Social Fabric

Al-Faid Scientific Center

Introduction

The social fabric represents the network of relationships and connections among individuals, groups, and communities. It reflects the extent of interaction among members of society, which is stronger and more resilient when the interactions are positive and civil. Conversely, the social fabric becomes fragile and weak in the presence of conflicts and disputes among individuals, or when essential elements or influential actors within the community are lost. Additionally, the fabric may suffer from specific tensions or significant problems and crises. The strength of community ties, the solidity of relationships, and the quality, stability, and sustainability of interactions significantly influence the robustness of society and the integrity of its structure. A weak (fragile) society is characterized by diminished levels of solidarity among individuals and groups, leading to a critical reduction in connectivity and increasing distrust, which ultimately diminishes the chances of social unity and the integrity of the social fabric.

Objectives of the Study

The study aimed to identify:

1. The importance of the stability of the social fabric in Iraqi society.
2. The current threats to the social fabric.
3. The changes and distortions that the Iraqi social fabric has undergone.
4. The most significant threats affecting the social fabric from the perspective of Iraqis.

Theoretical Aspects

Cultural Awareness and Identity-Building Mechanisms

The mechanisms for building identities are diverse and vary in effectiveness and strength. Several key elements contribute to the construction, consolidation, and formation of identities as imagined communities, which solidify and strengthen through imaginative tools, including:

1. Religions and religious rituals
2. Expression of identity
3. The Iraqi language and dialect
4. Geographic (ecological) environment
5. Cultural elements, mythology, arts, and public literature

Components of Social Fabric Cohesion

1. Solidarity

The concept of solidarity is a crucial social construct that reflects the social stability of communities and serves as a significant factor in their development and progress. It preserves the spirit of the community and creates a cohesive social fabric. Despite the numerous challenges Iraq has faced, including wars, security threats, and various difficulties, Iraqi society still possesses a high degree of solidarity and community cohesion due to the presence of these components. Social situations have reaffirmed our community's role in achieving social solidarity and a high level of responsibility. For example, during the incursion of terrorist groups, such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS, which forced the displacement of many components of Iraqi society into more stable areas in central and southern Iraq and the Mid-Euphrates region, there emerged a social network that supported them and extended assistance with all available resources. Additionally, the religious edict (fatwa) for sacred defense issued by the wise authority in Najaf aimed at forming the Popular Mobilization Forces to defend Iraq against the threat of ISIS terrorists prompted the Shiite community to rise and protect their fellow citizens from other societal components and liberate their lands from these terrorist groups.

2. Active Social and Political Participation

Social and political participation is one of the essential characteristics of vibrant societies that seek to assert their existence through active engagement in various important issues affecting public life. This engagement fosters and deepens the sense of responsibility toward the nation and relates to other existential matters. An example is the popular uprising in the 1990s, during which the masses mobilized in a widespread revolt across most provinces and cities in Iraq to rid themselves of the dictatorial Ba'ath regime. Moreover, significant social movements have emerged in response to various existential issues, such as participating in the last Friday of Ramadan to reject and denounce the presence of the usurping Zionist entity, a day established by the late Imam Khomeini (may his soul be sanctified) as International Quds Day. This occasion is commemorated by most Islamic nations to remind generations of the crimes of the Zionist entity and the necessity of liberation from its hegemony, instilling the spirit of uprising and resistance against oppression and subjugation.

Changes in the Fabric of Iraqi Society

A.Variations in Loyalties and Divergent Affiliations: The Triangle of Loyalties (Sectarian, Ethnic, Tribal)

This triad has accompanied the Iraqi state since its establishment, tracing back to the Ottoman Empire and continuing to the present day. These affiliations are not a recent phenomenon; they possess deep historical roots. The struggle related to them, amid numerous changes and challenges, has been existential in nature. The ethnic, sectarian, and tribal diversity in our society can be traced back to the early days of civilization and the settlement of populations in this land, particularly enriching Iraqi culture. This diversity reflects the natural state of the Iraqi social fabric when these elements perform their roles appropriately and without exaggeration, distancing themselves from political polarization and conflict.

However, what transforms this diversity into a challenge is that successive governments in Iraq have not embraced the principle of citizenship. Instead, they have strengthened their systems by exploiting these loyalties and affiliations for governance. Consequently, some individuals within the power structure or those close to the regime have manipulated their tribal or sectarian influences for personal gain in various matters.

B. The Social Space for Iraqi Cultural Diversity Between Rejection and Acceptance

Iraqi society is characterized by its ethnic, national, and sectarian diversity, which has deep historical roots. These components have coexisted, with individuals participating in each other's events without any rejection based on ethnic or national differences. Public occasions, such as religious holidays (Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha), witness significant social interaction and communication aimed at restoring community harmony and overcoming animosities. Furthermore, celebrations from other faiths, such as the Christian New Year, see Muslims exchanging greetings and well-wishes with their Christian neighbors. This spirit of cooperation has also been evident in recent times, with Christian brothers participating in the

Shiite Muslim commemoration of Arabian, receiving respect and admiration from their Muslim counterparts. Additionally, the Shiite community has shown support for other groups that have faced terrorist attacks, such as Christians and Yazidis. This willingness to sacrifice for those of different religions and sects reflects the depth of national unity and acceptance of ethnic diversity.

C. Identity Multiplicity and the Dialectic of Exclusion and Recognition

Recognizing the multiplicity of identities is a pressing and necessarily need to avoid reducing individuals to a single identity. It is crucial to address individuals as more than just their sectarian or ethnic affiliations. For example, a person may be Sunni, Shia, Arab, or Kurdish, yet at the same time, they are a Muslim, an Arab, an Iraqi, and, above all, a human being. Viewing the "other" as a partner in the nation through the lens of identity multiplicity is vital; it fosters acceptance and enhances a culture of peaceful coexistence. When active social forces in the community work to eradicate exclusion and oppression, and operate based on mutual recognition of rights and responsibilities while promoting a spirit of citizenship beyond sectarian, tribal, and ethnic labels, this can create a state of harmony and community cohesion among all societal components. This recognition, especially when founded on Axel Honneth's tripartite theory of recognition—love, rights, and solidarity—can foster deeper connections within society.

Threats to the Social Fabric

1. Political Threats

A. Political Quotas

The political change that occurred in Iraq after 2003 was initially met with optimism from the public, who hoped to emerge from a dark era characterized by oppression and the marginalization of others under a totalitarian regime and a dominant party that systematically obliterated the identity of most components of Iraqi society. The governance at that time was exclusionary, ignoring other societal components. However, this shifted towards a democratic

system that promotes party pluralism. Unfortunately, the heavy legacy and the negative accumulations of governance under the previous regime generated a widespread social and political sentiment of distrust among Iraqi political factions representing various societal components. Most of these parties were formed along sectarian and ethnic lines, amplifying their sectarian rhetoric to attract voters. Many political forces managed the governance through a consensus democracy, aiming to include everyone in the governance process regardless of electoral results. Yet, some political factions engaged in the political process have instigated and reproduced crises to maintain their positions and ensure the continuity of their interests by mobilizing the populace along sectarian lines under pretexts of lost rights and marginalization, among other sectarian mobilization tactics, resulting in sectarian divides that escalated to violence and displacement for some groups.

B. Demographic Change

The Iraqi society has experienced demographic changes in various forms, both voluntary and involuntary. Instances of forced internal and external displacement have occurred intermittently, with different manifestations. During the Ba'ath regime, the previous government executed forced displacement campaigns targeting specific indigenous components of our society. In 1969, the Iraqi government launched a campaign of forced relocation and exile aimed at the Fayli Kurds due to their ethnic background and Shia faith. In 1970, over 70,000 Fayli Kurds were deported to the Islamic Republic of Iran, losing their citizenship. This period and its aftermath clearly illustrate the Ba'ath regime's policies aimed at tearing apart the social fabric based on unfounded accusations to distort this fabric. The Ba'ath government did not stop at this stage; it also engaged in the distortion and falsification of facts to diminish other community components.

Displacement sand exodus did not cease with that regime but continued into the recent wave of terrorism and the rise of ISIS, which saw large-scale forced displacements based on sectarian and ethnic lines, confiscating the properties and wealth of these groups.

This created a profound rift in the Iraqi social fabric, the effects of which persist to this day.

C. Regions and Federalism

Following the exit from a totalitarian regime and the political marginalization and social exclusion of other community components, which subjected all cities and provinces to the rule of a minority based on kinship and tribal connections for four decades, political forces have demanded a federal governance system governed by constitutional institutions. This system should treat all individuals based on citizenship without discrimination, as stated in the Iraqi Constitution of 2005. However, this right may become a source of division and fragmentation for Iraq and its social fabric if misused by those implementing it. When federalism and regional autonomy are employed in a sectarian and tribal manner, driven by a culture of acquisition at the expense of weakening others, it poses a significant threat.

2. Religious Threats

A. Hate Speech

The advancement of electronic technology and the effectiveness of social media platforms, combined with an increasing number of users, both educated and uneducated, have led to a global wave of behaviors that encourage violence and hate speech, intentionally or unintentionally. Some individuals have exploited social media platforms, supported by various groups, to establish electronic channels and platforms, in addition to dedicated radio and television stations that broadcast terrorism-related operations, reinforced by slogans and anthems that encourage some users to join these groups and adopt extremist ideologies. Hate speech found in these images and videos indoctrinates individuals to undermine the beliefs and cultures of others, aiming to fracture social unity and attack its symbols and leaders.

B. Terrorism and Armed Groups

Terrorism constitutes an international crime that threatens human existence, emerging as a crime of the age resulting from rapidly changing events. Various extremist groups have appeared in Iraq post-2003, commencing their terrorist operations from late 2004 to the present. These groups, such as Al-Qaeda, the Naqshbandi Order, the Army of the Victorious Sect, the Army of Muhammad, Ansar al-Sunnah, and ISIS, have employed heinous methods of bloodshed and gruesome treatment of corpses. These dark forces derive their ideology from a distorted interpretation of Islam and receive international support from countries aligned with their extremist ideologies, with the backing and approval of the American administration in forming and training these groups to further their terrorist agendas by recruiting mercenaries who disguise their intentions in the name of religion to implement their sinister plans and achieve their interests at the expense of societies.

3. Economic Threats

A. Economic Crises (Inflation or Recession)

The Iraqi economy has not experienced stability since the 1980s, fluctuating between inflation and recession for various reasons, including the political instability of the former regime, which plunged the country into wars, conflicts, and economic sanctions that heavily burdened citizens and negatively impacted their living standards and income levels, leading to a decline in the purchasing power of the Iraqi dinar. This situation has resulted in a rising poverty rate. The Iraqi economy is predominantly reliant on oil exports, which are volatile and tied to global oil prices, subject to fluctuations due to international policies and the mechanisms imposed by OPEC on quantities and prices. Thus, the Iraqi economy's total reliance on oil wealth renders it vulnerable to these price fluctuations, potentially exposing it to numerous economic crises. Furthermore, the Iraqi economy reflects the country's policies that have experienced many setbacks and wars since the time of the previous regime, compounded by security threats and terrorist groups that have drained substantial financial resources to meet the social life requirements of the populace.

B. Corruption in Its Various Forms

Corruption is a global phenomenon affecting many countries, but its prevalence varies from one country to another. In nations with robust institutions and developed systems, corruption rates are lower, while they tend to be higher in developing countries. Iraq is among the countries where corruption levels in institutions are alarmingly high. Corruption has become entrenched within an administrative structure characterized by a complex network of interconnected parties controlling many decisions regarding investment, employment, and workforce management. This danger threatens not only state institutions but also negatively impacts society by diminishing the quality of services provided to individuals and creating social stratification.

4. Security Threats

A. Organized Crime

One of the most significant threats to the social fabric in any country is security threats, with organized crime and related offenses posing the greatest dangers. These crimes jeopardize individuals and their properties, exposing them to violence, torture, theft, and various forms of harm, as well as psychological issues that arise from such experiences. The repercussions often reflect on the social fabric of individuals and groups, posing a real threat to social cohesion and severely damaging the societal structure.

B. Drugs

In discussing the threats to Iraqi social fabric, it is essential to address one of the most critical issues that have gained significant traction, especially after 2003. This issue has ensnared many young people, leading them into darkness, violence, and crime. Statistics from the Supreme Judicial Council of Iraq for 2021 indicated that "the rate of drug addiction could reach 50% among the youth," with "the highest rate of drug use reaching 70% in impoverished areas with high unemployment."