertoires and performances on which social movement theorists often dwell.¹⁰⁰ Chalcraft’s modified version of hegemony is used to understand how mobilising actors are situated within larger contexts. In attempting to create a new political community, revolutionary groups must draw on moral, political and intellectual leadership. Their hegemonic expansion over the collective subjects draws on ideologies, identities, and common sense held by that population.¹⁰¹

This is particularly useful in light of the methodological approach of this study. These ideas ensure the focus remains on the leadership and the participants and the nature of their resistance to, in this case, the colonial power. As has been demonstrated, despite ongoing

⁹⁶ Meaning ‘Dhufar Revolution’, this is both the contemporaneous and academic term used in Arabic. The same distinction is clear in the scholarship on Iraq too, with 1920 referred to as *thawrat al-ashrin* (1920 Revolution) or *al-thawra [al-Iraqiya] al-kubra* (the Great [Iraqi] Revolution).

⁹⁷ Raymond Williams quoted in Takriti, 7.

⁹⁸ Chalcraft, *Popular Politics*, 20.

⁹⁹ Charles Tripp, *The Power and the People: Paths of Resistance in the Middle East*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), 139.

¹⁰⁰ See Antonio Gramsci, Quintain Hoare and Geoffery Nowell Smith (eds and trans), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, (New York: International Publishers, 1971).

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 420.

discussion, the concept of revolution primarily derives meaning from its application. Therefore, I approach revolution as a historically grounded process first and foremost. In this thesis I examine a revolutionary process on a much smaller scale than many of the examples discussed here, I find much to draw on within them. By bringing together a framework around the concept of revolution, informed by the ideas of contentious politics, I can understand the evolution and development of the forces involved, while considering the events themselves in the appropriate context. Finally, while revolution-based approaches emphasise the need to study the process of revolutions, the concept of contentious politics offers the framework through which to do this: examining the discourses of leadership and the modes of mobilisation of collective subjects.

Frontiers and the Spatial Turn

The 'spatial turn' in the humanities refers to a focus on the question of space, place and geographies in theorising processes and events. The roots of the turn can be traced in different ways, but the ideas of Lefebvre about the production of space are important. Lefebvre argues that space is historical and produced over time, focusing on spatial practices, representations of space and representational space.¹⁰² In other words, on uses and movements within space, on the conception of the space and on space as lived through symbolic associations. The influences of such developments can be identified across an interdisciplinary spectrum.¹⁰³ In the field of history, it was in the 1990s that some historians began to acknowledge the importance of this spatial dimension in studying the past, leading to a focus on landscapes, localities and localness, and the processes within them.¹⁰⁴ The spatial turn presents a reaction to the privileging of analyses centred on time over space.¹⁰⁵ It acknowledges the way in which space facilitates or creates stimuli for action – the way in which it is practiced and produced, as Lefebvre argued. Though this appears an obvious point, it is equally true that spatial histories remain innovative, and most studies focus on

¹⁰² Henri Lefebvre, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, *The Production of Space*, (London: Blackwell, 1991), 37–39.

¹⁰³ Barney Warf and Santa Arias (eds), *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, (London: Routledge, 2009).

¹⁰⁴ Angelo Torre, 'A 'Spatial' Turn in History? Landscapes, Visions and Resources', *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 5, (2008), 1127–1144, accessed in English online [26/10/2018] at: https://www.cairn-int.info/article-E_ANNA_635_1127--a-spatial-turn-in-history.htm#anchor_plan.

¹⁰⁵ Richard White, 'What is Spatial History?', *Stanford Spatial History Lab*, (February 2010), accessed online [26/10/2018] at: <https://web.stanford.edu/group/spatialhistory/media/images/publication/what%20is%20spatial%20history%20pub%20020110.pdf>.

political, social, or cultural dynamics (to name a few) with little acknowledgement of these dimensions.¹⁰⁶ Ultimately, it requires the recognition that space is historically contingent.¹⁰⁷

I am inspired by this theoretical approach, turning to the concept of the ‘frontier’ to analyse the context of the Jazirah, and to focus on the way in which the space provided a context for the action within it. I understand ‘frontier’ to represent a type of space with specific dynamics and processes within it. The concept was first articulated in the ‘frontier thesis’ of the American west that sought to frame the American expansionist project a dynamic space in which American democracy was forged.¹⁰⁸ An extremely influential, and controversial, idea in American historiography, it suggested there are unique dynamics to such regions, and invited much comparative study, particularly in the field of settler colonial studies.¹⁰⁹ However, it is its application in other contexts that provide guidance for this study.

The concept of the frontier has been employed by historians of Europe to understand the fluid dynamics at the edges of political blocs. For Sahlins, when examining the formation of national identities in France and Spain during the seventeenth century, ‘the frontier’ was separate from political boundaries and represented the space that faced the enemy.¹¹⁰ In other words, the frontier was a strategic and military space. While he identifies the solidification and centralisation of Europe’s frontiers as part of the nation state process, he points to the continued fluidity and fluctuation of these spaces, remaining not quite under state control. Similarly, McNeill takes a more global vision, examining Europe, North and South America, and China. He notes that the frontier is a multi-ethnic space with a variety of peoples.¹¹¹ The dynamics of flux and of the evolving limits of state control are particularly important.

In the Middle East specifically, the application of the frontier concept has been a more recent intervention in the historiography and the literature in this regard is not voluminous. The above historians reference the Middle East only in terms of the Ottoman frontier with Europe. McNeill, for example, focuses on it as a space of contact that evolved into a state of

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Charles W J Withers, ‘Place and the ‘Spatial Turn’ in Geography and History’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 70, no.4, (2007), 637–658.

¹⁰⁸ Frederick Jackson Turner, ‘The Significance of the Frontier in American History’, *Annual Report of the American Historical Association*, (1893), 197–227.

¹⁰⁹ Eric Altenbernd and Alex Trimble Young, ‘Introduction: The significance of the frontier in an age of transnational history’, *Settler Colonial Studies* 4, no.2, (2014), 127–50. See: Terry Bouton, ‘The New and (Somewhat) Improved Frontier Thesis’, *Reviews in American History* 35, no.4, (2007), 490; Leonard Thompson and Howard Lamar, *The Frontier in History: North America and Southern Africa Compared*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981); Richie Howitt, ‘Frontiers, Borders, Edges: Liminal Challenges to the Hegemony of Exclusion’, *Geographical Research* 39, no.2. (2001), 233–245.

¹¹⁰ Peter Sahlins, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees*, (Berkeley: UC Press, 1989), 6.

¹¹¹ William H McNeill, *The Great Frontier: Freedom and Hierarchy in Modern Times*, (Princeton: PUP, 1983).

siege.¹¹² More specifically, when studying Transjordan, Rogan conceptualises the Ottoman Empire's peripheries as frontiers in the sense that they were socio-political spaces that remained apart from the wider institutions of the state, somewhat beyond their control.¹¹³ This idea is particularly instructive when studying Iraq, a region that equally experienced this status, while also mirroring elements of Sahlin's frontier conception. Tejel Gorgas, meanwhile, explores networks of violence and exchange during the establishment of the Turkey-Iraq border in the 1920s. He uses the idea of the region as a frontier to examine the fluidity of the space and the trans-border geopolitical manoeuvres that permitted.¹¹⁴ This is particularly relevant for my focus on another of Iraq's frontiers and the potential for contention to emerge within and across that space. Finally, Fattah's employment of the concept offers the most. Her study of regional trade across Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula throughout the long eighteenth century draws on McNeill's definition to explore the fluidity and permeability of borders and spaces. This leads to an emphasis on the access and acculturation between the communities in the frontier.¹¹⁵ She emphasises the importance of the space as a place for different processes to evolve, as well as the process of frontier-making itself for the evolution of these communities.

These ideas of fluidity and limited state control lead to the concept of liminality and liminal space. Originally an anthropological concept, liminality was first used to analyse the middle stage in ritual passages, though now has applicability across social and political sciences.¹¹⁶ Evoking the idea of any 'betwixt and between' situation or object, liminality refers to subject, temporal and spatial situations.¹¹⁷ It is this final category that is of interest and can contribute useful ideas to this thesis. The examination of a space as liminal, or the spatial dimension of liminality can refer to areas and regions, or spaces between countries – in other words, frontiers.¹¹⁸ In this way, the idea of the frontier as liminal space emphasises

¹¹² Evans, 495 and McNeill, *The Great Frontier*.

¹¹³ Eugene Rogan, *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire: Transjordan 1850–1921*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1999).

¹¹⁴ Jordi Tejel Gorges, 'Making Borders from Below: The Emergence of the Turkish-Iraqi Frontier, 1918–25', *Middle Eastern Studies* 54, (2018), 811–826.

¹¹⁵ Hala Fattah, *The Politics of Regional Trade in Iraq, Arabia, and the Gulf, 1745–1900*, (New York: SUNY Press, 1997), 15–25.

¹¹⁶ See: Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, (Chicago: CUP, 1909) and Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, (Ithaca: CUP, 1967) for the first uses of the concept. Bjorn Thomassen, 'The Uses and Meanings of Liminality', *International Political Anthropology* 2, no.1, (2009), 5.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* 16.

¹¹⁸ See for example, Emma Cocker, 'Border Crossings: Practices for Beating the Bounds' in Hazel Andrews and Les Roberts (eds), *Liminal Landscapes: Travel, Experience and Spaces In-between*, (London: Routledge, 2012), 50–67.

its fluidity, contingency and transnational, intercultural nature. In approaching frontiers as liminal spaces, the space's capacity for contact and conflict is placed at the forefront.

These concepts are important in light of the case study in this thesis. Though the space that is analysed here – that between the modern states of Iraq and Syria – was historically within the Ottoman Empire, during the period in question it was increasingly structured as a national boundary.¹¹⁹ In this way it is particularly interesting in two ways: as a political boundary that was solidified during the process of state formation, and as a space that remained fluid, fluctuating and outside state control in between that process. Throughout the period in question there was a great deal of exchange and movement across it, while at the same time implicit (and explicit) acknowledgement of its definitiveness. It is appropriate to recognise the liminal nature of the region that, at the time, did not constitute a nation state in the modern sense of the term. This ensures that the common refrain of Iraq's artificiality can be both critically accepted and contextually understood.

Therefore, in line with history's spatial turn, I recognise the importance that this conception of the space had upon any processes I am studying within it. By doing so, I suggest that the lived reality of the space is illuminated, and the local, contemporary realities acknowledged. Most importantly, the idea of the 'liminal frontier' as the unit of analysis reinforces the importance of the events within that space as taking place not only in a time of political contention, but also geographical contention, as new states were forged out of the collapsed empire.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I outlined the theoretical interpretive framework with which this thesis engages. I first explored the idea of revolution, and what it means to utilise such a concept within academic discussion. Next I considered the idea of a frontier region, suggesting that the definition of such a space as liminal can offer fruitful analysis. Throughout this discussion, I both contextualised and interrogated the concepts of revolution and frontier in order to both fully understand them and, where relevant, contributed additional ideas to their traditional meaning. To bring these ideas together, I contend that in order to properly understand the type of contentious, revolutionary activity that took place, the nature of the space that facilitated it must also be properly understood.

¹¹⁹ See, for example, James McDougall, 'The Emergence of Nationalism' in *The Oxford Handbook*, 7, for a discussion of the liminal reality of the 'national' borders during this period.

Chapter Five

Findings – An Uprising in the Jazirah

In the findings presented below, I dissect the events with which this thesis is concerned. This explores the dynamics that enabled a relatively small group of Iraqi nationalists to lead an attack that took the British administration and occupying forces by surprise, and made, for a short while, unprecedented territorial gains. I outline the findings through three key themes: the nationalist discourses, the nature of the Jazirah, and the violent contention that escalated from raids into an attempt to dislodge the administration. Through this, I demonstrate the importance of both Arab nationalism and Iraqi nationalism within the struggle for Iraqi independence, and the role of these discourses as a means for mobilising different populations across a large space. I argue that ex-Ottoman officers, lower elites in urban centres, and the Jazirah tribes formed a crucial coalition of political actors that coalesced around these dual discourses to pursue the goal of ending the British occupation.

Throughout, the leadership refers to al-Ahd al-Iraqi (The Iraqi Covenant), a political society that comprised Ottoman army officers and Effendiya. Many of its members had roots in the Ottoman military and state, originating predominantly from the urban centres of Baghdad and Mosul. The participants of the uprising included many of the Jazirah tribes. The largest of these was the Shammar, one of the major tribes across the Jazirah plain in Iraq and Syria, with historic roots in the Arabian Peninsula. Others such as the Juhaish, Albu Hamad, Albu Bedran, Jaghaifa and Khabur Jubur played smaller yet still significant roles.¹²⁰ Beyond that, the area itself was heterogeneous. While the Kurdish regions to the east of Mosul remained outside the events in question, the wider population of the Jazirah included Arabic, Turkish and Kurdish speaking populations, comprising mainly Sunni Muslims, Christians, and Yezidis, among others. The city of Mosul exemplified much of this, while hosting urban and lower elites such as artisans and journalists. Therefore, in terms of these events, those involved were al-Ahd, based in Syria and in Mosul, and the mainly Sunni Arab tribes from the Jazirah plain. The sympathies of the wider population – peasants or townspeople, for example – remained largely outside the historical record of my material, beyond what can be inferred from the scale and relative success of the opposition identified here.

¹²⁰ This is by no means an exhaustive list. See: Ali, *Mudhakarāt*, 90–120; FO 882/23, ‘Notes by Captain Wooley’, April–May 1919.

Arab and Iraqi nationalism

Firstly, the concept of nationalism, and more specifically, the substance of that nationalism, runs through the events in question. The leadership and participants in the events of 1920 espoused both Arab nationalist and Iraqi nationalist discourses. The nature of these and the ways these discourses were transmitted to the wider population highlighted the power of the pan-Arab regional struggle.

The discourses with the movement engaged reveal a complex web of identities. Exemplifying this is the following episode. In January 1920 a nationalist Syrian newspaper ran an article written by an Iraqi under the pseudonym 'Ibn Arabi.' It was a response to an article in the British newspaper *The Times* that had argued Arabs in Iraq did not want self-rule. Ibn Arabi described *The Times*' claim as a 'contradiction to everything I know about the Arab aspirations in Iraq' and argued that 'the English have used all means at their disposal to prevent Iraqis from making their voices heard in a world that is supposed to be civilised.'¹²¹ Throughout the letter, the writer did not separate the struggle for Iraqi independence from the Arab cause, rather they were presented as mutually reinforcing. He wrote that the struggle for Iraqi independence involved the 'sheikhs and notables of Iraq' who 'repeatedly declared their solidarity with the Arab community and have made clear the necessity for [...] hoisting the Arab flag' in Iraq.¹²² Indeed, the pseudonym itself shows this, as the writer characterised himself as 'Ibn Arabi' while articulating the case for Iraqi independence from the 'cruel and inhuman' British administration.

This letter illustrates a central dynamic of anticolonial contention at this time: that the cause embraced multiple nationalisms that were widely referenced, often at the same time. There was a great deal of overlap between these, as they were drawn on for political rhetoric, and to mobilise the wider population. Importantly, while they may seem contradictory, in fact they were mutually held and reveal a great deal about the nature of the contentious politics of the period. Arabism and Arab identification provided a language with which to articulate an anticolonial and anti-British discourse, by situating the struggle within a pan-Arab regional movement. Iraqi nationalism, meanwhile, was the tangible goal towards which to mobilise in order to achieve an end to the colonial occupation.

¹²¹ FO 371/5226, 'Extract from *Al Mufid*', 5 January 1920. The British documents suggest 'Ibn Arabi' was an influential tribal sheikh, but no conclusive decision was reached. A note attached to the memo notes that its publication in a Syrian newspaper demonstrates its ties to al-Ahd nationalists in Syria.

¹²² Ibid.

In this period, Arab societies – including nationalist, scientific and political organisations – played an important role in developing and directing political discourse, particularly among elite and lower elite classes. Al-Ahd were one such example of the societies that operated in Syria and Iraq. Established in 1913, al-Ahd was active in Mosul – and Baghdad to a lesser extent – during the years after its formation and throughout the British occupation, which in Mosul began late in 1918. In 1919 and 1920, beyond their presence in the urban centres of the northern Iraq, the Iraqi branch of al-Ahd was based in Syria.¹²³ Initially only a military organisation, al-Ahd's civilian branch developed in 1918 and drew inspiration from the literary forums and political secret societies that were fomenting nationalist discourses in the decades after the turn of the century. They vocalised their support for the Arab cause, as illustrated by the involvement of many of their members in the Arab Revolt of 1916, fighting for the independence of Arab states from Ottoman control.¹²⁴ However, as the Ottoman state collapsed, this evolved into separate national Arab causes and distinct Syrian and Iraqi branches formed.¹²⁵ In other words, as the pan-Arab ideology evolved away from the outcome of an 'Arab nation', the movements coalesced around nationally focused goals.

The events of March 1920 further illustrate this dynamic, when a Syrian congress in Damascus proclaimed Hashemite Amir Faisal as the king of an Arab government in Syria. At the same time, the Syrians released a statement declaring support for their 'Iraqi brothers', praising their important role in supporting Syrian independence and demanding independence for Iraq too.¹²⁶ Concurrent to the Syrian congress, an Iraqi one declared independence for Iraq 'in the name of the Arab Iraqi people.'¹²⁷ The language of both of these statements highlights the central discourses in question here; the nationalist nature of their demands, embedded in pan-Arab language. These parallel struggles of the Syrian and the Iraqi people – which, at the time, the Syrians felt they had achieved with their Arab government – was a recurrent theme. On other occasions too, parallels were drawn between Syrian nationalism and Iraqi nationalism.¹²⁸ Importantly, despite the support the movements offered each other, and al-Ahd's physical base in Syria, the Iraqi nationalists constituted a distinct group. This is

¹²³ Jafar al Askari, trans. Mustafa Tariq al Askari, *A Soldier's Story: From Ottoman Rule to Independent Iraq, The Memoirs of Jafar al Askari*, (London: Arabian Publishing, 2003). They were based in Syria as this provided them with connections to other nationalists and the means to operate outside British control.

¹²⁴ FO 882/23, 'Personalities: Arab Government of Syria', 232.

¹²⁵ *Mawsueat al Mosul al Hadarat* [Encyclopaedia of the Civilisations of Mosul], Vol.4, (Mosul: University of Mosul, 1992), 133, 232. Similar parties during the same period include, for example, al Fatat in Syria.

¹²⁶ FO 371/5033, 'IO Telegram Allenby', 14 March 1920.

¹²⁷ Suwaydi, *My Memoirs*.

¹²⁸ IOR/L/PS 18/B350, 'Causes of Unrest in Mesopotamia: Report II', India Office.

underlined most clearly by the explicit nature of their demands; pushing for a separate, Arab-led government in Iraq.¹²⁹

Echoing this was the ‘Proclamation by the Arabs to the Free Iraqis’ from al-Ahd in May 1920. It stated emphatically, ‘We, all classes of Iraqis, hereby cry loudly: Long live Iraqis who demand complete independence, long live Arab nations, who live ever independent and who never accept any alternative.’¹³⁰ While making a clear demand for Iraqi independence within a national framework, the parallel struggles of all Arabs provided the language in which to frame the anticolonial goals of being ‘ever independent.’ Furthermore, the proclamation emphasised the regional struggle beyond the specifics of the Iraqi national efforts. The evocative language referenced the way in which the British ‘employ us as slaves’ and drew parallels with struggles around the world. This presented the clear message that the enemy was the British and framed their role in an anticolonial movement more widely. Similarly, it identified the Iraqi people as in the same position as ‘[their] brethren, the Egyptians and the Indians’ in a direct parallel to those under British colonial rule. Finally, it reinforced al-Ahd as the leadership of the Iraqi struggle, calling themselves ‘your brothers, the Iraqis who are in Syria’, highlighting the successes of the Arab struggle in Syria.¹³¹

As this shows, the nationalist leadership of the movement, from its base in Syria, engaged with both Arab nationalist and Iraqi nationalist discourses in order to frame an anticolonial struggle. They did not view the two struggles as mutually exclusive, with the independence of Iraq and an Arab-led government identified as the realisation of the Iraqi part of the regional struggle. However, these remained just words unless they were able to engage wider support for their cause. Indeed, the anticolonial rhetoric of al-Ahd can be identified both within pronouncements of the tribes who were involved in the uprising, as well as among the urban centres of Iraq’s Jazirah.

The tribes in the Jazirah constituted a large and powerful group in the population. After the British occupied the area of Iraq over the course of 1917 to 1918, some tribal sheikhs collaborated loosely with the administration. They paid tax revenues and as a result maintained varying degrees of power over their land.¹³² However, these relationships were tenuous and many broke down during the period of increasingly nationalist fervor from 1919 onwards. Within this process, some tribal leaders expressed their resistance and echoed the

¹²⁹ FO 371/5130, ‘Letter from Syrian Minister of Foreign Affairs to Allenby’, 16 June 1920; Suwaydi, *My Memoirs*.

¹³⁰ FO 371/5228, ‘Proclamation of the Arabs to the Free Iraqis.’

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² IOR L/PS 10/847, ‘Report on Land Tenure’, August 1917–December 1920.

discourses of the nationalists of al-Ahd. This letter from Ibn Gaud of the Jaghaifa tribe to the British forces, from May 1920, outlined such sentiments:

We are today in the twentieth century and you cannot treat us like sheep as you do the Egyptians and the Indians. The Iraqi are you say unchanged and savages and cannot manage themselves. It is we Iraqis who are the brains of the Arab nation and freed Syria. ... you are given a short time to clear out of Iraq and if you don't you will be driven out. He who takes the sword will not yield to words.¹³³

As this extract shows, many of the same ideas of al-Ahd's proclamation were directly drawn upon. Particularly striking is the reference to the colonised Egyptians and Indians, and the notion that Iraqis 'freed Syria.' This highlights the power of the rhetoric by this point, received and taken up by the tribes. Beyond that, the letter demonstrated the Iraqi national focus of the tribe in their goals, while referencing the wider identity of Iraqis as within the Arab nation. It demanded that the British 'clear out of Iraq' very soon, or else they will be 'driven out.'¹³⁴ In this way, Ibn Gaud's focus was on the Iraqi nation, while identifying the parallel struggles of Arabs across the region – in particular in Syria.

This entrenchment of this rhetoric as the oppositional discourse to the British occupation can be found elsewhere, demonstrating its power in the urban centres too. In Baghdad, the intellectual class was expressing discontent with the British policy of occupation and governance throughout 1920. By March, shortly after the congresses were convening in Syria, a union of notables from, according to the British, a 'pro-Arab organisation' declared themselves supportive of an Arab government in Iraq.¹³⁵ This mirrors other references in April, May and June, when meetings in Baghdad considered the importance of the 'Arab nation.' Urban notables expressed their discontent with the plans for the mandate and future constitution of Iraq, dispersing letters throughout the city that encouraged populations to rise up.¹³⁶ This resulted in the British Civil Commissioner attempting to placate the Baghdadi notables by referencing the Anglo-French agreement from 1918 that promised 'the complete and final liberation of the people' from the Ottoman state.¹³⁷ The same address included a remark that there was 'no hope for a civil government

¹³³ FO 371/5076, 'Letter from Nijris ibn Gaud of Jaghaifa Tribe to CC Baghdad, sent to IO', 14 May 1920.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ FO 371/5082, 'Baghdad Police Reports', January–June 1920.

¹³⁶ FO 371/5076, 'Mesopotamia Police Report, Baghdad', 26 May 1920; FO 371/5226, 'Baghdad IO to CC Baghdad', 26 April 1920; FO 371/5227, 'CC Baghdad to IO', 8 June 1920.

¹³⁷ FO 371/5227, 'CC Statement to the Baghdad Notables', 2 June 1920.

on the lines that you [the audience] desire unless public order is maintained during the period of transition.’¹³⁸ However, these efforts were unable to counter the growing discontent in Baghdad, particularly in the presence of al-Ahd and another influential nationalist society, Haras al Istiqlal, both demanding full independence.¹³⁹

Similarly, in Mosul, influential notables and lower elites permeated discourses that al-Ahd was encouraging and developing. As mentioned above, al-Ahd had been operating in the city for several years, though their early activity was somewhat hampered by the ‘conservative classes and clergy.’¹⁴⁰ This began to change in 1919 and 1920 as the efforts and influence of the society grew, particularly externally. Calls to action targeted the city directly, calling on ‘the Iraqi nation’ to unify in order to ‘throw out the mandate for complete independence’ during meetings, Mawlid events and addresses. Notables within Mosul began to further these links and directly address surrounding tribal sheikhs, imploring them to incite unrest and join rebellions.¹⁴¹ The tone of these calls mirrored the discourses outlined above. They invoked the unified nature of cause, referencing the success of the nationalists in Syria, and the increasingly agitated populations of the wider region and Baghdad. Ultimately, as nationalist discourses spread across the region, this wide array of forces began to identify with and espouse them.

Mobilising in the Jazirah

Secondly, the ambiguous nature of the Jazirah is another central theme. This concerns questions over the space’s political future, as well as the networks that existed within it, between al-Ahd in Syria, the intellectual classes in urban centres, and the tribes.

In 1918, the status of the Iraq-Syria frontier was far from settled. Dayr al-Zur province found itself in the ‘no man’s land between Mesopotamia and Syria’, in which the population – particularly tribes – moved freely and regularly.¹⁴² The border was undetermined at this time, and during 1918 and early 1919 the annexation of the province to

¹³⁸ FO 371/5228, ‘CC Statement to Arab Deputation in Baghdad’, 2 June 1920.

¹³⁹ Tahsin Ali, *Mudhakarat Tahsin Ali 1890-1970* [The Memoirs of Tahsin Ali], (Beirut: al-Mu’assasah al-‘Arabiyah lil-Dirasat wa-al-Nashr, 2004), 90. Nb. Haras al Istiqlal refers to the Guardians of Independence, a group formed in 1919 in Baghdad. In Baghdad, Haras played the more important role. See: Hassan Ali al Barzagan, *Min Ahdath Baghdad wa Diyala Athna Thawra al-Ashrin fi al-Iraq*, (Baghdad: Arab Printing Press, 2000), 13.

¹⁴⁰ *Encyclopaedia*, 141.

¹⁴¹ FO 371/5227, ‘From CC to IO’, 8 June 1920.

¹⁴² British Civil Commissioner, Arnold Wilson quoted in Tauber, ‘The Struggle for Dayr al-Zur’ 363. FO 371/5128, ‘Report on the events at Dair ez-Zor during November and December 1919’, 2 January 1920; FO 371/5076, ‘Note from Bell’, 22 May 1920

Iraq was under serious consideration. As a consequence, the area was under British control for the majority of 1919 until an Anglo-French agreement in September led to a British withdrawal and the conclusion that the region was Syrian.¹⁴³ However, the Shammar and other tribes in Iraq's Jazirah had roots across the area, meaning the boundary was imagined, rather than physical in their reality. Indeed, the British correspondence notes that 'tribes regularly migrated across the border' and that, for them, there was 'no frontier between the two areas.'¹⁴⁴ Dayr al-Zur was an important centre for those that travelled across this region and provided a strategic hub from which communication and goods spread.

This withdrawal of the British towards the end of 1919 prompted al-Ahd to move into the area through a coordinated attack of their forces, in conjunction with some tribal contingents.¹⁴⁵ Though the attempt to wrest control of the city was short-lived – the forces departed within the day – the attempted incursion illustrated the city's strategic importance and the fluid nature of the boundaries at this time. It also inspired increased unrest elsewhere, including in Baqubah, south of Mosul, and 'chaos' across the province and in Mosul itself.¹⁴⁶ Despite their quick retreat, the incursion established the influence of al-Ahd in the area, and the city grew in importance as a centre from which to disseminate nationalist messages and instigate unrest. This meant that the discourses discussed above were able to spread much more quickly and fluidly from late 1919.¹⁴⁷ That involved the calls and proclamations the group were issuing, as well as any news of unrest elsewhere, which contributed to the mobilisation of parallel groups.¹⁴⁸ As the future border between Iraq and Syria was by no means a foregone conclusion, it permitted al-Ahd to effectively utilise this area, while remaining outside the full control and hegemony of the British occupation.

Similarly, the status of Mosul was by no means agreed upon during this period. This was due in part to the unique location of the province between Iraq, Turkey and Syria. Mosul's importance for the future state of Iraq was commented on by the British officers at the time, particularly economically.¹⁴⁹ There were numerous references to this questioned status, and the need to 'secure it from Syria', with apparent confusion over whether the

¹⁴³ Ibid. 366.

¹⁴⁴ FO 371/5226, 'Nouri Pasha to Major Young', 5 April 1920.

¹⁴⁵ FO 371/5128, 'Report on the events at Dair ez-Zor during November and December 1919', 2 January 1920; Wilson, *Mesopotamia*, 231.

¹⁴⁶ FO 371/5076, 'Monthly Reports', December 1919, 24–28; GB 186/GB, 'Gertrude Bell to her Stepmother', 12 Jan 1920.

¹⁴⁷ Haldane, *The Insurrection*; FO 371/5074, 'Extract from *Al Aqaab* Newspaper', 16 February 1920; IOR MIL/17 15/42, 'Military Report on Mesopotamia', 1922.

¹⁴⁸ FO 371/5076, 'Mosul Political Report', December 1919.

¹⁴⁹ Wilson, *Mesopotamia*, Introduction.

Syrian Arab government had attempted to claim it.¹⁵⁰ Further correspondence again references the potential for Mosul to join Amir Faisal's Syrian government, due to its tribal links, common enemies and the economic community across both areas.¹⁵¹ The heterogeneity of the region contributed to this, demonstrating in some sense the arbitrariness of the boundary making efforts. This was reinforced by the later discussions from 1921 to 1925 between the British mandate power and the government of Turkey over the position of Mosul. Documents between the two submitted to the League of Nations highlighted the important historical, strategic, geographic and political reasons for each side's bid. In other words, they underlined the multiple identities of the region.¹⁵² While these cover a slightly later period, the same was true for the late 1910s and early 1920s, demonstrating the extent to which the region existed at a crossroads.

Most crucial to these connections were the tribal actors. Their movements and far-reaching connections and influence over the large geography facilitated the spread of the nationalist discourses. Similarly, al-Ahd's urban links that spanned from Mosul to Aleppo allowed them to influence the political discourse among the general population. The majority of the messages circulated in the Jazirah during this period emanated from al-Ahd in Syria as well as, to a lesser extent, from within Mosul and Baghdad.¹⁵³ They disseminated their Arab nationalist thought among both the educated classes in the urban centres, and the tribes, whose influence extended into rural areas.¹⁵⁴

The effectiveness of these networks was clear. The calls for different actors to join the uprising when it happened in June spread rapidly.¹⁵⁵ Even prior to that, correspondence between the civil commissioner and the India Office regularly mentioned 'pan-Arab' elements and their connections to Syria, with reference to the population's growing discontent with the British regime, which proliferated after the announcement of the mandate in late April.¹⁵⁶ Many accounts recognised that inspiration for the escalating opposition came

¹⁵⁰ FO 371/5033, 'FO to Allenby in Cairo', 16 March 1920.

¹⁵¹ FO 371/5226, 'Nouri Pasha to Major Young', 5 April 1920.

¹⁵² LON C/494, 'Letters Between Turkish Government and League of Nations VII', 16 September 1924; LON C393, 'Letters Between British Government and League of Nations', 19 August 1924.

¹⁵³ FO 371/5033, 'Telegram from IO to FO', 22 March 1920; FO 371/5076, 'Baghdad Police Intelligence', 29 May 1920; FO 371/5130, 'Report on the Recent Attack in Tal Afar by Political Officer in Mosul to CC Baghdad', 14 August 1920.

¹⁵⁴ IOR/L/PS 18/B348, 'Mesopotamia: Preliminary Report on the Causes of Unrest', India Office, 14 September 1920.

¹⁵⁵ CO 696/3, 'Administration Report', 1-5.

¹⁵⁶ FO 371/5226, 'Civil Commissioner (CC) Baghdad to IO', 30 April 1920; FO 371/5226, 'CC Baghdad to IO', 8 May 1920.

from the Iraqis who were based in Syria – and therefore had the space to operate – and the successful emanation of their message to nearby regions.¹⁵⁷

The consequences of this came not just for the actors within the anticolonial struggle, but also the colonial administration. The British force's lack of understanding of the specificities of the Jazirah permitted these discourses to flourish, as exemplified by their clumsy withdrawal from Dayr al-Zur.¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, the connections that went beyond the colonial boundaries meant that they were unable to fully extend their control and hegemony over the area. They attempted to handle this by banning Arab flags and seeking to suppress communications between Iraq and Syria, both of which failed and led to an even higher level of backlash.¹⁵⁹ Correspondence made repeated references to the possibility of withdrawing from the Mosul region, demonstrating the extent to which the hold on the area was less secure than elsewhere.¹⁶⁰ As these messages successfully spread through urban and tribal networks, the population was increasingly discontented.¹⁶¹ As a later parliamentary report into the unrest explained, '[the British] found themselves unable to resist the overwhelming desire of the people of Iraq for the formation of a national government under an Arab ruler.'¹⁶² Indeed, the area's unique geography and the consequential decreased level of colonial control provided the crucial context for the opposition to coalesce and reduced the ability of the British to exert their control.

From Tribal Raids to Revolution

Finally, the violent contention and its evolution is an important theme of these events. This concerns the way in which the forces outlined thus far resisted the British occupation, how this evolved into widespread raids and, eventually, a distinct challenge to the colonial regime.

In the months surrounding the taking of Tal Afar and march on Mosul, episodic unrest spread across the Jazirah, marking an escalation in the opposition rhetoric. This particularly concerned the tribes, as their sheikhs grew increasingly discontented with the occupying

¹⁵⁷ Arnold T Wilson, *Mesopotamia 1917–1920, A Clash of Loyalties: A Personal and Historical Record*, (London: OUP, 1931), 140.

¹⁵⁸ FO 371/5128, 'Report on the events at Dair ez-Zor during November and December 1919', 2 January 1920

¹⁵⁹ FO 371/5226, 'Nouri Pasha to Major Young, Supplemental Statement', 13 April 1920. FO 371/5076, 'Letter from Nijris ibn Gaud.'

¹⁶⁰ FO 371/5228, 'From Young in the FO to IO', 18 July 1920.

¹⁶¹ CO 696/4, 'Finances, Administration, and the Condition of Iraq', October 1920–March 1922, 3; FO 371/5226, 'FO Conference on Middle Eastern Affairs', 17 May 1920; 26 May 1920; 16 June 1920

¹⁶² IOR MIL/17 15/42, 'Military Report on Mesopotamia', 1922; LON C/457, 'Report by MP Fisher Presented to Council', 17 November 1921.

power.¹⁶³ By March 1920 elements of the Shammar tribe were based in the Sinjar region, in the north west of Iraq. From there, they were conducting attacks and raids against the British forces, which from April and May resulted in ‘a good deal of restlessness in the desert.’¹⁶⁴ Late in April, general ‘sedition’ was recorded by political and military officers, which they attributed to the movement of caravans from Dayr al-Zur, as well as tribal movements in the north west. The British described these as spreading ‘active propaganda’; in other words, active calls to action, feeding the unrest and instigating further raids.¹⁶⁵ As one British memoir detailed, the violence in the region came as the result of intrigue from Iraqis in Syria that ‘fell on soil ready to receive it.’¹⁶⁶ Though the British were disdainful of the level of political engagement of Iraqis in Iraq, within the evolving circumstances, they were beginning to engage in violent contention.

In May, more ‘hostile action’ launched from Dayr al-Zur and mobilised contingents in Mosul province. They raided trains and derailed carriages in Ayn Dibs, just south of Mosul, and targeted British military garrisons too.¹⁶⁷ These actions included declarations that the groups would ‘never rest until all the British were out of Iraq’, and that their goal was to create an Arab government, demonstrating the increasingly targeted nature of the unrest.¹⁶⁸ Other raids occurred throughout May as the British forces attempted to secure the Dayr al-Zur region. These involved raiders from the Jaghaifa tribe, among others, conducting almost daily attacks on British military posts. The report for the month of May notes that in the final week, there was a ‘suspicious calm’, hinting at the future uprising.¹⁶⁹ The escalating violence involved regular disturbances in Mosul and Baghdad too.¹⁷⁰

The culmination of these developments occurred when battalions began to coordinate in Dayr al-Zur, Sinjar and the surrounding villages in the Jazirah. From there, in the first days of June they gathered in the village of Qabak, just to the north of Tal Afar.¹⁷¹ Meanwhile, within the town itself, local notables also met the preceding night to coordinate the attack and develop the plans to occupy it.¹⁷² These coordinated groups entered the town on the morning

¹⁶³ FO 371/4148, ‘Monthly Administrative Report No.4’, January–February 1919.

¹⁶⁴ CO 696/3, ‘Administration Report’, 6; FO 406/44, ‘Report on the Recent Attack in Tal Afar’, 559.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. 600.

¹⁶⁶ FO 371/5228, ‘FO Young to IO’, 18 July 1920; Aylmer Haldane, *The Insurrection in Mesopotamia, 1920*, (London: Blackwood, 1922).

¹⁶⁷ FO 371/5074, ‘From CC Baghdad to IO London’, 27 May 1920; ‘From CC Baghdad to IO’, 26 May 1920; ‘From IO to CC Baghdad’, 31 May 1920.

¹⁶⁸ FO 371/5076, ‘Note from Bell’, 22 May 1920; FO 371/5074, ‘From IO to FO’, 22 May 1920.

¹⁶⁹ FO 371/5076, ‘Diary of Events in May, From CC Baghdad to IO’, 31 May 1920.

¹⁷⁰ FO 371/5130, ‘CC Baghdad to IO’, 11 June 1920.

¹⁷¹ Suwaydi, *My Memoirs*; CO 696/3, ‘Administration Reports’, 9; Abd al-Wahab, *Ahammiyat Talla‘far*, 30–35.

¹⁷² Haldane, *The Insurrection*, ch.5.

of the 4 June with Jamal al Midfai of al-Ahd styled as the Commander of the Northern Iraq Army. They declared their goal of an Arab government and urged Tal Afaris to join their cause and attack the British, which a large proportion did.¹⁷³ While led by the military officers of al-Ahd, it was tribal forces who killed the gendarmerie, disarmed the British garrison and took the town by force.¹⁷⁴ When the town of Tal Afar was taken, they carried letters bearing the seal of al-Ahd in the Jazirah and sent letters on to Mosul notifying the population of their intended arrival.¹⁷⁵ As such, these forces coordinated their activity across the space in which they had the capacity to manoeuvre, outside the full oversight of the British occupation.

The position of Tal Afar itself was significant in the violent contention. It moved the base of the anticolonial activity further east, from northern Syria and the Dayr al-Zur region and situated it in a strategically more viable position in northern Iraq. With the news of the violence, the leaders gained further support from the tribes across the Jazirah, including the Jubur, Juhaish, Jaghaifa, some of the remaining Shammar and the Girgiri, the one Kurdish tribe to join in the rising.¹⁷⁶ These groups launched subsequent actions, such as attacks on British gendarmerie in the vicinity, including at Kasik Kupri, to the north-east of Tal Afar.¹⁷⁷ Much of the British correspondence and the documents from the weeks that followed painted a picture of confusion, as they grappled to regain control of the large region and struggled to pin point the exact composition of the diverse body of forces involved.¹⁷⁸ This successful storming by the unified forces exploited the frontier region to gain a foothold in the heart of northern Iraq, galvanising the tribes who were not yet committed to their cause and leaving the British leadership in disarray.

The aftermath of the incidents also displays similar dynamics in the level of violent contention. While these forces failed to take the city of Mosul, and therefore drive out the British, the unrest still took several months to die down. In terms of the British narrative, it is telling that their mouthpiece newspaper, *The Baghdad Times*, reported nothing throughout June that mentioned any unrest in the north, focusing instead on the ongoing ‘successes’ of

¹⁷³ GB 186/GB, ‘Gertrude Bell to her Father’, 7 June 1920; FO 371/5130, ‘Report on Tal Afar Attack by Political Officer in Mosul to CC Baghdad’, 14 August 1920; CO 696/3, ‘Administration Reports’, 2.

¹⁷⁴ FO 371/5130, ‘From CC Baghdad to IO’, 21 June 1920; ‘From IO to CC Baghdad’, 25 June 1920; Nelida Fuccaro, ‘Aspects of the Social and Political History of the Yazidi Enclave of Jabal Sinjar (Iraq) Under the British Mandate 1919–1932’, (Unpublished PhD Dissertation: University of Durham, 1994), 167–171

¹⁷⁵ FO 371/5310, ‘Statement of Hajji Yunis Agha on the Tal Afar Rising’, 18 August 1920.

¹⁷⁶ IOR MIL/17 15/42, ‘Military Report on Mesopotamia’, 1922, 40.

¹⁷⁷ FO 371/5130, ‘From IO to FO’, 25 June 1920.

¹⁷⁸ For example, FO 371/5227, ‘CC Baghdad to GO Tehran, Dehli’, 9 June 1920; FO 371/5228, ‘Note from Bell’, 13 June 1920; FO 371/5130, ‘Parliamentary Question from Ormsby-Gore to Churchill’, 22 June 1920.

the plans for Iraq's future.¹⁷⁹ However, the internal correspondence demonstrated the level to which the British feared a revival of the anticolonial opposition.

Regular telegrams and memos throughout July and August of 1920 discussed the rebellious contingents that remained in the Jazirah, particularly in light of the parallel uprising that was steadily growing across the Euphrates region.¹⁸⁰ Continued suspicion was cast on the notables of Mosul for their role in al-Ahd and their alliances with the region's tribes. This was particularly apparent in August, which saw renewed nationalist discussions, meetings between leaders and collaborating tribal armies, and a defiant attitude from young nationalists.¹⁸¹ In response, the British redoubled their policy of policing from the air, warning that bands of raiders across the Jazirah would be hit if they continued.¹⁸² Ultimately, after a long build up and a rapid, successful escalation of events, the opposition was reduced to an insurgency. The nationalist leaders retreated, and the mobilised elements of the armed contingents continued their increasingly futile efforts in the face of the British firepower.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I outlined the central themes in the anticolonial contention in 1920: Arab and Iraqi nationalist discourses, the ambiguous status of the Jazirah region, and the escalation in violent contention. Together, these findings show how over the period of a matter of months, the discourses that permeated the region led to various forms of mobilisation. This took the form of the means available – violent outbursts of unrest and raids on the British forces. As the following chapter discusses, the three themes are interconnected: the nationalist discourses and the process of mobilisation towards violent contention was facilitated by the actors, networks, and physical context of the events.

¹⁷⁹ BL, *The Baghdad Times*, Daily: 3 June–4 July 1920.

¹⁸⁰ FO 406/44, 'Report on the Recent Attack', 559–562; FO 371/5228, 'From Young FO to CC Baghdad', 18 July 1920.

¹⁸¹ FO 371/5081, 'Mesopotamia Police Reports', 14 August 1920.

¹⁸² FO 371/5130, 'From HC Baghdad to Constantinople', 20 November 1920; From HC Baghdad to Sec of State', 1 December 1920.

Chapter Six

Analysis – the Post-Ottoman Moment

The central question this thesis addresses is: what form did anticolonial resistance take in the early mandate period? The previous chapter outlined the findings and examined the specifics of the anticolonial resistance in the Jazirah. It showed that it involved a movement that was shaped by the discourses of Arab and Iraqi nationalism. These spread throughout the region and escalated the anticolonial unrest to raids, and then a distinct attempt to challenge the colonial administration. Building on this, this chapter answers the question in its entirety, placing this episode within its spatial, national and regional context. I argue that opposition actors undertook revolutionary projects that attempted to overthrow colonial administrations. Their nationally-focused goals were framed in the discourse of Arab nationalism, which in the post-war, post-Arab revolt period had become an anticolonial discourse. These revolutionary projects took different forms in different places, where the relevant networks, geographies and degree of colonial oversight were crucial in shaping the outward expression of such forces. Throughout this discussion, I take the findings of the previous chapter to be a microcosm that illustrates these wider arguments.

I present the analysis on three levels, each offering a dimension of the answer to the research question. The first explores the nature of contentious politics. I argue that my case study is illustrative of the central tenants of anticolonial contention at this time, demonstrating a crucial coalescence of the key factors of political leadership and hegemonic contraction in enabling the forces to act. Next, I analyse the revolutionary geography, placing the events in the Jazirah within their physical context. Through this, I argue that spatial histories are vital for understanding the trajectory of revolutionary moments and the type of anticolonial contention – in other words, the type of violence that is embraced. Particularly in times of flux, the way in which spaces facilitate action is crucial. Finally, I examine the nature of nationalism in the post-Ottoman Mashriq. I argue that while Arab nationalism provided an anticolonial framework across this region, anticolonial groups ultimately remained nationally-focused in their overall goals.

Resisting the Mandates through Anticolonial Revolution

The anticolonial resistance in the Jazirah was centred on discourses that were directed towards overthrowing the British administration and establishing an independent state in Iraq.

The violent contention gradually escalated into a specific revolutionary moment in Tal Afar and attempted taking of Mosul. In this section, I further explore these factors, and situate the revolutionary moment in its national and regional context of anticolonial contention. Utilising the framework of contentious revolutionary politics, this considers the positive, revolutionary nature of a movement's goals, the role of the strategic leadership, and finally that leadership's ability to mobilise collective subjects to challenge the hegemonic power.¹⁸³

Firstly, in the Jazirah in 1919 and 1920, the demands made against the British demonstrated a focus on a distinct and positive goal. Grounded in Arab nationalist and Iraqi nationalist discourses, they espoused clear anti-British, anticolonial rhetoric. This echoes the 'ideological program' and 'clear objectives' that Cole identified as required for revolutions.¹⁸⁴ Al-Ahd repeatedly demanded 'complete independence' and asserted that they saw the British administration as one which 'employ[ed] us as slaves.' They called on all Iraqis to join them in ridding the country of the British through the means of violent contention, ultimately leading the regaining of locations across the Jazirah, and the attempted taking of Mosul. Similarly, revolutionary movements across the Mashriq sought to throw off the colonial administrations of the French and the British. The uprising in Syria in 1925 provides a cogent example of a moment of similarly revolutionary contention. Provence highlights the importance of understanding it as rooted in the membership of a national community, which was seeking an expression of that community.¹⁸⁵ Crucially, Provence argues that whether that membership was rooted in exactly the same thought is less important than the consequence of its existence – the uprising it permitted.¹⁸⁶ In that sense, this anticolonialism offers an important parallel: the goal was clear, if somewhat abstract. The elements of nationalist discourse that resonated with each group may have differed but resulted in what can be identified as a 'national' movement, at least in demands and focus.

In exploring this episode as revolutionary, I find company in Kadhim's use of the term 'political revolution' for the events of the later revolt across the south.¹⁸⁷ While other scholars steer away from this, the findings demonstrate the applicability of this approach and I argue that both the Jazirah and Euphrates uprisings formed Iraq's revolution.¹⁸⁸ The findings do not challenge the basis of Kadhim's analysis, but rather show that his approach is

¹⁸³ Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East*, and Chalcraft, *Popular Politics*.

¹⁸⁴ Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution*, 3.

¹⁸⁵ Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt*.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ Kadhim, *Reclaiming Iraq*, 9.

¹⁸⁸ See the majority of the historiography on Iraq outlined in the literature for this. In particular Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, Dawisha, *Iraq: A Political History*, and Kadhim, *Reclaiming Iraq*.

incomplete and, as a result, simplistic and somewhat reactionary. His narrative sought to ‘reclaim’ the revolution and portray it as a tribal, Shia uprising with national goals.¹⁸⁹ While the events he analyses across the Euphrates region follow that trajectory, the picture of anticolonial activity must be extended beyond it. I therefore reinforce Kadhim’s analysis, while complicating the picture. Iraq’s anticolonialism should be understood within a broader periodisation and include these important events in the Jazirah. Though the specifics of each context led to different moments of revolutionary upheaval, there are clear parallels between the goals and expression. Again, this reflects Provence’s call to centre the *consequences* of oppositional discourses. The parallel anticolonial movements represented a shared membership of a national community in terms of their aims, if not execution.

Secondly, approaching the episode through the lens of contentious politics highlights the role of the intellectual, political leadership of al-Ahd and their ability to challenge the hegemonic reach of the British when mobilising the broader population.¹⁹⁰ The position of al-Ahd, as a nationalist society with roots in the Arab nationalism of the end of the Ottoman state exemplified a common trend across the region. This concerns the elite nature of nationalist movements, or in other words, the extent to which ‘the politics of the notables’ dominated the contention.¹⁹¹ As discussed in the findings, al-Ahd were drawn from the old Ottoman military class, but also included intellectuals in the urban centres, as well as journalists and lower ranked military officers. Most significant was their ability to position themselves as leaders of the movement. They were able to hegemonise the oppositional discourse into a nationally focused one through the language of their proclamations and the dissemination of those across the region. In doing so, they led a period of violent contention, beginning with tribal raids and unrest, and directed it into a specific, unified moment of attack. This mirrors the way in which Swedenburg identifies the mufti and provincial notables in Palestine as the directors of the wider contention.¹⁹² Similarly, Gelvin conceptualises nationalist societies and their popular rhetoric as playing a formative role in the evolution of the political community in Syria.¹⁹³ In this sense, al-Ahd were the group that took on this role across the Jazirah.

Related to this, a key tenant of revolutionary contentious politics concerns the ability of the leadership to transform its revolutionary discourses into means of mobilising collective

¹⁸⁹ Kadhim, *Reclaiming Iraq*.

¹⁹⁰ See Chalcraft, *Popular Politics*, 29–39.

¹⁹¹ Hourani, ‘Ottoman Reform.’

¹⁹² Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*.

¹⁹³ Gelvin, ‘The Social Origin of Popular Nationalism.’

subjects into tangible action. In other words, the extent to which the revolutionary ideology can become popular. The cooperation between the nationalists, the tribes in the Jazirah and the urban notables in their attack on the British in Tal Afar marked an unprecedented escalation towards explicit anticolonial violence, predating that in the Euphrates region. The parallels within the rhetoric of those different groups demonstrated the shared, popular nature of their struggle. The tribes found expression for their desires to end the British administration through the nationalist discourses in al-Ahd's proclamations and were further amplified by the urban intellectuals. Again, this reflects the way in which the majority of the forces in the 1930s revolt in Palestine were drawn from the peasantry, though mobilised by that revolt's strategic leadership.¹⁹⁴ In contrast, Thompson argued that subaltern groups in Lebanon that were active in clashes against the colonial power were acting beyond the direction of nationalist movements.¹⁹⁵ However, my argument is not that the tribes were solely under the control of al-Ahd. Indeed, the wider patterns of unrest demonstrated that was not the case. Rather, with a common enemy and powerful rhetoric, the nationalist party was able to mobilise them into a more tangible movement.

Therefore, the anticolonial contention in the Jazirah can be situated within a national and regional revolutionary moment. The goals, leadership and widespread mobilisation of its participants fit within the framework of revolutionary contentious politics. Though unsuccessful, their anticolonialism was revolutionary, if not 'a revolution'; an episodic struggle of contentious politics.¹⁹⁶ As attempts were made to break through and oppose the hegemonic control of the British occupation, the political opportunities for revolutionary action increasingly prevailed. Beyond this, the nationalist leadership and their rhetoric provided the necessary articulation of oppositional discourse to escalate violent contention of tribal raids into a coordinated attack with resistance and overthrow as the goal.

Revolutionary Geography

The previous chapter demonstrated the ambiguous context of the space in which this revolutionary activity took place. In this section, I further explore this idea, drawing on the concepts of frontier, liminality and the approach of spatial history, arguing that without its unique geographical context, the revolution would not have evolved in the way that it did. Therefore, anticolonial resistance was fundamentally shaped by its physical context.

¹⁹⁴ Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*.

¹⁹⁵ Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*.

¹⁹⁶ Tilly *et al*, *Dynamics of Contention*.

Furthermore, I contend that understanding spatial practices in context, through a spatial history framework, sheds much needed light on anticolonial resistance more widely.

Firstly, the findings demonstrate the nature of the Iraq-Syria frontier as a place of flux, in which the present-day states and their borders were by no means foregone. Mosul and Dayr al-Zur occupied a liminal position, as it was unclear of which state they would eventually become part. The borders were permeable and fluid, with high levels of the acculturation between the communities on both sides.¹⁹⁷ This was reinforced by the heterogenous, liminal nature of the region, whose population eluded a simple classification. Approaching the Jazirah as a whole, we can view it as a space in which different groups met and interacted, as McNeill describes in his conception of the frontier.¹⁹⁸ In particular, while al-Ahd were based in Syria, their focus remained on Iraq, which they were able to easily access from both Aleppo and later Dayr al-Zur. Their incursion into Dayr al-Zur and the subsequent unrest across Mosul underlined this interconnectedness. Ultimately, the entire region at this time was ‘betwixt and between’ the nation state structures, or the clear definition of borders.¹⁹⁹ Iraq and Syria were in the process of formation and what I recognise here as the frontier only later became a solidified political boundary. This highlights the specifics of how the region’s geography enabled the revolutionary moment itself to take place. As these processes came together in June 1920, the frontier provided the necessary space of flux and ambiguity in which oppositional forces could coalesce and manoeuvre.

Connected to this, the frontier also existed as a space beyond the institutions of the state. This relates to the contraction of the hegemony of the British colonial administration in this region.²⁰⁰ As Rogan notes, the Ottoman frontier was a space that wider institutions of the state were unable to reach.²⁰¹ In this case, the status of the region allowed those within it to situate themselves somewhat beyond the British administration’s control. This can be identified within the ability of al-Ahd to base themselves in Syria, quite literally beyond the reach of the British administration in Iraq, yet still play an influential role in events there. Furthermore, as discussed in the findings, attempts by the British administration to suppress the spread of anticolonial discourses led to further backlash, for example, in attempts to repress communications or prevent certain flags or symbols being used.²⁰²

¹⁹⁷ Fattah, *The Politics of Regional Trade*, 15–25.

¹⁹⁸ McNeill, *The Great Frontier*.

¹⁹⁹ Thomassen, ‘The Uses and Meaning of Liminality’, 16.

²⁰⁰ Chalcraft, *Popular Politics*, 35.

²⁰¹ Rogan, *Frontiers of the State*.

²⁰² Reflecting in some ways the blame Dodge and Ireland place on the British administration’s policies for the later unrest.

Most significantly, the way in which the revolutionary moment played out demonstrated this status. Launching from Dayr al-Zur and moving through Sinjar enabled the nationalists to mobilise their forces strategically beyond British control. When they took the town of Tal Afar, this further increased their ability to extend influence across the region, as can be seen in the way in which the surrounding tribes who had not yet joined them did so. Though the British were able to hold Mosul, their lack of ability to quickly react to the large force that came from Syria and overthrew the administration in Tal Afar was due to these dynamics of trans-border contention.²⁰³ While operating in the Jazirah, the nationalists directed their attention on strategic towns, and ultimately the city of Mosul, as this was the space in which they had capacity to manoeuvre. The geography in which their anticolonial contention took place therefore directed the execution of it. That is, the frontier provided a space in which violent contention could escalate. The contention's specific trajectory and the choices made during it were shaped by the options available in the frontier.

Thirdly, the networks that evolved across the Jazirah and their effectiveness for spreading revolutionary discourse demonstrate the importance of what we can call spatial practices. When al-Ahd were based in Syria, they were able to disseminate their calls to action across the open, fluid frontier and reach a sympathetic audience in the urban centre of Mosul and among the discontented tribes. The movements of the tribes themselves and their patterns of mobility across the slowly solidifying political boundary exemplify this. The consequences of such networks are most clearly identifiable in the direct parallels between the proclamations of al-Ahd and the letter from the Jaghaifa tribe to the British administration. Similarly, the connections between these discourses and those of the nationalist meetings held within Mosul demonstrate their power to spread in urban space. However, it was the movements of these tribes across the entire region that facilitated the speed and depth of this dissemination, and the urban hubs in reaching large audiences. These networks and the way in which the actors mobilised by al-Ahd moved through the frontier region permitted a revolutionary movement to develop around shared discourses.

Together, this level of analysis demonstrates the importance of spatial history and the utilisation of spatially grounded frameworks, such as the concepts of frontier and liminality. While in this case these concepts explain the specific dynamics in the Jazirah, different lenses are required in other regions. For example, the difference between these dynamics and those in the Euphrates region must each be properly understood. As Kadhim demonstrates in his

²⁰³ Tejel-Gorgas, 'Making Borders from Below', 822.

exploration of the uprising that took place in the south, predominantly Shia, tribal actors spread their message through both religious and tribal networks.²⁰⁴ While the specific actors, networks and geography of the Jazirah resulted in the moment of violent contention presented here, in the south, a different situation played out. Similarly, in the 1925 uprising in Syria, the Druze occupied a frontier-like zone in southern Syria in Jabal al-Druze, the dynamics of which facilitated its beginnings.²⁰⁵ Certain networks across Syria then facilitated the spread of the agitation. Therefore, when approaching contentious politics, even large-scale regional or national uprisings such as these, attention to localities and the specific spatial practices within them explain the foment and spread of such ideas. As part of the analysis presented in this chapter, this context underlines the relative successes.

In sum, this anticolonial action was shaped by the space in which it developed. The nationalists exploited the liminality of space between establishing frontiers, within which they were able to mobilise diverse populations. Therefore, anticolonial resistance in the mandate period must be situated within its specific spatial geographies. This applies on a regional level – the Jazirah frontier, in contrast to the Euphrates region, for example – as well as more broadly to the Mashriq as a whole; its position as the Ottoman provinces, in contrast to the centre in Anatolia, significantly informed its post-war trajectory.

Post-Ottoman Nationalism in the Mashriq

Lastly, as shown thus far, the nationalists' discourses in this period were complex. They drew on both Arab nationalism and Iraqi nationalism in different ways. This offers insights into the concept of nationalism in the construction of Iraq, but also in the post-Ottoman Mashriq more widely. In this final section, I argue that anticolonial resistance in the mandate era was rooted in its post-Ottoman context, as the rhetoric and discourses reflected. By this time, Arab nationalism was no longer the forum of rivalries for Ottoman and ex-Ottoman elites, but rather an oppositional, anticolonial discourse. The elite led movement developed a hegemonic nationalism that was able, to an extent, to challenge the colonial order of direct rule.

The leadership of the revolutionary movement engaged with both Arabism and Iraqism to frame their struggle and did not view the two struggles as mutually exclusive. The language of the Iraqi nationalism permeated throughout the anticolonial rhetoric espoused in

²⁰⁴ Kadhim, *Reclaiming Iraq*.

²⁰⁵ Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt*.

the Jazirah, with references to the Iraqi people, the territory of Iraq in terms of the area under British occupation, and to the Iraqi nation. The proclamations of al-Ahd, those of the tribes and the rhetoric of meetings in the urban centres all highlight the way in which the goal of the uprising was nationally focused. Indeed, they demonstrate that the impetus for the revolutionary moment was independence and national self-rule, beyond the control of the British power. The independence of Iraq under an Arab-led government was identified as the realisation of the Iraqi dimension of that regional struggle.

In this sense, as Franzén and Davis suggest, the process of anticolonial mobilisation against the common enemy of the British fomented and escalated the process of building a national identity.²⁰⁶ They argue that the anticolonial uprising in the latter half of 1920 represented a period of formation towards genuine Iraqi nationalism, despite its failures to be wholly embracing in the aftermath.²⁰⁷ In terms of my findings, it is difficult to disentangle the extent to which Iraqi national identity was a strongly held discourse prior to the uprising, or rather that it was constructed and reconstructed in the process of the struggle. In other words, the confines of Iraq, in the sense that it was administered under the British occupation, delivered a unit of contention with which to engage and make demands upon. That is not to say the uprising *created* a sense of ‘Iraqiness’, but rather reinforced it through large-scale calls to action and mobilisation towards those ends. This reflects the popular nationalism in Syria that sought independence within Syria’s ‘natural boundaries.’²⁰⁸ As colonial administrations established control in certain areas, they reinforced a sense of identity within them as that control was resisted. In that way, oppositional discourses took shape and solidified within those spaces.

This leads to the question of Arab nationalism. As a political actor, al-Ahd’s ideology grew from its Ottoman roots, as its members originally advocated a pan-Arab resistance to the excesses of late Ottoman reform. From the inception of the British occupation of Mosul, they voiced their opposition to the colonial power, and their desire for self-rule. This crystallised into the explicit demand for Iraqi independence, though continued to be articulated in language that reflected the broader struggle of the Arab nation. In other words, the anti-British, anticolonial sentiments remained firmly in the context of the wider regional pan-Arab discourse. It is therefore important to note the Arab focus of these political

²⁰⁶ Franzén, ‘The Problem of Iraqi Nationalism’, and Davis, *Memories of State*.

²⁰⁷ Indeed, it was not. See for example, Elie Kedourie, ‘Anti-Shiism in Iraq Under the Monarchy’, *Middle Eastern Studies* 24, no.2, (1988), 249–253.

²⁰⁸ Gelvin, ‘The Social Origins of Popular Nationalism’, 645–661.

societies. When minorities were mentioned by the group – whether Kurds, Christians or others – the focus fell on national unity and the collaboration required to shake off the British occupation.²⁰⁹ In this sense, Arab nationalism provided an anticolonial discourse, rather than explicitly the desire for the creation of an Arab state.

This is an important point that Tauber, in his exploration of the formation of Iraq and Syria crucially overlooks. He argues that individual state-based nationalisms prevailed over the Arab idea in the post-Ottoman context.²¹⁰ However, as the findings demonstrate, the ‘Arab idea’ did not go away. Rather, it was not wedded to the nation state system. As Khalidi argues, Arab nationalism as a discourse was not the same as pan-Arabism in the form of a single state.²¹¹ The references in the nationalist calls to action to the ‘Arab nation’ and the parallel struggles of ‘Syrian brothers’ should be understood in this way. It was this that became the hegemonic nationalist discourse across the region and was able to challenge the colonial order to the extent that it did.

Finally, then, the findings shed light on the way nationalists, particularly notables and elites, used Arab nationalism to further their own position and gain power in the post-Ottoman context. It is true that the nationalist elite were those who benefitted from the anticolonialism in Iraq, at what became clear was the expense of the broader population.²¹² In the aftermath of the uprising, some of the nationalists returned from Syria, alongside those in Baghdad, and formed an Iraqi government under King Faisal.²¹³ In one sense, this reinforces the arguments of Hourani *et al* who suggest that nationalisms provided the framework through which notables could continue to exert influence during the period of flux. However, we must also bear Gelvin’s contribution about popular nationalism in mind. The composition of the forces was diverse, even though its leadership was drawn from among the notables. While some of the members of al-Ahd were ultimately able to ascend to influential positions in the aftermath of the uprising, prior to and during these events, they were very much outside the mechanisms of governance. Indeed, they were not involved with the provisional government the British were experimenting with. Therefore, this case presents a complex

²⁰⁹ Minority in the sense that most were Sunni Arabs. CO 696/3, ‘Administration Reports’, 2–3; FO 371/5026, ‘Baghdad Police Intelligence Report’, 29 May 1920. While more research is required in the Iraqi context, relevant research on Syria reinforces this point, arguing that the categories of minorities came into being under the French mandate, and that ‘nation-state form creates the objective conditions in which people begin to consider themselves’ as such. See: White, *The Emergence of Minorities*, 209.

²¹⁰ Tauber, *The Formation*, 325.

²¹¹ Khalidi, *The Origins of Arab Nationalism*.

²¹² See Davis, *Memories of State*, and Reeva Simon, *Iraq Between Two World Wars: The Militarist Origins of Tyranny*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

²¹³ Suwaydi, *My Memoirs*.

contribution to this literature. If al-Ahd's nationalism was a means for power, that would have been the forum in which to enact it, and indeed some Iraqi notables did so. Instead, al-Ahd's explicit anti-British focus demonstrates how by this period Arab nationalism was an oppositional, anticolonial discourse, evolving from its roots as an Ottoman discourse of resistance.

Ultimately, then, al-Ahd engaged with the regional pan-Arab struggle of the era, which evolved into a distinct, national effort as political entities solidified within the boundaries of European administrations. They exemplified the actions and ideas of nationalist political societies active across the Mashriq during this period and were important actors in the events that followed. Indeed, their focus remained on national, territorially bound goals. Their specific machinations demonstrated their intentions; they sought the independence of Iraq under an Arab government and were prepared to undertake revolutionary measures to that end.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the findings of this thesis and situated them within a theoretical and empirical framework. In doing so, I set out three interconnected answers to the research question of this thesis. Firstly, anticolonial resistance in the Jazirah took the form of revolutionary movements, with clear goals of independence, distinct political leadership and the ability to mobilise broad swathes of the population under nationalist discourses. Secondly, that resistance was shaped by its geographical and spatial context. The frontier nature of the Jazirah was an ambiguous, fluid space, in which networks could operate more freely, and mobilisation could take place beyond the colonial power's reach. Finally, anticolonial resistance was a product of the post-Ottoman context of the region. It drew explicitly on what had initially been separatist Arabist discourses in order to articulate an oppositional rhetoric to the power it now found itself under: the European ones.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

This thesis explores the nature of anticolonial resistance to the establishment of the mandates by European powers in the Mashriq region. Through a close analysis of events in the Jazirah region, I argue that anticolonial resistance took the form of revolutionary contentious politics. Its forms of mobilisation were grounded in and shaped by local realities, while the discourses with which it engaged were both nationally focused and evocative of the Arab nationalist moment in their anticolonialism. Specifically, al-Ahd as an organisation were able to mobilise tribal and urban actors to their cause and exploit the liminal space of the frontier to challenge the British occupation. Though unsuccessful, for a time they were able to overthrow the colonial power in Tal Afar, and challenge them in Mosul itself.

Beyond this, it makes some broader contributions. The anticolonial moment in Iraq's Jazirah occurred not only in a national context, but a regional one. Situating this episode within the events that took place across the Mashriq – and within the literature on these events – demonstrates its parallels with the wider context. This episode contributes another dimension to the Iraqi revolution of 1920 and highlights the way in which different regions of the country remained nationally focused in their goals, if in different ways. It further emphasises the need to integrate Iraq into the historiography on post-Ottoman nationalism, to avoid entrenching nation state narratives onto a region still in flux. Instead, we must centre analyses in the contemporary reality, rather than the eventual outcomes. Furthermore, the theoretical framework I utilise reinforces this point, demonstrating the way in which events are shaped by their physical as well as temporal context. This raises questions for further research into such dynamics, exploring how both urban space and transnational elements effect the evolution of contentious politics in the region.

Ultimately, in looking at this anticolonial contention, I argue that an elite led movement disseminated a discourse rooted in both Arabism and Iraqism to mobilise broad swathes of the population. The frontier region in which they and the constituents of the wider movement were situated shaped the mechanisms of contention and allowed them to coalesce into a movement. By this period, it was clear that the Ottoman moment was over, and so the separatist discourses of Arabism began to provide a discourse of resistance to colonial occupation. However, as I have shown throughout, the contention took on a national focus, in line with the framework in which power had been established.

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