**Wounded Citizenship**

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INTRODUCTION

Recent academic and civil society discourses have become increasingly concerned with rethinking a new relationship between the state and its subjects, especially in the context of “Arab uprisings” and “regime change” in the Middle East. Such efforts have called to reimagine an alternate body politic focusing on modes of citizenship that embrace frameworks of human rights and democratic processes, such as such as elections. Still, such conceptualizations of citizenship have often obscured a more dynamic history of state-citizen relationship anchored in everyday state practices and experiences of individuals and community.

In this essay, I aim to contribute to this debate by focusing on the state’s responses to war injury as a site where discourses on health and citizenship are manifested and contested. Recent work in anthropology (and the social sciences more broadly) has examined the notion of “citizenship” as a social construct embedded in everyday social and material relations and practices of state and society (Hansen and Stepputat 2005). Such works have argued that “citizenship” goes beyond its normative Western-centric origins and meanings; rather, citizenship should be examined as situated in historical, local, and regional processes with ever shifting limits and conditions (Nguyen 2008; Das and Poole 2004; Ong 1999; Ong 2006; Faist 2000; Petryna 2002). Building on the work of Michel Foucault (2003) and his theorization of the notion of biopolitic—the increasing incorporation of processes of life (and death) in state politics and practices of governance –recent work have shown how practices of citizenship can be further linked to the negotiations of political rights through forms of physical affliction and wellbeing of the physical and social body. For example, in her work on the post-Chernobyl Ukraine, Adriana Patryna (2002) uses the notion of biological citizenship to understand the ways victims of the disaster capitalize on toxic injuries to put forward political claims for citizenship, claiming their affliction as a right to political life. Similarly, in West Africa, medical anthropologist Vinh-Kim Nguyen (2005) uses the notion of “therapeutic citizenship” to explore the political implications of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in advancing a political and moral economy for a biological claim to citizenship in West Africa—where African states have became incapable of providing health coverage to combat the epidemic. Building on such critical work, I introduce the notion of “wounded citizenship” to explore the ways wounds become a site for contested therapeutic rights and claims. Here, I use “wounded citizenship” as an analytic to focus on the legal history of war injury in Iraq and its consequences on the relationship between those injured and the state. More specifically, I trace the shifting values and responses to “woundedness” over time that is in subsequent wars in the country—the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), the First Gulf War and sanctions (1990-2003), and the post-2003 US-led occupation and “War on Terror.” Through showing how wounds become animated across changing state discourses under these different, yet overlapping, wars, I aim to show how the tensions between the biological and the political refract through the instability—or “woundedness”—of such modes of biological citizenship. In particular, how the changing political value of afflictions are shaped by the broader discourses of war and alternate political projects. I argue that it is critical to situate questions of (biological) citizenship in a their historical trajectories to understand the making (and unmaking) of political communities.

WOUNDED CITIZENSHIP

For more than three decades now war-related injury and disability has been central to the articulations of state and citizenship in Iraq. Since the start of the Iran-Iraq war in 1980, war injury became central to the Iraqi state policies of welfare and acquired special place in terms of the responsibility of the state to the injured and the disabled. The official definitions of “disability” in Iraq falls under the social welfare Act number 126 for the year 1980. The law was originally instated during the border skirmishes between the two countries almost 3 months before the official declaration of war in August 1980. In article 1, and building on the welfare orientation of the state, the law identified that: “Social solidarity is the first bases of society, which entails that each citizen should perform [his/her] full duty towards society, while society guarantees complete rights for the citizen.”[[1]](#footnote-1) The law goes into details in describing the responsibility of the state to protect the various vulnerable populations, including the poor, the disabled, the orphaned, the widowed, the dependents of the imprisoned. Under this 10 page legal document, the main focus is directed towards defining injury and disability vis-à-vis the responsibility of the state to the individual and to the family. In article 7 (One), the law states that: “The state seeks to reduce disability in society and has the mandate to care for the disabled physically and mentally through their reform, rehabilitation, and insertion in the work place according to their capacities, in preparation to their integration in society. The state has also the responsibility to provide financial, health, mental and social care for those who are completely incapable of work.”[[2]](#footnote-2) The introduction of the law was tightly linked to the war and the anticipated blow to the social, and more precisely the family body. During the war, the state emphasized pro-natal policies. It provided aid for couples that wanted to get married and subsidies for each child in the family—as an attempt to respond to the loss of men in the battlefield (Dewachi 2017).

In 1981, one year into the Iran-Iraq war, the Ministry of Finance established a fund that which supported those who are affected by the war. The fund spelled out compensation for death, physical injuries and damage to properties that were directly related to the war with Iran. The compensation was based on a functional economy of disability, calculated medically around the “loss” of bodily functions. The highest amount claimed reached close 500,000 Dinars—at the time mounting to more than million dollars—and corresponded with more than 90% functional loss {Those whose injury ranged between 60-90% received 50% of the original compensation and so on}.

In 1984, four years into the war, and with declaration of austerity measures, the government, burdened by the number of the injured, radically reduced the compensation from 500,000 to 3000 dinars. During the same year, the government issued a new decree offering compensations and subsidies to the disabled to encourage marriage and procreation. In line with the general direction of pro-natal policies during the war, the decree offered injured and disabled war veterans the financial and the moral support to marry and procreate. Many disabled veterans took advantage of this law, which offered an opportunity to normalize disability within the framework of family building in society.

Towards the end of the war, the government commissioned a foreign French company to build two disability villages that housed more than a hundred families of war veterans. The two sites located in the vicinity of Baghdad were ominously called *Madinat al Thura* and *Madinat al Shumoukh* (*City of Pinnacle* and *City of Glory* respectively). The two “cities” were designed ergonomically with service to accommodate the needs of the disabled. In addition to the disable-friendly housing, each city entailed an elementary school for the children, a healthcare center staffed with doctors, nurses, social workers and physiotherapists, and a sport center where many of the disabled exercised and competed in special sports games. In addition the state offered many privileges in education to the sons and daughters of the disabled providing them with bounces.

The declaration of ceasefire and end of the war in 1988, presented the Iraqi government with major population and demographic problems. In addition to the large economic debt that incurred from the war, there was the problem of the returning populations from the frontline seeking reintegration into the job market. Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990 could be seen as a response to the inability of the state to respond to the rising demands of the returning soldiers who after putting their lives on the line, wanted to be compensated by the economically challenged state. The international backlash on Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait with the 90-day war that destroyed the country’s physical infrastructure and the twelve-years of sanctions that followed made sure that the Iraqi government would remain crippled ­as its populations suffered the burden.

Throughout the 1990s several laws were put forward to support those affected by the 1991 Gulf War. Struggling with gaining back control over the country after the failed popular uprising, the fragile Ba‘thist regime created a new fund to address compensations for victims of that war. Once again, the etiology of injury and disability of war was defined in relation to the actions of the external enemy, yet adding the effects of those who were afflicted by the internal actions of the uprising. The fund was simply called Al-*Sandouq* (or The Fund) which claimed to support the relief and compensation of those who were affected in what the regime called “The Mother of All Battles and the Page of Treachery and Treason,” a reference to the US-led war international sanctions and the failed uprising in the south of Iraq.

After 2003, and fall of the Ba‘ath regime, the new Iraqi government under the occupation struggled with redefining new meanings of war injuries and woundedness. In 2004 the first new law of compensation was issued and signed by, then, the Prime Minister Ayad Allawi. Implicated in a totally different war, a more internal one this time, the new law focused on the targeting of the newly created army and police force by militant groups and attacks. In a gesture to encourage further enrollment, the decree further identified Iraqis who were killed while lining up at recruitment centers, as martyrs and were entitled for compensation. The same went for those injured in daily suicide attacks that rocked Iraqi cities daily, and targeted members of the newly formed police and military forces. With no clear way to identify those who were lining up to join the force and those who were mere passersby, the government received many claims that it were unable to verify.

The rise of the sectarian violence between 2005 and 2007 and the declaration of the war on terror, represented another turning point in the legislation of disability and compensation. On the main consequences of the compensation and legislation around victims of the “war on terror” is a democratization of the claims from the military and police forces into the general population. Immediately after the start of the sectarian violence in 2005, the Iraqi parliament voted on a new law to compensate victims of “terrorist attacks.” The new legislation defined a terrorist act as: “Any criminal act that comes from an individual or a number of individuals or a group that does not carry an official status, with aims of creating chaos and fear among Iraqis or the instigation of violence and injury of a citizen and leads to the martyrdom of the citizen or his affliction with a permanent disability.” The law regulates the compensation for the family of the martyr (up to 2.5 million dinars) and for those who are injured, according to the percentage of their disability. Civilian claimers needed to supply the government with police and medical reports, which supported the validity of their claims. However, with the spread of corruption and nepotism at all levels of government, claims for compensations ran amok.

In 2006 and with the confusions of the surge of claims on the government, the office of the prime minister established an independent foundation that is titled “The Martyrs foundation” which aims to take charge of the compensation schemes under the oversight of the Prime Minister’s office. While aiming to “limit” the corruption in the different ministries, the role of the Martyrs Foundation aimed “to define who are the martyrs, provide privileges to those who are included in this law, provide priority of work and economic and social facilitation, and to glorify the meanings of martyrdom, sacrifice and their value in society and its externalization in cultural and political activities in the domains of culture, arts and the all forms of media.” The new law did not only address the victims of terrorism in the present, but expanded the definition to include retrospective claims for compensations from the actions of the previous ba‘thist regime. The legislation defined the martyr as “Every Iraqi citizen who lost his/her life due to opposition to the demised regime, in opinion, belief, political belonging, or sympathizing with its opponents or helping them, through an act of the regime directly caused death, or because of imprisonment, torture, or due to ethnic cleansing, use of chemical weapons, crimes against humanity, assignation, or forced migration.” While attempting to include a broad and vague notion of affliction, the legislation goes further to identify those who were excluded from this law. The law states clearly that a person is NOT a martyr: “that is any person who worked in the various institutions of the demised regime, or from Baathists or supporters, and was killed by the regime because of internal power liquidation.” The decree covers claims in retrospect from the period of 17/7/1968 to 19/3/2003 the period of the rule of the Baath party. Once again, Compensation amounts proportional to their disability. Among the privileges granted to people covered by this law, along with guarantees of health coverage inside and outside Iraq. With the increasing military operation of the occupation and the Iraqi military and the increasing number of “collateral damage,” the government expanded the definition of affliction and disability to include those who are affected by military operations, friendly fire (or military mistakes), in addition to terrorist operations.

CONCLUSION

The continuous shifting political value of war injury in Iraq is complex and dynamic. With the changing nature of war and political projects, one can see how certain wounds become imbued with meaning and value, while others lose their privilege—as the present day case of the Iran-Iraq war veterans. In fact with the coming to power of a government more sympathetic with the Iranian republic, the value of such wounds have become more questionable.

In this essay I tried to sketch some of the problems emerging in Iraq in relation to the history and definitions of war injuries. I showed that government policies in Iraq have constantly shifted the meaning and practices of defining notions of war injury and thus the responsibility of the state to such population. In defining and triaging injuries and death within these publically contested logics of war injuries, these policies have marginalized segments of the population that has suffered for decades the effects of war, violence and political instability. The production of massive documentation of afflicted population, medical committee that decides on the percentage of injury, the negotiation of bribes and corruption, political nepotism and the definition of this triage along certain claims of victimhood, ethno sectarian lines are all important processes to begin to understand wounded citizenship in Iraq. For the anthropologist, it its important to further understand how these policies metabolize in everyday life- an analysis that goes beyond the scope of this essay.

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1. See: http://www.iraq-lg-law.org/en/node/557 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)