Social Capital in modern, conflicted Iraq: Its characteristics, dynamics and effects at the micro level of Iraqi society

By

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Certificate of authorship/originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that this thesis has been written by me. Any help I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged.

In addition I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of student

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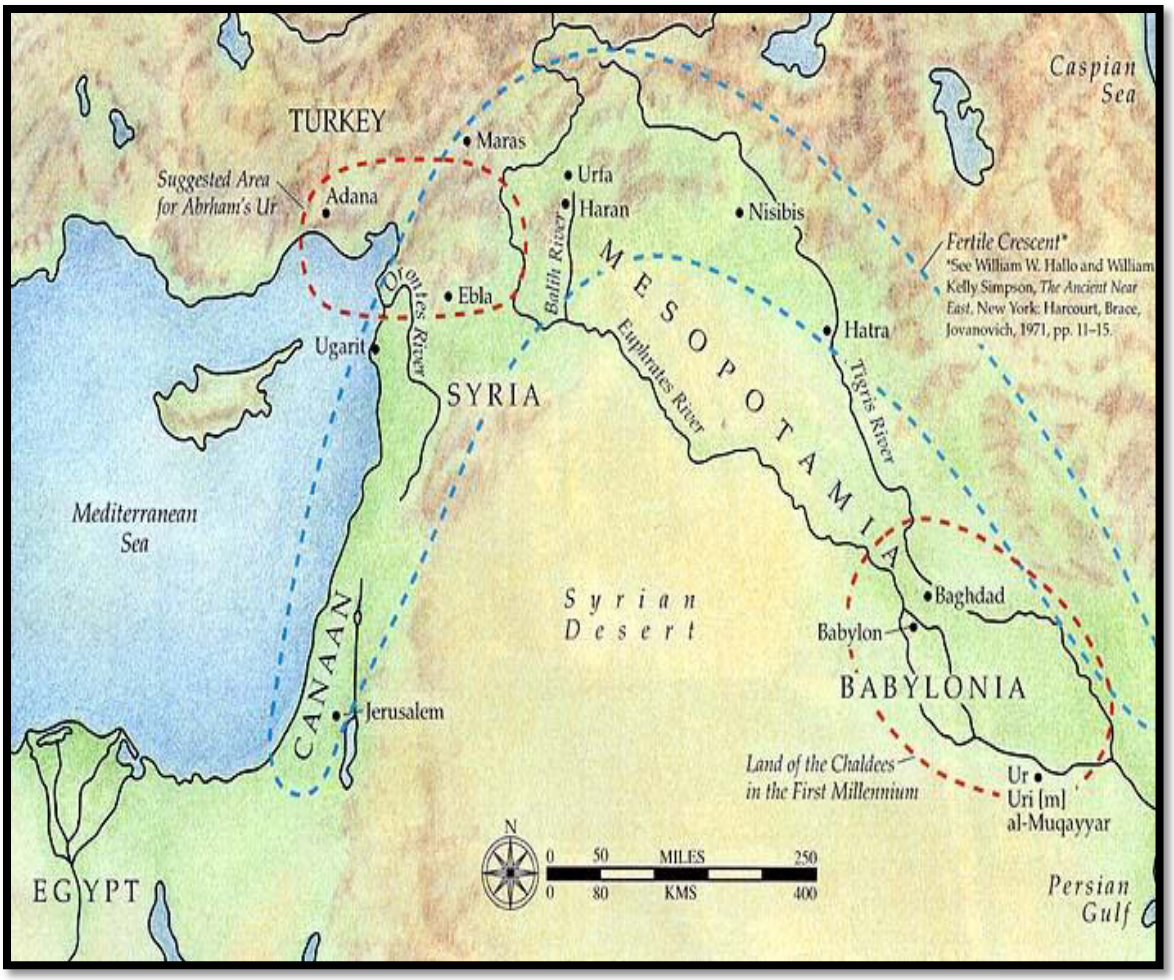
ABSTRACT

The thesis reports the results of a study of social capital in the nation state of Iraq. It specifically examines social capital activity at the individual *micro* level of the ordinary lives of Iraqi citizens. It identifies the dominant social networks within Iraq, and the kinds of benefits obtained from these networks at the individual and collective level. Utilising a qualitative iterative research design that involved focus group discussions with Iraqis in the Australian *diaspora,* a series of Tele-interviews with selected participants in Iraq, and finally a number of clarifying interviews with selected Iraqis in Iraq and Australia, the study was able produce rich sets of empirical data. It found that virtually all Iraqis are members of up to three different types of social networks: Their Family networks in which they are born and in which they acquire a set of special reciprocal behaviours based on norms special to Iraqis; their separate Personal networks of friends and neighbours; and their Constrained social networks, such as work networks, in institutional settings where organisational rules may also apply. These networks were based on trusting interpersonal relationships of varying strengths. In this process the religious and ethnic backgrounds of the fellow members of their networks were irrelevant. Iraqi social networks crossed sectarian divides. This multiple membership characteristic meant that benefits from one network could be brought into another network in bridging social capital transactions. The study further found that in their social networks, Iraqis exchange a range of benefits which may be unique to Iraqi society. These were classified as qualitatively-different benefits of emotional support, informational and, at higher levels, practical and material support. The determinant of the benefits are the social settings of the transactions – and the external intrusive social contexts which may require help for threatened members of social networks. The study found that these benefits and the underlying willingness of Iraqis to provide them comprised the social capital assets of Iraq. Needy members could access benefits immediately. But as a latent community resource, this social capital could only be mobilised by trusted facilitators for an agreed community benefit. Personal trust was found to be a necessary pre-condition for forming social capital, but a lack of social and institutional trust, common in Iraq today, hindered the mobilisation of the community pools of social capital. Generally social capital transaction activity was found to be

vibrantly alive and flourishing in Iraq, but only at the individual *micro*-level of the society, with consequent implications for Iraqi social planners.

Map1. Iraq - Governorates and Districts 2013



Map2. Map of the Old Mesopotamia

Table 1. THE MAIN ETHNO-RELIGIOUS GROUPS OF IRAQ

Kurds	With their own language, clans and tribes and now their own territory. Mainly Sunni Muslims. The minority Shi'ite Muslim **Faili Kurds** live mainly in Diyala province and around Baghdad.
Turkoman	With their own language and clans live mainly around Kirkuk.
Yazidis	Adherents of an old *Kurdish* religion with ancient *Indo-European* roots, living mainly around Mosul.
The Shabak	An ancient Muslim Indo-Iranian tribe with their own language living around Ninevah.
Sabian Mandaeans	A small pre-Christian sect with their clans and their own churches near running water which they call Mandas. They tend to live together in the bigger cities.
Chaldean Christians	Around Nineveh and Mosul but also in other major cities. They have their own Aramaic language, a system of parish churches, bishoprics and cathedrals and even their own villages. They are linked to the Catholic Church of Rome.
Assyrian Christians	Also around Nineveh and Mosul. They have their own Assyrian language and network of Churches and hierarchical clergy. They are linked mainly with the Orthodox Christian Church of Greece.
Armenian Christians	Mainly around Kirkuk but also scattered in the major cities. They only arrived in Iraq 90 years ago during the Turkish genocide against them at the end of the First World War. They are mainly Orthodox Christians.
Sunni Muslims	The more diffused Sunni Muslims with their chain of mosques and a small hierarchical clerical system comprising two networks of respected Muslim scholars who provide religious and social guidance on the Sharia'a law of Islam.
Shia Muslims	the largest group of Iraqis with their own chain of mosques and/prayer centres *(husseinayats)* There is a clerical hierarchy of Imams, Mullahs, Ayatollahs and at the top the Grand Ayatollahs, functioning as a *marja'iya* or religious establishment. These recognise as their leader the revered Grand Ayatollah Ali Al Sistani.