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FINAL PAPER

" 'Good and 'Bad Aghas' as Persistent Models of
Authority in Iraqi Kurdistan"

By: Daniel P. Wolk
(Ph.D. Candidate, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL)

Abstract

An old distinction in studies of Kurds in Iraq between the "good" vs. the "bad agha" serves as a spring- board for understanding models of authority in a Muslim society. Prototypically, the good agha is the first among tribal elders who takes the interests of his local group to heart whereas the bad agha is an outsider who rules over his subject people for the sake of his own personal benefit. Drawing on data from local writings on Kurdish history, politics, and fiction, I identify attributes associated with the bad agha: being an outsider, grasping aggrandizement, discrediting rivals, "logrolling", scheming, cronyism, and intimidation. These traits match up perfectly with traits that Kurds ascribe to Saddam Hussein, Baʿthists and the many "Little Saddams" in Iraqi Kurdistan — a conclusion supported by testimony from colleagues at a local university about its unpopular vice-chancellor. Such correspondence is evidence for a persis- tent model of despotic authority. A reexamination of historical accounts by Kurds shows that the models transcended the village and tribal level with the expansion of Sufi orders in the 19th century, for the Sufi shaykhs emulated the "good aghas". Over time, however, more

and more representatives of the shaykhly families slipped into the "bad agha" pattern of leadership. Much contemporary discourse about particular Kurdish leaders, many of whom, including top ones, still belong to those shaykhly families (such as the Barzanis and Talabanis), reads as a coded, elaborated debate over whether such leaders are acting as good or bad aghas.

1   Introduction

Even a casual observer of events in Iraq and Syria today suspects that nobody really understands the rapid realignments of political factions and the rise and fall of local and national leaders, all of which strike us as crucial components of the nasty, violent, chaotic situation of the present. One angle that is poorly understood or missing in accounts of leadership and authority in the Middle East (and everywhere else) are local beliefs about, attitudes toward, and above all understandings of the character and behavior of their leaders that both supporters and opponents entertain. My purpose in this paper is to experiment with a particular approach to *cultural models* in order to sketch out a new way to account for these inscrutable matters. Popular approaches to authority in currency today, including those that are bent on figuring out why certain leaders can stay in power and others cannot, why some gain legitimacy and others do not, or how ritual performances enacted by regimes in power contribute to reinforcing authority, all skirt the fundamental issue of how people conceptualize different types of leaders.

My argument takes several steps. First, I suggest more fully how the going approaches to the

study of authority skip over the core matter of why people both obey and resist leaders. Actors behave in terms of their own understandings of and attitudes toward leaders, not in terms of social scientists' generalizations about when authority is convincing and when it is not, of when authority is legitimate and when it is not, and what types of performances reinforce power and which do not.

Second, I propose a cultural models approach to grasp how actors conceptualize leadership and take attitudes towards them. Such an approach draws from some of the many new insights about how human beings think that have emerged from the new cognitive sciences. I can only hint at this promising new approach to the study of culture that models understandings as information processing, and sees attitudes as positive and negative evaluations of mental stimuli, such as objects and persons, including leaders.

Third, I delineate three cultural models of authority in Iraqi Kurdistan that I have discovered. Model One is what I call the BEST AMONG US model of leadership or authority, or, when I want to stress its historical underpinnings, the GOOD AGHA model.[1]. Model Two I dub the OUTSIDER WHO PLUNDERS US, or, correspondingly the BAD AGHA. The third model is the WISE, SYMPATHETIC OUTSIDER. The core elements (or "nodes") of each of these models consist in *character* or *behavioral traits* that actors ascribe, often more automatically than reflectively to a leader or authority figure.

Fourth, the one I delve into the most thoroughly is the OUTSIDER WHO PLUNDERS US, or the

1. Text in small caps indicates that what is at stake is the underlying conceptualization rather than the words (lexemes) themselves.

BAD AGHA. To flesh out the model will help illustrate the power of my approach. I suggest that this model has been in force over the *longue durée* by citing examples of (1) late 19th century aghas, (2) Saddam Hussein or Baʿthism (in the minds of Kurds), (3) and "Little Saddams" who have appeared since Saddam's demise in 2003, as exemplified through behaviors of, and attitudes towards of one particular "Little Saddam", the former vice-chancellor. "Haval Barzinji" of what I call "Zagros State University."[2] I have yet to hear a Kurd draw the connection between "bad aghas" and Saddam Hussein or particular "Little Saddams". Nevertheless, I provide evidence that the model does indeed apply to them, and suggest that it interpret the behaviors of these latter-day despots, who ply their "trade" in allegedly "modern" circumstances, as elaborations of the hoary image of the "bad agha" furnishes the possibility of explaining what until now have appeared as inscrutable or merely expedient behaviors of loyal followers of such despots.

Finally, I lend further credence to the idea that contemporary attitudes and actions of leaders and followers elaborate much older models by sketching out a particular historical process in the expansion of authority from small-scale Kurdish tribal or peasant society to the governance of the entire Kurdistan Region of present-day Iraq. It is no accident that many of the most powerful leaders in Kurdistan today hail from the families of Sufi shaykhs that began to flourish in the early to mid-nineteenth century. I suggest that such shaykhs started out as translocal spiritual leaders modeled on "good aghas," or the BEST AMONG US. Later, their power transfered over to the temporal realm. As a consequence, the issue of whether their behavior conformed more to that BEST AMONG US model or to the BAD AGHA/OUTSIDER WHO PLUNDERS US one became

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2. Although an IRB official has told me that it would be permissible and appropriate for me to use real names in regard to this case, I am not ready to do that yet, primarily out of security considerations.

more and more contestable. In some cases of such contestation, the third model of the WISE, SYMPATHETIC OUTSIDER comes into play as well. Curious debates that are still playing themselves out concerning whether Kurdistan's leaders are exemplary vs. rapacious despots become less exotic when we see them in the light of these persistent cultural models of authority.

2   The Need for a Cultural Models Approach to Authority

Fresh approaches to the understanding of authority are necessary to overcome our current befuddlement over what is happening in Iraq and elsewhere. I suggest we dispense with certain widespread assumptions that guide most social science endeavors to understand authority or explain obedience to it (not to mention other social phenomena). First, despite routine disavowals of functionalist views of society, most studies still presume that the "empirical" issues we care about most boil down to the issue of how *effective* are specific patterns of governance. This includes such questions as "What keeps leaders in power and what does not?" "What strategies of leadership reach their goals and which do not?" "How and why is such-and-such a leader (or regime) able to establish or maintain political stability?" "Which patterns of conduct, rhetoric and demeanor make a leader *convincing* to followers and which do not hold sway?" All of these address the overriding problem of how power and authority function. Historically such concerns rose out of the metaphorical analogy of the polity (or society) with the human body. Modeling themselves on physiologists, who orient their investigations of the human body to the problem of what maintains good health and keeps the organism alive (and what causes maladies and death), social scientists studying authority routinely aim to unlock the secrets of what causes the social

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or political order to flourish or decline.

The obsession with judging how effectively or convincingly authorities lead has impeded fundamental research into the nature and practice of authority. Consider the analogy of medicine. Many of our advances in it have become possible through the study of basic cell research, which aims to understand the biochemical processes that actually take place at the cell level, without fretting about what their ultimate consequences for larger organisms are. Even more importantly, the organic analogy is much more a product of Western political philosophy than it is a deliberately crafted scientific assumption. A moment's reflection suggests that to imagine "society" as an organic whole is unwise. We care about the boundaries of a whole body and normally agree that its health is a good thing. But with regard to social or political entities such as the "state", it is far more difficult to agree on its boundaries, what is healthy, what is stable and on whether stability is a good thing. Functional approaches to the study of authority are thus either premature or expend too much effort in gauging what authority achieves or what it does not. This is the case even of most the best studies of authority in the Middle East, including Wedeen's of the cult of Hafez al-Asad in Syria (1999). Prior to figuring out what social actions and communications that relate to meting out of and (dis)obeying authority do and do not accomplish, we need to figure out what beliefs and actions actually constitute authority in particular cases.

A popular though not universal concern of much research on political authority is *legitimacy*, much of which comes down to us from the German legalistic tradition of understanding the state, of which Weber was the most influential proponent. As Wedeen has effectively argued, the word "legitimacy", in spite of the range of definitions it has attracted, actually helps us very little to

understand the larger issue that it taps into, namely the attitudes, beliefs, and emotions toward authority figures (and would-be figures) that combine to determine the mix of support and antagonism that actors harbor towards leaders. Until now, however, we have not developed very good methods for figuring out this mix. This is where cultural models come in: psychologists, linguists, and anthropologists have introduced such models precisely in order to apprehend attitudes, beliefs, and emotions — in short, how people understand their surroundings and their own behaviors — more clearly than previous approaches, because they are focused more exclusively on those issues. Though many studies touch upon such models in the course of wider investigations, focus on cultural models of authority are rare indeed.[3]

An assumption that has motivated a great many anthropologically-inclined studies of authority has been to regard *performance* — ritual behavior, spectacle, theatre — as the lifeblood of authority, which animates and revivifies it, making it real, as it were. While the performative practices of authority deserve disciplined attention, they only indirectly help us to understand the core problem: namely the *meanings* that inform the minds of participants in authority relations (leaders, followers, recalcitrants, resisters, etc.). As Strauss and Quinn (1997) so brilliantly argue, the culture theory that *externalizes* meaning on the presumption that the mind is impenetrable, is doomed to failure. The most celebrated proponents of such externalizing culture theory include Geertz, who saw meaning in texts, and Foucault, who saw it in discourses. Both are guilty of a vulgar realism that sees meaning in the things of texts and discourses rather than in people's minds.

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3. For a pathbreaking example, see Lakoff (2001). For what is probably the largest survey to date of cultural models, see Bennardo and Munck (2014), where issues of authority are conspicuous by their absence.

Let me elaborate. It is unwarranted to infer meanings directly from performances or testimony encoded in texts without a theory of how people process information and produce knowledge (and emotions and attitudes) within their minds. It should be intuitively obvious that nobody acts on the basis of what is in a text or performance, *except* as it is processed, filtered or mediated through their minds, their cognitive processes. By now, in the 2010s, there has been over a half-century of monumental efforts in the cognitive sciences to understand those very processes. It is no longer acceptable to ignore them in the rest of the social sciences. The cultural models approach is all about ascribing meanings to people's minds in such a manner as to take account of the most convincing fruits of research in the interdisciplinary cognitive sciences.[4]

Finally, the "tradition" vs. "modernity" distinction, even without explicit mention of the terms themselves, more often than not, plays a key role in studies of authority in the Middle East and beyond. The best-known example of this distinction put to use is what might be called a "vulgar-Weberian" approach to authority. On the one side are patterns of authority rooted in unthinking, "irrational" traditional authority, whether merely habitual or dignified by the sanctity of tradition. Authority as it is found in "tribal", feudal, patrimonial, sultanistic, or other "personalistic" societies comes under the rubric of "traditional", whereas authority that is guided by formalized laws and institutions explicitly organized to carry out those laws is "modern" or "rationalized". Of the many possible objections to this way of thinking, the one I want to stress here is that it pits the colonized natives on the side of the "traditional", such as Kurds, against the colonizers on the side of the "modern". No respectable cognitive theory of the mind would consign traditional

4. Note that my own approach to cultural models is based on a reading primarily of cognitive linguistics and social cognition, but that a paper such as this is no place to spell out how I do that in any detail.

cognition to the bulk of the world's population and reserve "the modern mind" to the privileged few, for — to be frank — most persons in the world, including hyper-educated scientists in the West, are at best nonrationally intuitive most of the time.[5]

A glance at how this vulgar-Weberian mentality has percolated down to the study of Kurds will provide an entrée to the pivotal distinction of the GOOD vs. the BAD AGHA, and how it flies in the face of the traditional vs. modern distinction. In one of the few standard works on Kurdish history, McDowall puts his finger on the following conflict between Kurdish and British notions of authority that exhibited themselves in personal misunderstandings between British political officers and Kurdish leaders, above all Shaykh Mahmoud, in the years immediately after World War I when the British were striving to create a colony:

> There was a fundamental conflict between institutionalized government ..., in which officials were appointed on merit and owed their loyalty to an abstract idea — the state, the administration, the Crown or whatever — and ... the highly personalized form of government based on patronage still existing in the religious and tribal strata of Kurdish society. McDowall (1997:157)

What McDowall calls "institutionalized government" corresponds to Weber's rational-legal bureaucratic authority, whereas "the highly personalized form of government" corresponds to Weber's "traditional authority". Soane, the top British political officer at the time, saw this latter type of authority as a "reversion to tribalism" (*Ibid.*)

I do not claim that such a variant of the tradition vs. modernity opposition is false or devoid

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5. For one of the most convincing demonstrations of this point, see Kahneman (2011).

of any value for understanding patterns of authority across societies. What I do claim is that it is not helpful in the explanation of why Kurds do as they do. They act in terms of *their* construals of different types of authority or leaders, not those of universalizing social scientists. Even if words that correspond to "tradition" and "modernity" play a role in Kurds' behavior, it is an error to assume that they resemble the distinction as expressed by McDowall, for example.[6]

So what concepts have Kurds used over the long term to understand different concepts of authority? Because of the difficulty of finding relevant writings by Kurds that predate the 1950s, an indirect method might serve as a proxy. One of the first of the British colonialists who had learned to speak Kurdish and other languages of the area was Rupert Hay. He made a big point of a distinction in types of leaders between that he characterized as "good" vs. "bad aghas", that has since been recapitulated and elaborated by a number of other writers, both Kurds and non-Kurds (e.g. Hilmi (1956–1957) 2007, Barth 1953, Jwaideh 2006:33, Yalçin-Heckmann (1991), A. Bārzānī 2010:46–50, and Ahmad (1994)).

It is telling to compare Hay's setting off the good from the bad agha of 1919 with McDowall's take on it. Here are Hay's words:

> The Kurds may be divided into good Aghas, bad Aghas and the people. Every area has
> its bad Agha. ... These are the people that cause all the trouble and whom it is neces-
> sary for us to suppress by every means possible. They are actuated purely by greed

6. I gave a public presentation in 2010 in which I argued that Kurds I interacted with over a two year period in Erbil did indeed strive to be "modern", but the specific behaviors that they construed as "modern", such as wide paved roads and the absence of sidewalks, were jarring indeed to me and my expatriate colleagues from North America, Europe, and "Down Under".

and selfish ambition. ... It is the bad Aghas and they alone who have anything to say against the Government [set up by the British] and by suppressing them we protect ourselves, and do a service to Kurdistan generally. Fortunately the good Aghas, who wish to live in peace, and who see their tenants prosper are not rare and where they are to be found, I consider we should use every endeavor to associate them with *our* rule. (1997:164)

McDowall finds that Hay's approach reflects a "simplistic state of mind", because it ignores the implications of self-determination, as well as longstanding conflicts between rival neighboring tribes and between aghas of the same tribe. But by finding that Hay ignored issues of self-determination and factionalism, he overlooks what Hay put his finger on: the association of bad aghas with "greed and selfish ambition", as opposed to that of good aghas with peace loving and the promotion of prosperity.

What did lead Hay astray was to draw an association between good aghas and cooperation with the British regime, as well as one between bad aghas and resistance to it. Rafiq Hilmi, a Kurdish politician who was active mainly in the 1920s and 1930s, contrasted Kurdish leaders of good character vs. those of bad (without using the actual expressions "good" vs. "bad agha"). He also correlated them with being pro- vs. anti-British, but (unsurprisingly) he inverted Hay's correlation. The British, Hilmi suggested, regularly created enemies:

The main reason was because of the appointment of bad, corrupt officials and un-scrupulous, illiterate informers, while all those with some intelligence, warm patri-otic blood and integrity had turned against them. These disgruntled people were

openly and, rather recklessly, attacking the British, verbally as well as physically.

([1956–1957] 2007:147)

Here is what I suggest. That Kurdish writers, like Hilmi, made a big point of contrasting good vs. bad leaders based on personal character traits, as a means to account for their behavior, such as their stance towards the British colonialists, suggests that Hay was onto something critical about Kurdish understandings of leaders.

My own experiences working with Kurds for two years at a university in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (2008–2010), as well as reading (mostly anonymous) comments by them on news-oriented websites, convinces me that the way that they attribute positive and negative moral qualities to leaders strongly influences their opinions of them and how they deal with them. My hypothesis is that such attributions of character traits to leaders are far from haphazard, but rather fit into recurrent patterns, or, in other words, "cultural models".

3   What is a Cultural Model?

Here is not the place to provide any more than the barest sketch of what cultural models are all about, and the rationale behind the particular type of such models that I devise. Cultural models can be thought of networks, clusters, or patterned configurations of generic memories. A simple example would be a cultural model of playing a basketball game as a member of a league. Once players gain experience, they remember all sorts of details about how to behave: the rules of the game, tactics ("Xs and Os"), how to prepare in the locker room and shootaround, when to take

their seats on the bench, how to show deference to the referees, how to interact with or ignore the audience, etc. Here is the key point: what they remember refers back much less to *specific* games they have played in the past but rather to their *generic* experience of having played many games. Much of what they remember they remember not in words but rather in their bodily experience, what Bourdieu would variously call "sense of the game," "body hexis" or "habitus", and psychologists of memory would call "nondeclarative memory". Most of those who work with cultural (or individual cognitive) models express the generic or generalized aspect of memories networked, batched, or associated together into models as "schematic" or "schematized". Models pertain to schematic memories, or *schemas*, not to memories of specific episodes of experience. While it is possible in some circumstances for actors to understand reflectively the models they are used to, most of the time models persist and shape our knowledge intuitively or *automatically*.

A cultural model of leadership or authority would be memories, many of them indeed expressible in language about what generic leaders, perhaps of different types, are like, how they behave, or why they behave as they do. In this case, most of the memories will be "declarative", or what amounts to the same thing (for other writers) "semantic". It is not as if, however, every member of a social group shares exactly the same models of generic types of leaders. To be more precise, it is a cultural model if the same memory networks are *recurrent* and *distributed* through a social group, community, society or population, among many individuals, but by no means everyone. "Distributed" means that different people may remember different parts of those memory networks, while they accept (usually intuitively or automatically) that others remember fragments of those networks that they do not.

The idea of a "memory network" should be easier to grasp by seeing how it is modeled on what neurophysiologists have learned about *neural* networks. When a mental stimulus, such as a particular leader, comes to mind, it is like a cue that activates a network of neurons. In cognitive science jargon, it causes "spreading activation" or it "potentiates" a network. The connections in the network embody how actors *understand* the particular object stimulus; the pattern of positive, or activated connections, and negative, or inhibitory connections, are the material counterparts of attitudes toward that stimulus. The brain does not process information by creating a new network for every particular leader a person thinks of, but rather every particular leader who fits a certain type, such as a BAD AGHA, activates the same, *recurrent* network.

We are still in the very early stages of cultural model investigation, still too early even for investigators to agree on the different types of models humans put to use in the living of their lives. An important distinction for me is between models that are causal or explanatory vs. those that are associative (or, more technically, "connectionist"). I am interested in this paper in the latter type. That is, I care about *what character traits and patterns of behavior actors for the most part intuitively or automatically associate with different types of leaders.*

Cultural models, like language, are both persistent and modifiable. When concepts or mental connections are intuitive, they tend to persist because most people most of the time have little inclination to engage in the tough, imaginative work to alter them. Nevertheless, people are sometimes creative and indeed do, just as they sometimes coin new turns of phrase, invent new metaphorical connections, and otherwise find new ways of saying things. Regarding cultural models, as time goes on, people associate new traits with a particular type of leader, or forget old

connections.

One final point: models do not flatly determine how people think because at any given time, different models may apply to a particular case. Thus, given a particular leader, such as Vice-Chancellor Barzinji of Zagros State University, thoughts of him might cue different cultural models for different people and with different degrees of elaboration. Thus some actors respected him as the WISE OUTSIDER, while a larger group perceived him as if he were AN OUTSIDER WHO PLUNDERS US or BAD AGHA. It is even possible for one person to shift from one model to another in their perception of a particular leader, depending on context or circumstances.

4 The Three Cultural Models of Authority Figures

A cultural models approach rejects traditional *holistic* views of culture that treat the culture of a people as some kind of harmonious whole: logically coherent or normatively consistent (cf. Bennardo and Munck 2014:17). Rather, to take a cultural models approach mandates a broad-scoped license to find in a population a range of models that may have emerged at different times, proceeded via importation from other societies, merged with other models, and transmuted as a result of creative efforts of individuals: in short, from the vagaries and contingencies of history. Since adherence to cultural models is mostly intuitive and automatic, there is every reason to think that contradictory models co-exist, giving rise to conflicts, contestations, misunderstandings, and feelings of exasperation toward the opinions and attitudes of one's countrymen and peers. Whereas no empirical warrant justifies the assumption of logical coherence or normative

consistency in a population, group or community's repertoire of cultural schemas and representations, empirical evidence of those conflicts, contestations, and so forth, is never difficult to drum up.

Given such a *pluralist* conception of culture within a society, I assume that contemporary Kurds entertain a host of different models of authority and leadership. Some carry more weight than others inasmuch as they are more widely distributed and come into play in a wider range of contexts than others. Based on my experience at a Kurdish university, and my investigations of historical documents, fiction, contemporary political, I have so far identified three models whose recurrence is substantial enough to suggest that they carry significant influence in current affairs in Kurdish politics and society.

In this section, I provide an overview of these three models that I already identified: 1. the BEST AMONG US or the GOOD AGHA, 2. the ONE WHO PLUNDERS US or the BAD AGHA, and 3. the WISE, SYMPATHETIC OUTSIDER. It is premature to speculate on how tight a grip each of these models holds on the minds of Kurds, or on how strongly they shape the conduct of leaders, followers, and resistors. My sense is that all three count for much. In the subsequent section, I provide evidence that the second model does indeed carry much resonance in Kurdish culture today inasmuch as it recurs in a surprising variety of contexts. Seeing as other models are no doubt waiting to be discovered, my account understates the pluralism that I presume prevails in Kurdish society today.

The best among us or the Good Agha

The distinction Hay drew between the "good agha" and the "bad agha" in his published account (rather than archival one quoted above) is still the clearest in the literature:

> The position of the chief varies greatly in different tribes. In the remoter mountains, though granted the most ungrudging obedience, he is distinctly one with the tribesmen, the leading member of a family which has won its headship though military prowess. Lower down he often belongs to an entirely separate caste, and comes from a different stock to the tribesmen. ... [In the larger tribes that are divided into sections], the sections [often] represent the original owners of the soil, while the present chiefs belong to powerful families who have invaded their domains and seized their lands. (Hay 1921:65)

The Good Agha was the superior insider who earned his position through military prowess. Such PROWESS is far from irrelevant today. The President of the Kurdistan Region and head of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, Masoud Barzani, grew up as a peshmerga in the mountains, and is the scion of a long line of war heroes. Jalal Talabani, the founder and longtime head of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (the other leading political party), as well as the President of Iraq from 2003 to 2012, also spent decades as a peshmerga. The head of the lead opposition party, Newshirwan Mustafa, also cut his teeth a guerrilla fighter in the mountains. In public discourse, certainly, the mental connection between leadership and military prowess of the *tribe* has become inhibited inasmuch as Kurds are disinclined to think of anything associated with tribes as such when they talk about their national leaders. So in recent decades Kurds have in effect modified

this association between the BEST AMONG US authority figure and military prowess, in effect replacing it with what I might call PATRIOTIC FERVOR.

Another concept that the authority figure of the BEST AMONG US type strongly potentiates is GENEROSITY. Leach, in one of the first professional ethnographic accounts of Kurds in Iraq, found that the raison d'être of the village (*gund*) agha was to keep up the guesthouse through generosity and hospitality (esp. [1940] 2004:28). Owning land and extracting the equivalent of rent through various payments from what Leach construed to be tenants facilitated the aghas capacity to be generous. As Leach heard through the Balik tribal district, it was so important for the agha to be generous and hospitable in his running the village guesthouse, that without doing so he could not be a proper "man" (*piyaw*). Such an agha enhanced his prestige if he was so benevolent in providing for guests and sanctuary-seekers that he brought his own lifestyle down to the level of ordinary folk: "the more the Agha can persuade his neighbours that he is being made bankrupt by the lavishness of his hospitality the greater will be his reputation" (*Ibid.*: 29).

Aside from living up to the virtue of being a real man through his hospitality, there is further evidence that the Good Agha's demonstrations of prowess and hospitality were linked. Yalman, in a study based on fieldwork near Diyarbekir in Turkish (North) Kurdistan, seconded Leach's claim that GENEROSITY was at the pinnacle of the good agha's virtues, but he added that it is coupled with the striving to be a hero in a local, popular saying: "*Agalık vermekle, Yigidlik vurmakla olur.*('You must give to be an Aga, and you must kill to be a Hero.')" (Yalman 1971:189).

As one might expect, the values of generosity and hospitality are very strong in Kurdish society generally (e.g. Sweetnam 2004:7–58). So how is the association between a Good Agha and these

values any different from that between any ordinary person and them?

Ayoub Barzani furnishes a nice example. He tells the story of Sultan Agha Birsiyavi, who felt so ashamed that his daughter had picked two pears from a peasant's tree, that he slaughtered a billy goat, and distributed its meat to villagers, while taking the unusual step of forbidding it to his own family (A. Bārzānī 2010:50). Rather than displaying generosity and hospitality in a manner expected of any ordinary person, an agha of the BEST AMONG US variety is liable to exhibit an AMPLIFIED SENSE OF GENEROSITY. The willingness to punishing his own family more severely than he would have punished others for the same crime, suggests that Sultan Agha Birsiyavi exhibited what might be called EXEMPLARY ORDINARINESS/HUMILITY.

More deserves to be said about this EXEMPLARY ORDINARINESS/HUMILITY. In December 2011, along with some British and Kurdish colleagues, I met a man in the countryside south of Slêmānī whom they described to me in advance as a "good Agha". While we sat together in his guesthouse (diwan), Shawkat Agha (a pseudonym) struck me as a humble man who made no demands at all for deference. In the course of conversation he made an important point about his relations with his own people. I asked him about the political affiliations of his followers. He explained that many of them, because of their encounters with Western societies, had higher aspirations for Kurdish society than their parents and forbears. They were likely, he thought, to vote for the new opposition party, Gorran. As for himself, in spite of the disapproval he registered for Jalal Talabani, then the Iraqi President and leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), he planned on voting for the PUK. Why? As a lifelong comrade in arms of Talabani, through thick and thin, he had, like any Kurd, to remain loyal to his friend. He had to live up to the traditional

Kurdish norm of loyalty. He could not be an exception to that important norm. That was it and that was that. But, he added, what was so special about him that he had a right to complain about the thoughtful political judgments of his tribal fellows?

For a different type of example of this EXEMPLARY ORDINARINESS/HUMILITY, consider Zuhdi al-Dahoodi's treatment of one of the characters in his epic novel, *Aṭwal ʿām*. Shaykh Zorab, the patriarch of his tribe (the equivalent of a tribal agha), is a man susceptible to ordinary regrets, of longings for women whom he had loved in vain, as reflected through his recurrent encounters in his dreams with afrit, or fairies, such as the afrit princess Fay (eg. al-Dāwūdī [1994] 2008:55–56).

The politician mentioned earlier, Rafiq Hilmi, provides a nice illustration of two other qualities that Kurds recurrently associate with aghas or other leaders whom they are fond of, of the BEST AMONG US type of authority figure. Here is how he described Shaykh Maʿruf al-Barzinji, the grandfather of Shaykh Mahmoud, the first governor to serve under the British Mandate after World War I:

> [He was famous for being a righteous man and believer in God.] For that reason the people of Kurdistan looked upon him with great respect, adoration and reverence, so much so that many people in rural Kurdistan and tribal followers sang his praises, talked of his great honour and wisdom, and swore oaths by his name. ... That reverence made the descendants of the family equally well respected and revered, and has resulted in fame and fortune for them. They are, therefore, held in the same esteem as Sheikh Ahmed himself [Shaykh Ahmad al-Jilani, the legendary medieval founder of the Qadiriya Sufi Order]. This adoration and reverence has trickled down

to his sons and grand sons, in particular, to Sheikh *Mustafa Naqeeb* and *Sheikh Sa'id*, the father of Sheikh Mahmud. (Hilmi [1956–1957] 2007:71)

Without being a holy man in any sense himself, Shaykh Mahmoud was the beneficiary of the reverence people felt for his grandfather. He partook of his family's INHERITED RESPECT/HONOR. I cannot elaborate on the point here, except to say that such a legacy of adoration typically includes the belief on the part of ordinary people that such a leader exhibits PERSONAL PIETY, without ostentatiously displaying it. Supporters of Iraqi Kurdistan's current, controversial President, Masoud Barzani, often draw attention to the "fact" that he is a personally religious Sufi, without ever claiming any status as a religious leader.

So far I have identified the following attributes of the GOOD AGHA, the BEST AMONG US leader, including PROWESS/PATRIOTIC FERVOR, an AMPLIFIED SENSE OF GENEROSITY, EXEMPLARY ORDINARINESS/HUMILITY, INHERITED RESPECT/HONOR, and PERSONAL PIETY. This is only part of the network of associations of this type of leader. Drawing now on al-Dahoodi's novel, mentioned above, I briefly allude to three other features that "come with the package".

First, a function that Leach and others associate with aghas, especially ones at higher levels of social organization than the village, such as the clan or tribe is the arbitration of disputes. It is often the case that these higher-level leaders are simultaneously village aghas and so sometimes this function is in addition to keeping up the guesthouse. Shaykh Zorab, the de facto leader of his tribe in the Garmian region (which al-Dahoodi leaves unnamed), spells out to a visiting Ottoman official, a *yuzbashi*, who has come to formalize local structures of authority, the role of the unofficial tribal leader — actually himself:

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As for the issue of the *rayyis* (chief) of the ashiret (tribe) appropriating land, in truth I don't understand such a thing. Wadi Kufran [the tribe's territory] is sovereign over our ashiret and our ashiret doesn't have a rayyis, and it does not want it to have a rayyis. Indeed, the oldest man among us [himself] is the one who advises us in the the settling of affairs within the ashiret, after bringing our affairs up in front of the shaykhs. ([1994] 2008:11–12)

While illustrating Shaykh Zorab's HUMILITY, the passage stresses the settling of affairs in a way that is FAIR to all. With his commitment to the entire tribe, the oldest man no longer pushes his own greedy self-interest but rather looks out for the FAIRNESS of the whole tribe. al-Dahoodi's narrative as a whole reinforces this point.

Second, the BEST AMONG US leader comes across to his followers as OMNISCIENT. As the narrator puts it:

... [T]he members of the ashirat knew that Shaykh Zorab knew most of the demons (*saᶜālī* and *ṭanāṭil*) and their secrets, moods, and behaviors, their evil and their good qualities, and what places they focus on, how one can escape them or drive them out, or even catch them, though they can always slip out of one's hand (19)

This theme of OMNISCIENCE is pervasive in discussions of Middle Eastern leaders. Although it is not always seen as a good thing, such as when it accompanies accusations of spying, it often comes into play to express both the fear and respect that followers show toward certain leaders. Vice-Chancellor Barzinji of Zagros State University, who I will describe as a prototypical contemporary example of a Bad Agha, did have his supporters who habitually expressed admiration for how he

understood everything that was going on.

The final trait associated with the BEST AMONG US leader is an uncompromising commitment to TRUTHFULNESS. As al-Dahoodi's narrator ascribed to the thoughts of Karim, Shaykh Zorab's youngest son: "It is impossible for his father to lie. Didn't he see the djinniya with his own eyes on the night of [Karim's son,] Rustam's birthday?" (al-Dāwūdī [1994] 2008:55) If he claimed to see a female djinn, there is no question he must have. As a Good Agha, Shaykh Zorab comes across throughout the novel as disingenuous and incapable of scheming.

The one who plunders us or the Bad Agha

If one thought like an old structuralist, one might take all the traits I have found associated with the Good Agha and invert them to model the Bad Agha. Alas, things are not so simple. It is necessary to see how Kurds actually talk about such a different type of leader, whom they not only understand in very different terms, but also have a thoroughly negative attitude towards.

To bring out in sharper relief the difference between the GOOD AGHA and the BAD AGHA, I return to Shawkat Agha, who I mentioned briefly above. During that same encounter, he impressed upon us how exasperated he was with the corruption of Kurdish leaders nowadays, by recounting recent visits he payed to two top Kurdish authority figures, the governor of Slemani and President Talabani (of Iraq), both of whom he claimed to have been longtime chums with, having fought alongside them in the mountains. I paraphrase what he told us (in decent English):

> I have met personally with both of my old friends recently. To each I told them that
> I just don't get it. In the old days, if our leaders had pocketed the money with which

the ordinary people have entrusted them, we would have run them out of the village, literally. Yet you guys, the entire class of our leaders today, do indeed pocket our money and live your own lavish lives. And you do it openly and shamelessly! How do you have the nerve to do it? Both of them just sat there, stony-faced, and did not answer.

I cannot judge the veracity of the good agha's testimony, but there you have the stark contrast between the GREED and GRASPING SELF AGGRANDIZEMENT of the ONE WHO PLUNDERS US and AMPLIFIED SENSE OF GENEROSITY and HUMILITY of the BEST AMONG US leader.

The theme of the Bad Agha plundering or robbing the people out of self-interest recurs so often that I have promoted the "ONE WHO PLUNDERS US" to the label of the type. If we return to Rupert Hay, in the next passage after he spelled out the Good vs. Bad Agha distinction, we see this centrality of the theme of plundering on the part of an outsider:

> The position of the chief varies greatly in different tribes. In the remoter mountains, though granted the most ungrudging obedience, he is distinctly one with the tribesmen, the leading member of a family which has won its headship though military prowess. Lower down he often belongs to an entirely separate caste, and comes from a different stock to the tribesmen. ... [In the larger tribes that are divided into sections], the sections [often] represent the original owners of the soil, while the present chiefs belong to powerful families who have invaded their domains and seized their lands. (Hay 1921:65)

The Good Agha, who is "one with his tribesmen," is THE BEST AMONG US, whereas the Bad Agha

is among those "who have invaded [the] domains [of those who have later become his subjects] and seized their lands," and has thus become the ONE WHO PLUNDERS US.

It is striking that Leach, who was obsessed with what was "really going on" in the social organization of the Balik Kurds, stared at Hay's distinction between the good agha who is at one with his people vs. the bad one who treats them as objects of exploitation, and totally missed the cultural significance of it (Leach [1940] 2004:22–25). He argued that Hay underestimated how intertwined even bad aghas were kinship-wise with their villages (sing. *gund*) and clans (sing. *tayfe*), and overestimated brigandage and . In a celebrated work, van Bruinessen finds that Leach failed to realize that even at the *tayfe* level, unrelated families could be from different kinship groups (1992:63).[7] More importantly, Leach roundly faulted Hay for taking too seriously all the talk he heard about brigandage and plundering:

> the unbiased observer cannot avoid the conclusion that most of the more spectacular
>
> exploits of Kurdish brigandage are products of the Kurds' own imagination. Seen in
>
> their proper scale these warlike activities can never have been more than an exciting
>
> gloss upon the normal balanced cycle of agricultural economics (24).

Here is the rub: contrary to Leach, Kurds act in terms of their imaginations, not in terms of the sort of demographic calculations Leach relied on. Kurds act upon their understandings of

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7. My own researches in another part of Kurdistan, Garmian, southeast of Kirkuk, back up van Bruinessen's criticism even more dramatically. I elicited from village aghas (there called *encumen* [sing.]) "spontaneous kin listings", in which uninterruptedly they listed all those they could think of who were related to them. I then went back over each name with them to see how they were related to each one on the list. In several cases, the "encumens" listed members of his village whom he admitted had no kinship relation.

whether a leader follows the mold of a brigand, not upon a scholar's assessments of whether the leader in truth acts as a brigand or some modern equivalent thereof.

Leach's celebrated student, Fredrik Barth[8], grasped the pivotal importance of the distinction. On the one hand, Jaf village aghas ruled by virtue of the goodwill of his followers, after the male members of his village appointed him through consensus (Barth 1953:47). Such a type of agha fits the type of the Good Agha. On the other hand, many of the Hamawand were what Barth dubbed "conquering" or "brigand aghas". As Barth recounted the process, one tribal segment would raid, conquer and pillage a non-tribal tenant population, and impose over it one of its junior aghas. With support from his fellow tribesmen, he would exploit the local population by extracting as much wealth as possible from it. The bad conquering agha — as a Bad Agha — would act out of his own and his own tribe's interest, not the client population's (1953:54ff., 115). From the point of view of those in the conquered villages, it is easy to see how the agha imposed on them fits the model of the ONE WHO PLUNDERS US.

Based on interviews with villagers in the Barzan region, Ayoub Barzani, the Kurdish historian, treats one Fattah Agha Hirni, as a prototypical "bad agha". From the Pinyanish tribe, he inherited his father's power upon his death in 1880, and expanded his power (literally "thorn") over various tribes in the region. With the help of his deputies, he was very resourceful in claiming a share of all kinds of wealth among the other tribes he ruled over. He was so intimidating that when he built a castle in Baz and ordered the local villagers to carry ice down from high up in the

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8. It is worth pointing out to non-anthropologists that both Leach (1910–1989) and Barth (1928–) both became among the very few leading social anthropologists of their generations, after publishing the initial works on Kurds.

mountains for his use, nobody dared disobey him (A. Bārzānī 2010:48).

Not only does Ayoub Barzani reinforce the idea that the Bad Agha exploits or PLUNDERS those over whom he rules, but also underlines and his GRASPING SELF-AGGRANDIZEMENT.

As opposed to the Good Agha, who is an insider, the BEST AMONG US, the Bad Agha is what I call an OUT-OF-STEP, LOWLY OUTSIDER. Kurds assign this trait to leaders whom they do not like with startling recurrence, as will be seen both here and in the subsequent section. An initial example reveals itself again in Ayoub Barzani's historical account. This one concerns Nurallah Agha, who was the son of Fattah Agha Hirni, Barzani's prototypical Bad Agha whom I just discussed, and who was installed as a deputy agha over Sîrîby his uncle (and Fattah's Agha's brother). Barzani characterizes him as "a youth who makes an uncouth impression, spiteful, with limited thinking powers, with whom there is no way to reach a mutual understanding, and has no sense of the meaning of flexibility or pliancy" (1980:114). With more than a dash of scorn, Barzani is suggesting, among other things, that this Nurallah Agha was distant and difficult to understand, and not to be trusted, echoing this theme of the LOWLY OUTSIDER. Furthermore, he attributes stupidity to him to underline how OUT-OF-STEP he is with the local norms of flexibility or pliancy.

Nikitine has reported on a story that he heard from Kurds about an agha, Mam Bapir, in the district of Zeybar that illustrates *both* the OUT-OF-STEPNESS OF A LOWLY OUTSIDER and SELF-AGGRANDIZEMENT (Nīkītīn [1956] 2007:152). The agha, who was rich yet stupid, went to the mosque to urge the imam to substitute his name for that of the Sultan in the Friday *khutba*. In exchange for such public recognition, he would convey 30 milk sheep to the imam. That Friday, unbeknownst to the everyone, a mullah from a neighboring village attended. When the time

came to mention the Sultan, the imam called out in Arabic, which none of the villagers knew at all. "Oh, Mam Bapir, you are a great liar. Your abode will be Hell, your fate miserable." The mullah screamed, "No! No! No!" But the imam continued on calmly in Arabic, "Shush, there are 30 sheep in this, 20 for me and 10 for you!" Anyway, the agha was beside himself that his name had replaced the Sultan's in the *khutba*, so he merrily went to the shepherd to have him pick out the 30 most excellent sheep for the imam.

There you have it: the agha is OUT-OF-STEP, LOWLY OUTSIDER with the people of the village inasmuch as he does not understand what goes on. Simultaneously he is comically SELF-AGGRANDIZING.

There is an important tangle of traits associated with the Bad Agha that is difficult to unravel. In Kurdish literature, one often finds the agha treated as a *mysterious* person, which is obviously related to the fact that Kurds understand him as an OUTSIDER. In a story by the well-known Kurdish author, Fadhil Karim Ahmad, the narrator tells a story in which the narrator characterizes a *raʾīs*, either a "chief" of some sort or a "president" as mysterious inasmuch as he is UNPREDICTABLE. The *raʾīs* is coming to town to visit. Day in, day out, word comes that the president is arriving: "But nobody knows what day and hour he will arrive. The time of his arrival has become part of a tale of mystery that until now nobody has been able to crack" (Aḥmad 2009:41).

What belongs to the same cluster of meanings is the Bad Agha's perceived propensity to RUMORMONGER. While the Good Agha is the paragon of truthfulness, the Bad Agha inveterately twists the truth. Ayoub Barzani, for example, cites many examples of enemy aghas spreading rumors as part of their struggle to maintain authority. In his account of the bad agha Fattah Agha's

struggles against Shaykh Muhammad Barzan, here is how he reports the agha's smear campaign:

> Fattah Agha sent a report to the Wali of Mosul, accusing Shaykh [Muhammad] Barzan
> of deviating and departing from the main path of the True Religion ... [He said that]
> Shaykh Muhammad [Barzan] always has friction with the people; he goads them to
> disobey and to challenge the authorities, instigating resistance, spreading dissen-
> sion, and filling the souls of his Sufi followers (*murīdīn*) with the spirit of enmity
> against the administration. (A. Bārzānī 2010:42)

The author makes it clear that he sees the entire report as lies, for he takes pains in his narrative to highlight the Good-Agha-type Shaykh Barzan's PIETY, and advocacy of peace and tolerance.

A classic Kurdish story by ʿAlā al-Dīn Sajjādī, one of the founders of modern Kurdish literature, brings together the various strands of this tangle of traits. The story is about a local agha who barges in uninvited with his horsemen to a village wedding, right at the most joyous point, the dancing of the dabka, catching the celebrants unawares. When he shows up, all the wedding-goers become frightened and scatter about. Rather than doing anything terrible, however, the agha addresses the celebrants publicly, proclaims how different he is from other aghas because he cares only about their welfare, and assures them that he has been a strong advocate for them at the district council. The villagers listen, nervously. The narrator then tells us that this incident happened many years ago, when he was still a youth, and years later, after he became educated, he met other members of that district council, who confided to him that that agha of his was so uneducated and ignorant that he could not understand a word that transpired during the meetings, and never opened his mouth over a period of many years (Sajjādī 1985).

As presented by Sajjādī, the villagers know very little about their agha's activities (SECRECY), they cannot predict when he will accost them (UNPREDICTABILITY), and they are uneasy about the veracity of what he tells them. As Nuri, the critic, tells us, the villagers sense that even though what the agha impresses upon them his interest in them, his speech is all about extracting whatever benefits he can out of them (hence LYING) (2010). Again, the story creates an aura of mystery, that underlying epistemic malaise despite appearances of rejoicing, that are all part of that train of associations that potentiates what might be called the SECRETIVENESS, UNPREDICTABILITY, RUMORMONGERING, LYING cluster of associated representations

Sajjādī's story about this local agha who shows up uninvited to a village wedding also activates the trait of GRASPING AGGRANDIZEMENT, if we go by the interpretation of it by the Kurdish literary critic, Jamal Nuri:

> Even though [the agha] knows perfectly well that he is the cause of the anxieties of the people, nay the devastation of their lives, he persists in enumerating his own merits and how much he shares in the details of their lives, even though in actuality he seldom shows up among them. (Nūrī 2010)

On multiple levels, Sajjādī cues the cultural model of the BAD AGHA, AN OUTSIDER WHO PLUNDERS US.

The last trait I will discuss that Kurds recurrently associate with a Bad Agha might be characterized as VENGEFULNESS. Here is one example. Shakir Fattah (1914–1988), a respected Kurdish government official and writer until he was martyred, explained that it was actually a known pattern for tribal chiefs to resort to vengeance when they could not solve problems through the

enforcement of customary law:

> The chief of the tribe normally tries to solve problems that occur between individuals of the tribe in accord with tribal or religious traditions. As for matters that touch upon his own interest, honor, or career (lit.: life), he will not be bound by any tribal or religious law when he solves it. His single course of action in solving it will be taking revenge. (Fattah in Khaṣbāk (1972) 2005:381; my translation)

In his ruminations on traditional leadership, Fattah found that vengefulness played a key role, when tribal resources, the one a Good Chief or Agha will depend on, are exhausted. Consistent with what I have said about cognitive models, thinking about a traditional leader potentiates the concept of VENGEFULNESS. Here, Fattah reflected on it to the point that he suggested that vengefulness comes into play when being a good leader seemed inadequate.

Space does not permit an exhaustive inventory of traits that I have found to be associated with Kurdish leaders of the Bad Agha type. An obvious one is CRONYISM, which approximates what Kurds (and Arabs) call *waste*. Kurds talk about this in so many different ways in connection with corrupt leadership that it deserves a separate paper. I will say only that in the Kurdish context, leaders build up a special kind of mutual investment that is often motivated by a fear of betrayal. Two leaders have damaging knowledge of each other, so each keeps such knowledge to himself. Americans might think of this as a special brand of "log-rolling".

To summarize: the traits cued by the thoughts of a unlikable leader, BAD AGHA WHO PLUNDERS US, include GREED, GRASPING SELF-AGGRANDIZEMENT, being a LOWLY, OUT-OF-STEP OUTSIDER, SECRETIVENESS/UNPREDICTABILITY/RUMORMONGERING, VENGEFULNESS, and CRONYISM. These

traits contrast dramatically from the model of the GOOD AGHA, THE BEST AMONG US, but not in a clear binary manner, in which all the traits in one model represent the clear opposites of those in the other.

The wise outsider

I make mention of one other cultural model of an authority figure to stress that not all leaders have any cognitive link to AGHAS. Hilmi has a curious discussion of Ali Shafiq, known better as Özdemir. He was a Colonel in the "Militias", an irregular army allied with Mustafa Kemal during the final days of the decline of the Ottoman Empire around 1920. He headed a contingent, overwhelmingly of Kurds, in what is now the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. He was a rival of the incipient British colonial officers, and for a time had a following of perhaps the majority of Kurdish tribes in the Region. Hilmi had a poor opinion of the troops that Özdemir led: they "resembled a group of cut-throats rather than a military force" (Hilmi [1956–1957] 2007:277). And he was very much the outsider, being "of the Czerkes race, and of Egyptian roots" (*Ibid.*). But notice how positively Hilmi characterizes him:

Ali Shafiq alias Özdemir was a truly clever and well educated man. He knew the temperament of the Kurds and was familiar with their tribal constitution. He was a medium-height smart and attractive looking man. In military uniform he appeared as a well groomed Turkish officer and when you heard him you saw him in the light of a literary figure or a man of high education.

From the point of view of running tribal relations he was much more successful

than many of the British political officers. He had understood the temperament and

moods of the tribal chiefs and had turned many of them into close supporters. ...

   ...

Özdemir's real brilliance was in the fact that in addition to the little aid he was

receiving from Mustafa Kamal he was able to gather four times that from within the

region under his control and besides providing food and clothing for the cut-throats

who aided him he would also provide a comfortable living for those who would escape

from the British to join him. In short he administered the region in such a way that

was well suited for that day and was unmatched by any ... [sic] (278–279)

As evidence that Hilmi was characterizing Özdemir schematically here, what he says does not

match how he describes Özdemir in an off-hand way later in his book: "[He] was not less treach-

erous and deceitful than the British" (374). So even though Hilmi (at times at least) harbored a

negative attitude toward him, he still was inclined to characterize him in a formulaicly positive

way. We have a whole slew of qualities in Hilmi's description that might well be part of a cultural

model. A number of them cluster around a single theme I gloss as WISE: He was "clever", "well

educated", "a man of high education", "a literary figure", and he was smart enough to administer

the region in a way "unmatched by any" and "well suited for the day."

   Let me lend credence to my suggestion that there is a third model of authority, the WISE

OUTSIDER. Soon after my arrival in Kurdistan in March 2008 to teach sociology at Zagros State

University, it surprised me that on a number of occasions (budding) journalists would show up

at my office to gauge my opinion on some matter of importance to Kurdistan, and would then

publish it up in the press. The most extensive attention I got at this point was from a Kurdish Democratic Party (government-backed) journalist who brought me to an elaborate little cultural center, rounded up a student to interpret for me, and interviewed me for about 90 minutes on tape about the problem of honor killings of unmarried women, probing me again and again on the issue of how this social problem out to be addressed. Soon thereafter a long summary of our interview appeared in a glitzy government magazine, with color photographs of me. At first I felt very proud that the word had gotten out that I knew a thing or two about issues of honor in the Middle East, until I learned that every other expatriate with a college education who shows up in Kurdistan was receiving the same treatment, provided that journalists found out about their presence. Nevertheless, in a surprising number of contexts, Kurds took my opinions on the issues of the day as far more authoritative than I ever imagined they deserve.

What I did not get until years later when I started to work on this paper that the deference I received was all the playing out of a particular, persistent cultural model of authority.

5   The Bad Agha, Baʿthism, "Little Saddams", and a University President

To lend credence to my claims that the three cultural models I have identified are *recurrent*, I marshal in evidence regarding perceptions of more recent leaders that Kurds have had to contend with, none of whom Kurds in any routine sense would label as "aghas". First, I have been struck by the parallels between the way the historical and fictional materials I cite characterize

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bad aghas and the way Iraqi Kurds talk and write about Saddam Hussein. Many vivid examples of this arise in the Kurdish writer, Hama Dostan's fictionalized biography of Saddam, *Saddam Land* (2007). Second, Iraqi Kurds (and Iraqis in general) do not see Saddam as an isolated type. A common refrain you hear around Kurdistan since 2003, when Saddam was overthrown, is "We got rid of Saddam, only to find ourselves ruled by a thousand little Saddams." Not infrequently, Kurds accuse their leaders, both big and small, of being Little Saddams, notwithstanding how many Kurds register approval of the same leaders, typically with the glowing terms that are associated with the Good Agha. Masoud Barzani, the longtime President of the Kurdistan Federal Region of Iraq, is the subject of spirited debate regarding whether he is a Little Saddam, as are other lower-level leaders. Third, Haval Barzinji, the Vice Chancellor of Zagros State University, with whom I had much first-hand experience, is a good example of a leader who "earned" the accusation of being a Little Saddam, though, to be sure, he also had his supporters who balked at such an accusation. The bulk of the evidence I marshal in as contemporary examples of recurrent activation of the BAD AGHA cultural model apply to Vice Chancellor Barzinji.

I just noted that Kurds seldom draw any explicit connection between leaders they dislike and "bad aghas". Let me add that a word they frequently use to cue what *I* call the BAD AGHA WHO PLUNDERS US model is "Baʿthist". I was struck by how often Kurds use that word to characterize leaders even if they do not literally accuse them of having been active members of the Baʿth party.

In case anyone is skeptical about just how strongly some Kurds feel about their Little Saddams, and how closely they identify them with the fallen Baʿthist regime, I open this section by quoting some excerpts from a newspaper article about Zagros State, written in Kurdish, by a local ex-staff

member.

[When one thinks about what has become of Zagros State University, what] comes to mind is an analogy: A beautiful young lady is kidnapped from her family's safe abode only to be abused as a prostitute and be taken under the custody of an arrogant, immoral Baʿthist who does not have any values or ethics. ... [T]hose who are aware of her perilous situation are a group of honorable, civilized professionals who abide by the rule of law ...

Whenever [they] have approached anyone [in an influential position] regarding this painful situation they have received the same response: [what happened at the University] is not unusual in distressed Iraqi Kurdistan Region and it fits the pattern of many other issues over a long period of time.

...

This group of [honorable] persons, which is not small in number, were either dismissed or fled in a way similar to soldiers fleeing Saddam's military camps ...

...

... [W]hat we have in [Zagros State University] is indeed a Saddam-era military camp, or a Fascist Baʿthist place that is run by a group of uncivilized, vulgar Baʿthist orphans.

...

Nowadays, the professor [Haval Barzinji] who is the Vice Chancellor of the University and his aide are running [Zagros State] as exactly the same type of mechanism

as during Saddam's regime. They believe in spreading lies upon lies about Zagros

State to the point that they believe their own lies.

This articulate Kurd, "Soran", leaves no doubt that he construes the actions of Barzinji and his aide as fitting a cultural pattern.

I now illustrate my method with some of the representations (or traits) activated by attentional focus especially on Vice Chancellor Barzinji in particular, complemented by some remarks on the attributed of these traits to other Little Saddams or Saddam himself.

Being an Out-of-Step, Lowly Outsider

Professor Barzinji left Iraq for graduate school in 1981, and then spent 28 years away from his country of birth. He grew up in Kirkuk and went on to study at a university in Baghdad. I found it striking how often my Kurdish colleagues harped on their perception of him being not one of them. "He is different from us." "He is a Kurd, but he does not sound like us." "His Kurdish is a bit off or rusty or something." "He seems more like an Arab, maybe because of all that time in Baghdad." This last judgment was reinforced by the perceived fact that he recruited the new head of the IT Department, an Arab from Baghdad, who, like him, had been in the diaspora for nearly thirty years. While he was new on the job as Vice Chancellor, these assertions struck me as neutral in tone. As he gradually came across to more and more of the university staff as authoritarian, such assertions acquired a more and more bitter edge, in spite of the steady improvement in his Kurdish speaking skills.

Two years later, long after he drove most of the academic staff out of the university, Btwen, a

Kurdish lady who had been a high-ranking non-academic administrator of the university before Barzinji and the Governing Board had unceremoniously fired her, startled me with what she described as an unexpected discovery she made while inquiring about his background and upbring. I paraphrase:

> His family name — you know that is a very respected, distinguished name among Kurds; the Barzinji family were leaders among Kurds for many generations — that is not really his name. He adopted that name. He is an imposter. He is not really a Barzinji. It turns out he is from a very low family, from a bad neighborhood in Kirkuk.

I cannot judge the veracity of Btwen's claims, but that is immaterial. The point is that many came to perceive Professor Barzinji as a mysterious, shady OUT-OF-STEP, LOWLY OUTSIDER.

If you read the literature on Saddam Hussein, you will find similar perceptions of being a stranger, an outsider, of a shadowy background. Take for example the words of a well-known Sunni Arab novelist, Muhsin al-Ramli, himself from a village in northern Iraq, as was Saddam, words that the author put in the mouth of a young peasant. She says of the unnamed leader of Iraq, unmistakably alluding to Saddam: She is disturbed by how her father and brother's relationship has broken down as a result of their divergent attitudes toward "the leader", who is obviously Saddam Hussein. She confronts her brother and asks him, "How does so distant and strange a man destroy your relationship with your father ... ?" (Al-Ramli 2003:54; al-Ramlī (2000) 2005:17). Later, speaking to her young son, she blames him for destroying her family: "That distant stranger, the intruder: 'He has made us into scattered crumbs.' " (Al-Ramli 2003:107; al-Ramlī (2000) 2005:31).

The sense here is of a man of whom people know too little, lacks connection with people, and threatens their very sense of belonging. He is inscrutable. He is like an imposter who has usurped power from the outside.

Dostan, in his fictionalized biography of Saddam, portrays Saddam in detail as being from a destitute, fatherless family on the fringes of the Tikrit district.

I noted above that some see President Masoud Barzani as a Little Saddam. As the son of Mula Mustafa Barzani, the great revolutionary hero among Iraqi Kurds, one might wonder how he could be perceived as a mysterious stranger. Yet notice how one "Kāḏim", commenting in the pan-Arab online newspaper, *Elaph*, dubbed Masoud "a little dictator", and managed to paint him in the terms of a lowly outsider:

> ... Barzani and his tyranical family also plundered the riches of the region with the help of his family's armed militias and with the clear approval of America. — Masud transformed from a destitute person living off crumbs in Iran into a billionaire and a spigot of oil on a barge, while the Kurds live on the threshold of poverty. (`http://www.elaph.com/Web/news/2012/7/751393.html`)

Like Dostan's Saddam, Kāḏim's Masoud Barzani is from the lower fringes of society, from far away. In branding the President as "a spigot of oil," Kāḏim also connects with the character trait of GRASPING SELF-AGGRANDIZEMENT.

We thus see that there is evidence of congruence among those associations cued separately by Vice Chancellor Barzinji as an example of a Little Saddam, Saddam Hussein himself, and President Masoud Barzani — all three.

Secretiveness, Unpredictability, Rumormongering, Lying

Not long after Professor Barzinji took office, the university community was abuzz with chatter about how the new Vice Chancellor would never document the reasons for any of his decisions, or any aspect of the process by which he reached them. One of his first decisions, which seemed to "come out of the blue", was that no instructor would be allowed to order more than two books per course. In spite of many inquiries, he simply refused to explain why to anybody. Much later, when he started firing people left and right, he simply never provided reasons publically, neither verbally nor in writing. Whenever the Director of Human Resources had to call a staff member to present them with termination papers, he never knew the reason for the termination except that Barzinji ordered it. And everybody believed he did not know.

After his first firing, of a popular instructor, about 10 graduate students from the instructor's department (more than half the total) burst into his office and demanded an explanation. Reportedly, he would not budge, repeating again and again, "I do not have to explain." He would also add, "Besides, I did not fire him; the Governing Board did." Nobody seems to have believed that, including the secretary who had taken notes at the meeting where Barzinji announced the decision — and prohibited her from recording what transpired at this meeting with the students. Many other students and staff confronted him the next week or so about the reasons for the termination — same answer.

One of Barzinji's habits was that he would kept everyone guessing about when they might be able to meet with him. Very seldom did he make appointments, but from time to time he would pop in unannounced to a faculty member's office. When he did that to me, he came to make the

point that he never wanted any suggestions for improving the university to be raised in group emails. If I had any ideas or complaints, I should discuss them confidentially with him.

Barzinji's secretive ways were shared by other powers-that-be at the university. Thus it was well over a year and half before even the names of the members of the Governing Board leaked out (with the source being a disgruntled former employee). Students from time to time distributed anonymous open letters expressing their grievances with the university administration. In one of them, the students expressed frustration with the Board: "We do not know what they are doing or thinking." They referred to the members as "those ever sleeping people" (students letter May 19, 2011).

Just as staff and students complained that so much of what was going on at the university was being kept secret from them, they also complained that they were sick and tired of rumors and untruths. Staff routinely branded Barzinji as an inveterate liar — behind his back of course. Let one example illustrate how inseparable what people perceive as Barzinji's "lying" is from SECRETIVENESS, UNPREDICTABILITY, AND RUMORMONGERING.

On the testimony of the secretary of the Governing Board, I heard that when Barzinji recommended the firing of one instructor at the university, Michael Lesser, he made the argument that the instructor had a long history of working with Iraqi Christians. He was an evangelical Christian, and he would spend his leisure time in the city's Christian neighborhood, agitating the residents against the Muslim Kurds. That was the charge, and since at that time rumors were rife in Iraqi Kurdistan about the presence of foreign evangelicals attempting to undermine Islam, and since none of the Board members knew one iota about Lesser, they accepted the story lock,

stock and barrel. This story got out slowly. Lesser did not wear his religion on his sleeve, but nevertheless it was well-known that he was Jewish and that he spent less time in the Christian neighborhood than most of his colleagues. Staff were hesitant about relaying the story because it seemed so preposterous.

A few months later, however, a rumor circulated around the university to the effect that Lesser had been deported because he had done something so horrible that nobody could say what it was, and nobody could say how this rumor started. In a group discussion on Facebook, this rumor came out again.

Barzinji added another twist. Sometime later a French journalist published a story about the travails of the university, in which he claimed that the University had not only dismissed Lesser but also suggested that it had him deported. The paper published a response from the university, which, though unsigned, was unmistakably in the writing style of Barzinji. The response stated that Lesser was deported for unethical behavior unrelated to his work at the university, but did not even hint at what that unethical behavior was, enshrouding the entire matter in even more obscurity. So far as I know, after many inquiries, nobody has ever divulged what the allegedly terrible thing Lesser did was.

Barzinji is not the only leader spewing out clouds of mystery and confusion, with nobody knowing what was happening, and with imaginations running wild to fill in the gaps. A number of staff members tried to make contact with a high-level government official, Tatarkhan Aqrawi, whom they heard had special influence at the university. I have heard of no less than six reports of contacts claiming to have met with Aqrawi about what was happening at the university, including

Lesser's dismissal. In every case, these contacts explained that "Kak (Mr.) Tatarkhan" made it clear that he was hearing about the case for the first time! Aqrawi himself has been described by many as another Little Saddam, though others describe him as a true "democrat". The point? *It seems impossible to know* exactly what is going on. Did these people really meet with Aqrawi or only with one of his aides? Who is telling the truth and who is lying?

A common theme of conversations I had with Kurds is this idea that you cannot tell what is true, what is false, and what is really going on. Sometimes people believe everything and sometimes they believe nothing. Such an atmosphere stifles initiative; people never know what to do.

This entire sense of epistemic angst corresponds to a cluster of closely related impressions that are associated with "Little Saddams".

One does not have to read much about Saddam and Baʿthism to sense that this same cluster of impressions is an integral part of "Saddamism". As Dostan put it about Saddam, "Saddam had an amazing ability to lie. He lied about everything and no one every really knew if he was telling the truth or not" (Dostan 2007:13).

Grasping Self-aggrandizement

Whether true or not, the story circulated shortly after Barzinji was hired that one of his first demands was that he be given the title "Vice-Chancellor", whereas his predecessors in the job took the more humble title of "Rector". Another one was that he demanded that he be the only one at the university who may be designated "Professor", and he insisted that all staff use that form

of address for him, regardless of whether it was in speaking or in writing. It was by no means the case that he had the most distinguished publishing record at the university, and everybody knew that. One of many other such behaviors that attracted notice was that in his email signature, he amended to "Professor Haval Barzinji" no less than *nine* acronyms indicating his degrees and professional affiliations.

The Irish journalist Richard Downes relates a story of his encounter, before the fall of Saddam, with the then Baʿthist Minister of Information, Naji al-Hadithi (Downes 2009:xviii–xx). The latter challenged Downes to a tennis match. Downes's Iraqi colleague, Sahdoun, admonished him to lose because the Minister was a poor loser: "I promise you. You do not want him as an enemy. He is close to Saddam and has a lot of experience." Once they started playing, Downes took note of how crummy a player al-Hadithi was, and how shamelessly he cheated. Downes deliberately threw the sets they played. Afterward, al-Hadithi beamed in triumph. After Downes acknowledged to Sahdoun that he just could not understand how this Baʿthist minister could take such pleasure from his patently spurious superiority, Sahdoun explained, "This is the way it is in Iraq."

Vengefulness

Fear of Vice Chancellor "getting angry" and taking revenge on faculty members for disagreeing publicly with him, or appearing to foil one of his initiatives, surfaced on many occasions during his tenure as top university official. To cite one of many examples: our Undergraduate Education Committee had an emergency session at one point to take up a proposal that the Chair received from Barzinji to reinstitute an instructor evaluation system. Several of us committee members

had objections to the proposed evaluation forms, and to the lack of sufficient safeguards of confidentiality. We wanted to delay our approval until after we had a chance to study the evaluation system and make appropriate modification. The Chair, an American, pushed very hard for "fast-track" approval. She explained to me in private that she was sure from her interactions with the Vice Chancellor and the Registrar, a Kurdish woman, that if we delayed approval, this would infuriate him, and that the consequences of his wrath would be unbearable for us. Furthermore, Kurdish staff members attributed several of the firings of both academic and non-academic staff to feelings of revenge on the part of either Barzinji or Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Teaching, Fawzi (another often described as a Little Saddam), for what they perceived as slights on their character.

The vengefulness of certain higher-level leaders in Iraqi Kurdistan is a familiar theme of independent journalists, but space does not permit discussion of that here. As for Saddam's personal vengefulness, this is very well known and Kurds still talk about it. Dostan, in his fictionalized biography of Saddam, imagines Saddam's reaction when members of the underground opposition during the reign of Abd al-Karim Qasim (1958–1963) recruited him to be one of Qasim's assassins:

> When Saddam was asked he said yes without any hesitation. He would take part in the attempt on al-Qasim's life — [H]e hated al-Qasim, it was al-Qasim's fault that he had not gotten into the military academy. Dostan (2007:38)

That Dostan offers this interpretation without any hard facts reinforces my contention that his attribution of vengefulness is in accord with a cultural model.

What Can this Example of Haval Barzinji Tell Us?

Before I answer the question of what my account of Vice Chancellor Barzinji tells us, I want to ward off a potential, grievous misunderstanding of my account. While I do suggest that in some ways there has been a relapse into authoritarianism, as exemplified by a reemergence of leaders of the OUTSIDER WHO PLUNDERS US type, I do not claim that such a relapse marks an unequivocal movement. Kurdistan is undergoing a variety of processes at once that may appear to be contradictory. Accompanying the creeping authoritarianism I allude to is also a growth of civil society institutions, indications of a widening of the public sphere, remarkable economic growth, and the surprising growth and routinization of a new political party, Gorran, all suggesting possible democratization. The high official I call Tatarkhan Aqrawi eventually fired Barzinji, even though for a time he disguised it as a promotion, however spurious (with a loss of pay and a de facto loss of influence).

Much less do I suggest that indications of a relapse into authoritarianism mark a fallback to "traditional" Kurdish society. I have already argued how any association of the Bad Agha model with tradition and the Good Agha model with modernity, or the vice versa, only serves to obscure matters. Both have, as I will elaborate in the next section, deep roots in Kurdish society, and both persist in contemporary "modern" Kurdish society.

The subject of my paper is Kurdish leadership and authority in the imagination, and how this impinges on behavior, not with any "objective" reality of Kurdish political structure. There always seem to be plural understandings of leadership, and this is certainly true of that of Vice Chancellor Barzinji, President Barzani, and Saddam Hussein. All have or have had genuine sup-

porters, which shows that these leaders cue the activation of character traits in other models besides those of the BAD AGHA WHO PLUNDERS US model.

However many Kurds (privately) accuse President Barzani of being a "Little Saddam", many others sincerely support him. Many routinely describe him as a fairminded, judicious person who masterfully balances various competing interests and has managed to keep the Iraqi Kurds walk on a tightrope between the conflicting interests of Turkey, Iran, the central Iraqi government in Baghdad, the United States, etc. This is in accord with the traits of both FAIRNESS and OMNISCIENCE associated with the Good Agha. They also see him as embodying the virtuous Kurdish traits associated with the Good Agha, including PERSONAL PIETY, for his clear but unassuming fidelity to Naqshabandi Sufi ideals; EXEMPLARY ORDINARINESS/HUMILITY for his softspoken manner, his donning of "Kurdish clothes" popular among ordinary men; his apparent candor about current conditions of Kurdistan (TRUTHFULNESS); and, last but not least, the fact that he is the son of the great Kurdish hero, Mula Mustapha Barzani, and the scion of one of the most distinguished shaykhly families in all of Kurdistan (INHERITED RESPECT).

President Barzani thus may be genuinely popular, but he is wildly controversial. The cultural models approach makes it clear why: some perceive him as a paragon of the Good Agha, others as a villain in the mold of a Little Saddam or Bad Agha. However elaborate current public discourse about him may be, such discourse may be understood as glosses on subterranean beliefs and attitudes that I have interpreted as cultural models.

As for Vice Chancellor Barzinji, I cannot dredge up any evidence of anyone understanding him as an incarnation of a Good Agha. Yet it would be preposterous to imagine that he intended that

the Zagros State University community fear him as a Bad Agha or a Little Saddam. So what gives? On what basis did he gain any appeal at all?

One of Barzinji's top selling points was that he had already enjoyed what seemed to be a sterling academic career in the United Kingdom and two other British Commonwealth countries. One of the members of the Vice Chancellor search committee confided to me that his career in advanced English-speaking countries was indeed a drawing card. He earned a degree in geology from a prestigious British university, contributed countless papers in his own field of expertise in both conferences and in print, served as an editor, supervised graduate students, and had even become a dean of a respected professional school. Many Kurds told me that the expertise he gained in his field, and the respect he had garnered abroad made him a countryman that Kurds could be proud of.

As Vice Chancellor, he presented himself as a skilled technocrat who had mastered management practices current in the West. He devoted much attention to formalizing bureaucratic procedures that included, among other things, the creation of elaborate forms to assess the performance of academic and other staff, that included detailed plans for teaching and research, as well as accounting of how everyone spent their work time. Faculty members had to account for the precise number of hours they spent on every one of their work duties: teaching, preparation for classes, time spent meeting with students, staff meetings, undertaking research, and everything else imaginable. Detailed proposals were required for any prospective travel to conferences. Barzinji also introduced strict communication rules that required almost all communications to be routed through department heads.

To some, the new forms and procedures marked an increased commitment to professionalism, accountability, and managerial best practices. For a long time I myself perceived Barzanji management style as an attempt to align with the latest British standards of what some decry as "the new managerialism". I thought that its appeal represented beliefs in the superiority of what I called the "managerialist organization of university governance." With its strict procedures and hierarchical differentiation of duties, it set itself off from what some see as the outmoded "collegial" organization of university governance that empowers faculty at the expense of professional managers.

While there may have been a tiny number of Kurds sold on the New Managerialism, I now realize that the appeal of Barzinji's style of leadership drew on a much more powerful source, the WISE, SYMPATHETIC OUTSIDER model. Barzniji's supporters saw him very much as an outsider, but one who gained an enormous amount of expertise in societies largely remote from the experience of most Kurds. His success abroad was a testament to his talents and wisdom, and they trusted him, for the most part unquestioningly, in his efforts to advance the University and raise its stature. Although the Governing Board was very secretive in its proceedings, I did hear from a person who attended their meetings, that the members of the Board were too busy and too apathetic to investigate for themselves what was going on at the University. But they were very impressed with Barzinji's rhetorical skills and the demonstration of his managerial expertise, so much so that they uncritically took his word for everything. I doubt any of them thought explicitly about the New Managerialism at British universities, in spite of the fact that a stated goal of the university, even in the government decree that created it, was that they university

gain validation as a British university.

In fine: when a few Kurdish staff members, as well as Kurds outside the university looking in, talked about President Barzinji, they usually assigned him to the frame of what they perceived as a *modern* institution that operated in accordance with principles of Western, specifically British, management practice. Intuitively they saw these "modern" management practices as further elaboration of the model of the WISE OUTSIDER.

There is an additional important ramification of this insight. By associating Barzinji with modern, managerial frames, this had the effect, even for those who were not sold on him as a WISE OUTSIDER, of *inhibiting* the mental connection of his leadership style specifically with the representation of the "bad agha", or any agha. The word "agha" conjures up impressions of feudalism and "traditional" Kurdish society that at the explicit level for Kurds is *incompatible* with any notions of modern management or bureaucracy. So while Barzinji and his management practices *activated* all those associations of the Bad Agha (much more strongly for those who disliked him than for those who supported him), they *inhibited* thoughts of the Bad Agha.

Let me explain this further. I never heard anyone suggest that Haval Barzinji or any of the other little Saddams was acting like a "bad agha". But the congruence is anything but contrived. When a leader makes a dictatorial decision without giving any explanation, Kurds do sometimes say, "*Eme briyarękî aghayane-ye* (this is a decision [made] in an Agha-like manner)."[9] On top of that, each of the half dozen or so times that I have suggested to Kurdish friends that he and other contemporary leaders of his ilk act like the old-time bad aghas has elicited a telling response: first

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9. Andrea Fischer-Tahir, personal e-mail, Sept. 8, 2010.

a pregnant pause, then an affirmation of the idea as if it were a sudden revelation, "Yeah! That's it! Exactly!" The impression of "ringing a bell" is consistent with the hypothesis that "Haval Barzinji" (or "little Saddam") and "bad agha" both activate or potentiate the same network of associations. The latency of the response, as familiar to social psychologists, indicates the presence of an inhibited link that has been overcome. The increased attention I give to the issue floods the positive connections to such a degree that it unblocks the connection to the representation of the "Bad Agha."

As a mini-epilogue for this section, I want to remind readers that I do not pretend to have discovered all the relevant cultural models of leadership. In a conversation I had with one Zagros State student, Pishtewan, who claimed to be a strong supporter of Barzinji, he raised what seems to me to be a puzzling reason for siding with him. When I asked him about all the people who had lost their jobs because of Barzinji, sometimes in humiliating and even physically threatening ways, he argued that "any real advancement requires victims" (his words in English). In the press I have noticed a number of opinion pieces that describe what Iraqi Kurdistan and the rest of Iraqi society is going through as a form of "sacrifice". Just as sacrifice is a key trope in Islam, the current state of sacrifice holds out hope for future progress and amelioration of society. I cannot yet see how these concepts of the THE NEED FOR VICTIMS and SACRIFICE form part of a network of associations that comprise a cultural model of leadership and authority. There is little doubt, however, that one is lurking around, awaiting illumination.

6 Historical Vicissitudes of the Models

To ascribe persistence and recurring features to a cultural model does not amount to essentializing culture. The model has changed over time, as translocal relations have expanded among Kurds, along with the changing role of Sufi shaykhs and their scions. I reinforce this point by providing the sketchiest of historical outlines suggesting how the models of the GOOD vs. BAD AGHA have evolved over time.

From the time of the conquests of the Mongols until the penetration of the Ottoman Empire, that is from the 14th century until roughly the 1830s, most of the region we know now as "Kurdistan" fell under the control of dynastic emirates. The mirs, variously called "pashas", "valis", and "khans", were temporal leaders, with complex relations, to be sure, to ulama, Sufi shaykhs, and other religious, primarily Muslim, virtuosos.

One of the richest sources of information we have of that classical period of Kurdish principalities is the *Sharafname* of Prince Sharaf Khan al-Bidlisi, originally written in Persian in 1597 (al-Bidlīsī [1953] 2007). Most of it comprises profiles of individual leaders over the centuries — princes of various dynasties who ruled over small territories as well as confederations of principalities. Almost all of the profiles are laudatory. A close study of the work would no doubt repay by affording a much fuller elaboration of the GOOD AGHA models, and presumably foster the discovery of different variants of the model, and (probably) "new" models altogether. Take for example the opening passage of the profile of ʿĪsa, the first Soran ruler al-Bidlisi describes (Soran being one of the most important principalities that eventually encompassed by Arbil and

Slêmanî):

> ʿĪsa was distinguished from the other sons of his father, Klaws, by his astuteness,
> highmindedness, and the grace of his social interactions. He would pay out all that he
> gathered in rent to the young men of the village, which led to people being deceived
> by his skillfullness ... (427)

We have allusions here to GENEROSITY, with a hint of OMNISCIENCE, but possibly also to SECRE-TIVENESS. There is fertile ground here for gaining insight into the emergence of cultural models.

By the time Claudius Rich, one of the first Western travelers to Kurdistan who had significant linguistic competence, visited Slêmanî and Sinna in 1820, the contrasting models of the GOOD vs. BAD AGHA were readily apparent. Relying mostly on his attendant, Osman Aga, he learned of the stunning contrasts between Amanuallah Khan, the Vali of Sinna, who was also the prince of Ardalan, vs. Mahmoud Pasha and his late father, Abdurrahman Pasha, who were princes of Baban. What Rich reported can be represented as a series of contrasts (Rich 1836:86–87, 211–215, 263–264, 324): First, the Baban princes were tribesmen who followers were loyal to him and would follow them if they were forced into exile and remain supportive no matter what privations they had to go through, whereas the Ardalan princes were lords over peasants, who, as servants, no matter how well the Ardalan princes treated them, would never follow them into exile. Second, the Baban princes were kind and supremely generous whereas the Ardalans were cruel and avaricious. Finally, Amanuallah, the Ardalan prince, used his apparent tact and his manners so refined that he is able unscrupulously to extract benefits from people, whereas Mahmoud Pasha was personally pious and ingenuous to the point that he opened himself up to treachery and

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abuse.

Over the next few decades, the emirates dissolved under pressure from the Ottoman administration, who gained a firm foothold only in the cities. This left a power vacuum in the rural areas. At about the same time, Sufi orders, above all the Qadiriya and Naqshabandiya developed into reform movements. Several families assumed came to provide shaykhs whose influence grew to include entire regions over many tribes as well as non-tribal populations, the most prominent being the Sadate of Nehri, Barzinjis of Sulimaniya, Talabanis of Kirkuk, and Barzanis of what is now the far north of Iraqi Kurdistan. Besides serving as exemplars for Sufi adepts, the shaykhs assumed the roles of mediators of tribal and other local disputes. The most salient characteristic of the founders of shaykhly lines was their status as outsiders (Jwaideh 2006:48), but as reports of some of the key ones, above all Shaykh Khalid, the founder of the Barzinji line, indicate, local Kurds admired them greatly for their wisdom and sympathy, in line with the model of the WISE, SYMPATHETIC OUTSIDER.

After that, the shaykhs gained reputations for their generosity, humility, personal asceticism, and exemplary fairness, as can be seen in the accounts of Ayoub Barzani of the Barzani shaykhs, and other local histories. On many occasions, these shaykhs, fitting the model of the BEST AMONG US, had to struggle against bad local aghas, who routinely accused them of heresy, and bitterly tried to preserve their ability to extract wealth from their subjects, whether tribal or non-tribal.

During the final decline of the Ottoman Empire and the rocky establishment of the British Mandate, from about 1890 to 1925, a remarkable transformation took place. In a story recounted by Mulla Said (Nikitine and Soane 1923:69–106), Nikitine's Kurdish tutor, who was murdered in

1918, the Shaykh of the Sadate Nehri, Muhammad Sadiq, appears in a bad light. He is rapacious — "a great vulture, and the Rekani lands were equally a very fat and pleasing carcase" (74) — scheming, and very solicitous of deference, or self-aggrandizing.

When the British were establishing Iraq as a Mandate, the man they appointed as governor over the Kurdish region was Shaykh Mahmud, who had inherited the role of shaykh of the Barzinjis, another one of the four leading families of Sufi shaykhs. A complex figure who is still the subject of much writing by Kurds, he comes across in some accounts as a heroic, Good Agha type figure, and a Bad Agha in other. Hilmi, who worked closely with him, alternates between the two.

The scions of the Sufi shaykh "dynasties" remain, in many cases, the leading families of Kurdistan today. Masoud Barzani is the President of the Kurdistan Region, his son in charge of security and his nephew the prime minister. Jalal Talabani was until recently the President of Iraq, his son the deputy prime minister of Kurdistan. Many other members of these families, as well as of the other Sufi shaykh families, have prominent roles today. Sufism itself no longer holds a prominent public place in Iraqi Kurdish life, with many members of these families appearing as secularists.

What is true today is that the images of Iraqi Kurdistan's leaders are highly contentious. In the previous section, I have already explained how much of the debate over President Masoud Barzani's leadership can be interpreted as elaborations of the contrast between the these two models of leadership. In parallel fashion, I argued that Vice Chancellor Barzinji presented himself as the "good manager," who learned his expertise while he trained in Great Britain and worked in other Commonweath countries. He thereby comes across as a modern elaboration of the WISE,

SYMPATHETIC OUTSIDER. Contrary to that, the bulk of his subordinates construed him in a way that parallels the ONE WHO PLUNDERS US, or the Bad Agha.

7 Conclusion: What a Cultural Models Approach Can Do

A cultural models approach, the lifeblood of which is a sense of plural understandings of the world, lends itself to making order out of the seeming chaos of multisided struggles over authority in the world today. The substance of contemporary contestations concerning the evaluation of Kurdish leaders do not magically materialize out of nowhere. Rather, they are firmly entrenched in Kurdish culture, which, like any culture, is alway open to new creative elaborations.

This paper is not intended to be a theoretical manifesto of a new cultural models approach. Nevertheless, in closing, I do want to attempt to dispel two common misconstruals of a cultural models approach.

First, some would say that a cultural models approach, by drawing from data that presents itself in a multitude of different forms — interview testimony, casual conversation, historical memoirs, narrative fiction, online comments on the news — homogenizes all kinds of diverse material, and thereby "loses more than it gains" (to quote one criticism leveled against my approach in private). By ignoring issues of "form" and "genre" — so the argument goes — cultural models inordinately simplify the social world, whose complexity social scientists ought not reduce to neatly organized material, as cultural models do.

To offer this criticism is to sound the alarm that the defining criterion of cultural models, *schematization*, has not penetrated. As the basketball example illustrated, people generalize, schematize from their experience, so what becomes inscribed in their memories, etched into their memory traces, rubs out (episodic) memories of particular events and the forms those events took. Human beings, by their very nature, are radical simplifiers, who embed their experience into schematized structures and networks of mental representations. If we do not grasp the results of their everyday simplifications of their complex experience, it will be hopeless to nail down what drives their everyday actions.

Second, I have already traced out how the models have evolved, and been the subjects of elaboration over time, in the previous section on historical vicissitudes of the models. While they are persistent, they are far from frozen, unchangeable and essentialized.

Third, a criticism that is easy to confuse with the charge of essentializing culture is that a cultural models approach *reifies* inasmuch as it confuses the investigator's presentation of a cultural model with the "real thing", the thoughts and understandings that people carry around in their heads, thereby treating the researcher's abstraction as if they were real.

This last criticism fails to grasp that the phrase "cultural models approach" is a convenient shorthand for a research strategy that aims to devise plausible models *of* the cognitive models that people collectively and distributively carry around in their heads. With the approach thus spelled out, it is easier to see that the account I have presented of the BAD AGHA WHO PLUNDERS US is merely an early stab at assembling a model of how real live Kurdistani actors model leadership in their social milieu. Like any other scientific theory, it makes no claim to be definitive, but

rather eagerly awaits its own supersession. Properly put, the three models I have proposed are models of particular cognitive models. They are models of models. We presume such cognitive models to exist based on the findings of the last 40 years of cognitive science.

Even at this exploratory stage, however, my study already provides a solution to issues that perplex observers of contemporary Iraqi Kurdish society. How can President Barzani, the symbol of an Iraqi Kurdistan that serves as a lonely beacon for a tolerant, secularist, democratizing and modern Middle East also be the object of disdain on the part of a significant portion of the citizenry of Iraqi Kurdistan? The reason is that that the citizens of Kurdistan, without being consciously aware of doing so, see him through the lenses of two very different cultural models.

On a smaller scale, my cultural models approach gives shape and ascribes a certain degree of causality to events at a new university in Kurdistan — events that continue to puzzle (and disturb) many of the participants in those events. By tracing those events to two sources in the human imagination, namely the BAD AGHA WHO PLUNDERS US vs. the WISE OUTSIDER models, my approach provides an answer (albeit tentative and partial) to the question of what drove those events.

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