

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

THE MAKING OF ISIS:
INTERPLAYS OF
CAPITAL, COERCION, AND CONTENTION

by
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A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
to the Department of Political Studies and Public Administration
of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences
at the American University of Beirut

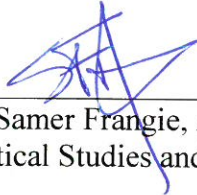
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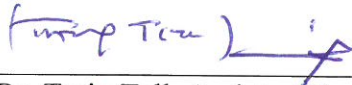
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work was completed through the kindness, generosity, and constant encouragement of my Advisor and Committee Members.

I am infinitely grateful to Dr. Samer Frangie, who continuously provided me with his time, patience, genius, humor, and concern. Leaving AUB without being your student would have been a tragedy.

I was fortunate to have the support of not only one, but two professors. I am indebted to Dr. Tariq Tell who selflessly supported my research far beyond his mere capacity as a committee member, and whose insights fed my curiosity and informed this study.

I am thankful to Dr. Waleed Hazbun for his interesting lectures, personal conversations, and the class I took with him. I have benefitted from your wide knowledge.

My ultimate tribute goes to my mother, потому что всё и всегда благодаря тебе и для тебя.

For all of this, I say thank you.

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Roua Seghaier for

Master of Arts

Major: Political Studies

Title: The Making of ISIS: Interplays of Capital, Coercion, and Contention

The thesis is an investigation of the validity of state formation in the *Syrian Jazirah* from a bellicist perspective, at the age of increasing challenge to the conventional nation-state. It argues that social organizations competing with the de-facto state and mimicking its processes are enabled by contextual variables of rentierism, militarization, and tribalism, through a *longue durée* argument. To do so, the thesis elaborates a modified Tillyan framework, traveled spacio-temporally, specifies it to the context of Syria and Iraq, and illustrates the interplays of capital, coercion, and contention leading to the emergence of ISIS.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Not much time passed after the declaration of ISIS as a Caliphate in June 29, 2014, before journalistic accounts raced to produce knowledge on the insurgent group. According to these accounts, ISIS was different from its predecessors, as it claimed bellicist ever-expanding territorial boundaries, and consciously attempted to trouble at once the postcolonial order and the age of the nation-state. The first set of studies to emerge attempted to answer the question of difference through the lens of the discourse of the “war-on-terror”. Eager pens took up the task of theorizing ISIS’ origin, usually in the alleged religious ‘backwardness’ of Islam and its adherents. “Unique in their brutality,” (Coates, 2015) “uncivilized,” (Hollande, 2015) “extreme and historically unprecedented barbarism” and “unparalleled threat to global security” (Boaz, 2015) were favorite descriptions of many¹, along with the superposition of Islam with Islamism, and Islamism with terrorism. (Ali, 2015; Cottee, 2017; Farwell, 2014; Hall, 2015; Stern & Berger, 2015; Weiss & Hassan, 2015; Winkler, ElDamanhoury, Dicker, & Lemieux, 2018)

¹ Boaz (2015) criticizes the political-correctness concern of some security experts of demarking the exact meaning of terrorism. He argues that because Muslims engage in it, defining terrorism might result in their wrath, claiming that the lack of an efficient definition impedes global strategy to counter terrorism, and that defining it as *modus operandi* enables ISIS to evade the responsibility of its acts and enable scholars and people to justify the violent acts, since they are not essence, but method.

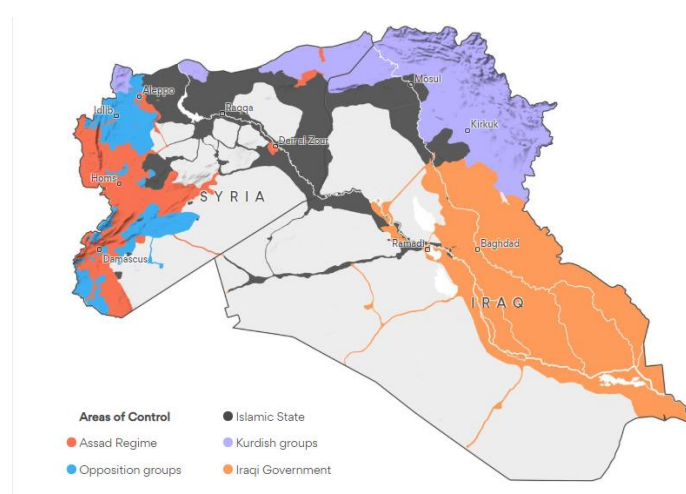
However, ISIS was not a fanatic fantasy, nor simply a return to an unchanging Islamic essence; it was in the making since 1991, when Abu Mussaab al-Zarqawi² was released from prison in Jordan. Convinced that the US will attack Iraq, al-Zarqawi received a \$200,000 loan from Al Qaeda to establish a training camp which was named *Jama'at al-Tawhid wa' al-Jihad* (JTWJ), and later announcing his allegiance to Al-Qaeda (AQ), named his organization AQ in Iraq. Aside this loan, the group expanded making use of available rents and political opportunities to take over military artillery and money. The leadership of the group and its name have changed over time. After Zarqawi was killed in a US airstrike, Abu Ayub al-Masri established himself as the leader of AQI, only to announce a few months later the creation of the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI), and Abu-Omar al Baghdadi as its leader. After both Masri and Baghdadi were killed, Abu-Bakr al-Baghdadi took over the leadership of ISI, expanding it to Syria and changing its name to ISIS.

Making use of the already porous Syrian-Iraqi border due to the “long-standing smuggling routes that were used to move fighters and supplies from Syria during the war in Iraq,” (Stern & Berger, 2015, p. 41) Baghdadi, then based in Iraq, sent his underling, al-Julani, into the neighboring country, and creating *Jabhat al-Nusra* (JAN). After the 2013 regime chemical attack in Syria; JAN grew in prominence motivating Baghdadi’s greed to claim the fame and announce the group’s presence in Syria. Julani appealed to AQ’s Zawahiri to vet between the two organizations. The mediation fell

² There was seldom anything peculiar about Al-Zarqawi’s early biography other than his belonging to the Bani Hasan tribe; it was not a blood relation that provided him such affiliation, but strategic coalition formation.

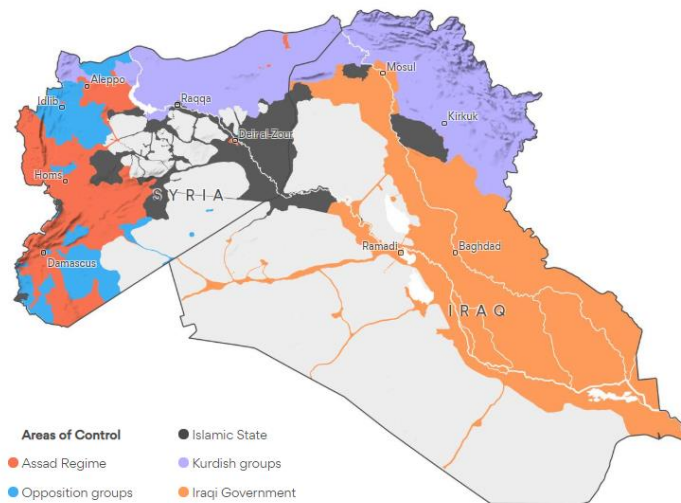
through, and AQ formally disavowed ISIS in a formal statement saying that it has no organizational relationship with it whatsoever in February 2014, crystallizing the final shape of the state-project. Half of JAN's forces defected to ISIS enabling its takeover of Raqqa. Going back to focusing on Iraq, ISIS took over another major city, Mosul, staying true to its claim of territorial expansion.

Map 1 Territorial Control in Syria and Iraq on May 4, 2015 (Lawler & Britzky, 2017)



By May 2015, half of Syria's territory and all Iraqi border crossing points were under ISIS' command. Kurdish fighters, Russian deployed military, along with US-backed coalition airstrikes intensified making the territory governed by ISIS smaller, and causing damage to their vital points of financing such as oil refineries. Iraqi forces regained Ramadi, Fallujah, and Mosul over the period of two years. The Syrian regime regained Palmyra and Aleppo. However, at the times of its intermitting territorial control, ISIS governance was both administrative and service-oriented. It oversaw 'corrective' outreach institutions such as courts, the police force, educational facilities, and public relations, progressing from less-resource intensive outreach centers to more

complex institutions. ISIS set and approved budgets, paid its employees, collected garbage from the street, created a central banking system, and even had a consumer protection authority. (Müller, 2017) To spell it out, it performed as a state.



Map 2 Territorial Control in Syria and Iraq on June 5, 2017 (Lawler & Britzky, 2017)

The components of the insurgent’s name, “Islamic” and “State,” however, encountered an uneven interest. It favored its understanding as religious fanatics’ plight, not as military strategists’ project. And ISIS willingly contributed to this reading, for “[ISIS knows the] fears and images that the Western media is hungry for, so [ISIS] give [sic] it and the media spreads it.” (Ingram, 2015, p. 746) In the midst of this bait-propaganda, ISIS statehood project got sidelined. It is this state-building project that the thesis wants to take seriously.

A. The Ideology behind ISIS: Islamic or not?

The most covered aspect of ISIS in the western media, as argued above, has been the religious dimension of this group. The “Islamic State is Islamic, very Islamic:” it is in its very name. (Cottee, 2017) A certain tendency to reduce the group to its religious background, and then to assign to treat it as an aberration has dominated the coverage of the group: “Motivated by a paranoid sectarian political ontology and a megalomaniacal fantasy,” (Kumar, 2018, p. 121), the mainstream media analyzes ISIS as stemming from a “psychology mired in the pre-Islamic Medieval Arabia.” (Kumar, 2018, pp. 123-126)

Some studies specified their variable to Wahhabism, as thought, (Armstrong, 2014; Crooke, 2015; Kirkpatrick, 2014; Macris, 2016) studying religious influence and Saudi promotion of a “contaminated” version of Jihadism that enabled the violent rise of groups such as Al Qaeda and ISIS. (Kumar, 2018, p. 122) However, “facile utilization of cultural interpretations to explain phenomena [such as ISIS...] is a trap,” (Al-Ibrahim, 2015, p. 408) as it attempts to explain its emergence in relation to ideological factors, ignoring the structural and historical context of such emergence. Rejecting ISIS as an inauthentic Muslim, different scholars jumped into a defense of Islam as thought. However, they claimed Muslims, the followers of the thought, lacking the capacity of distinguishing between Islam and Islamism. (Mahood & Rane, 2017, p. 33)

So while it was to be expected that the Islamic component of the name would attract more attention from an academic and media field obsessed by the question of political Islam, such a reading ignores the regional agency over processes shaping the

state. The religious inquiries of ISIS origins come at a cost: attempts to ‘demystify’ the insurgent’s religious values overshadow the material conditions that enabled its existence, and feed the academic dismissal of non-Western models of statehood, all the while contributing to interventionist discussions aimed at safeguarding the “conventional” state. In order to move past the discussion of religious text to one of the globalized capitalist economic conditions that rendered its utilization possible, it is to these material conditions that we need to turn our attention.

B. The Material Conditions of Emergence

As “apocalyptic visions alone are not enough to capture cities and take over countries,” Reuter (2015) explained that “Terrorists do not establish countries,” but states do. ISIS, that at some point controlled a territory the size of the UK with landed and diversified sources of revenue, is thus “no amateur band of religious fanatics” (Bunzel, 2014) to be studied through thought alone. Accordingly, some studies focused instead on the material conditions of ISIS emergence, be it the failures of the post-colonial states in the MENA regions (Al-Ibrahim, 2015; Macris, 2016) or the effects of globalization. (Mahood & Rane, 2017) These studies clearly focused on a positivist IR framework which, despite simplistic, illuminated the international events exacerbating the rise of ISIS.

Over the years of ISIS existence, ISIS as a “revolutionary state” like any other. (Walt, 2016, 2017) In 2014, it was running a small and under-resourced “territorial state,” despite all its efforts to distance itself from the international state system. (Walt, 2016, p. 42) This intermittent territorial control briefly made ISIS finances resilient to

sanctions and US offensives attempting to shut down international fundraising for Jihadist groups. ISIS attempted to “acquire statehood characteristics by exercising core-state activities from disciplined military parades to minting a currency.” (Stergiou, 2016, p. 190) Nevertheless, its economic model was unsustainable as it relied on income secured through the extortion of oil money and other natural resources. (Bunzel, 2014; Caris & Reynolds, 2014; FAFT, 2015; Jaafar & Woertz, 2016; Swanson, 2015) Over-taxation provided additional income, but limited the production of sufficient surplus to invest in economic growth.

ISIS was rich in comparison to terrorist organization, but poor in comparison to institutions and countries. (Swanson, 2015; Walt, 2016, p. 47) Its military projection capabilities were mediocre. The heterogeneous equipment acquired from looting also contributed to its disadvantage in conventional war. By October 2014, the US had destroyed half of ISIS oil refineries, and killed or displaced its skilled workers. And since under the contemporary state order, economic growth requires the provision of security for institutions through the insurance of some basic liberties, ISIS risk of expansion was minimal both monetarily and in human capital. The difficulty of spreading its beliefs kept its security risk in “global” terms negligible; it lacked both military capabilities and inspirational contagion and only rose because “the stars aligned.” (Walt, 2016, p. 47) Granted, dismissing the predictability of the formation of an alternative state-project through the reduction of reasons behind its emergence to simple fortune is an easy task for remote scholars. If not for the 2003 institutional collapse in Iraq, the deepening of Sunni-Shi’a divide, and the civil war in Syria, ISIS would have not seen the light. But international processes creating a political

opportunity were not sole contributors to the materialization of a challenge to the conventional state.

Unlike literature that “has focused primarily on what is exceptional about Daesh,”(Hansen-Lewis & Shapiro, 2015, p. 142) the materialist studies on the group, however minimal, have predicted its decline. Some focused on the category of the “international” as disciplinary distinct - a fallacy, while others focused on an ‘ephemeral’ economy, existing only in time of governance. The latter, while aware of the larger environment in which ISIS emerged, have focused on the domestic finances centering the concept of governance in its analysis, and only brushing upon historical events for contextualization alone, not for integration. What enabled the ISIS economic model, however, is a process more complex than internal financing and external alignment of stars. I find the adaptation of a Tillyan inspired framework useful in connecting formal statehood and informal governance in an area of contested sovereignty, due to its focus on material conditions prompting collective violence, contention, and state formation. Applying the modified bellicist theory, I find that rentierism, tribalism, and militarization molded the processes of capital accumulation, coercion, and contention necessary for the emergence of a state project, such as ISIS, in Iraq and Syria.

C. Research Question

The emergence of ISIS has brought to the surface multiple problematics in the fields of IR and social sciences, particularly in interrelation of state-making with war-making, as “the study of war in the Middle East has been shaped much more by military

and diplomatic historians, theorists of international relations, and journalists than it has by their counterparts in comparative politics, comparative and historical political economy, sociology, social history, and anthropology.” (Heydemann, 2000, p. 1) State formation in the region is thus generally understood in relation to international historical events and political influences, in a macro-analysis that often leaves local factors ambiguous. While state formation is inevitably a product of both external and internal processes, the focus is often displaced from the latter when it comes to the Middle East, in a rhetoric that assumes local actors too weak to be accounted for. Confining our understanding of regional state formation as a product of (neo)colonial and international hegemony is insufficient and incognizant of local processes. However, the contested sovereignties sponsored by these historical processes might shed light on different types of social organizing in the region, conducive to state formation.

Statehood in the region has been ascribed qualifiers reflective of its hybridity and non-normativity or non-compliance to the conventional Western statehood, held as standard of comparison. Fluid, failed, collapsed, and inevitably illegitimate, statehood in the Middle East is evaluated according to Weberian definitions, bypassing the multifaceted and competing forces that feed into state-formation and narrowing it down to controllable variables. However, such hybridity is not necessarily reflective of a failure; for state-formation - past and present - is no linear process. It evolves in accordance with the creation of competitive authorities in whose hands rests resources management and networks of trust and profit. It is the interactions between formal and informal establishments, symptom of hybridity, that tells us most of the distance between the Weberian and the empirical models of statehood. In multiple regions of the

Middle East, it is the hybridity of the state that secures authoritative actors some legitimacy, hence informality becomes a factor of sustainability. (Costantini, 2015, p. 5) Most states in the Middle East have been dubbed “coercive” but not strong, failed, but of high capacity. Most frequently, they have failed the Weberian monopoly over the use of legitimate violence as they have delegated or received protection to networks outside of the formal state institutions.

So as collective violence created states according to Tilly (2003, p. 6) and as ISIS grew through the cycle of war-waging and extraction, this thesis bypasses the understanding of insurgency as categorically separate from the state building process. Such dichotomy is “politically powerful, yet analytically elusive.” (Tilly, 2004, p. 5) The war-on-terror discourse is one that maintains this separation to safeguard the state’s monopoly of violence. If we distance the state from the institution, and state-building from an abstract notion, an independent object existing in a *tabula rasa*, we can explore multitudes of governing groups as an alternative system of organizing that came to be through state-formation processes. To that extent, an application of a bellicist state formation theory that accounts for contention is particularly interesting for the study of ISIS, as it troubles categorical classifications of legitimate top-down and illegitimate bottom-up violence by exercising both. (Müller, 2017, p. 445)

It is not only the political or religious thought of ISIS that is peculiar to the region, but also the patterns of state formation governed by historical property relations, ownership of land, movement of networks of trust. In other words, the aim is to investigate the *stateness* of ISIS as an example of state-like formations in the Syrian *Jazirah* from a process-oriented approach. I argue that the rise of ISIS is a continuation

of, not a rupture from, already present dynamics in the ‘deep history’ of the Syrian *Jazirah*, accounting for rentierism, tribalism, and dependent militarization and a manifestation of the collapse of the Sykes-Picot order as a whole. The thesis hopes to add onto to add to the complexity of the studies of post-colonial Middle Eastern state formation and the failure of the age of the nation state. It hopes to do so by providing a deep history analysis of the political economy behind the emergence of ISIS, and demystify potential ways of organizing that operationalize tribal and former military networks inherited as remnants of military states which might indicate a new political map of the Syrian *Jazirah*.

D. Plan and Limitations

To illustrate this claim, I use a Tillyan-inspired theoretical framework, elaborated in Chapter II, starting from criticisms his students employed, notably Karen Barkey (1988, 1994, 2008) who used it in comparative sociology. State-formation needs not to comply by late-nineteenth to early twentieth-centuries European experience studied by Tilly, as expected by normative frameworks pioneered by liberal peace. Henceforth, I specify the theory further benefitting from other scholars’ temporal and geographical adaptations of the bellicist theory, to create a three-fold state formation process that accounts for the encounters of capital, coercion, and contention (CCC). In Chapter III, I illustrate the *longue durée* CCC interplays in the Syrian *Jazirah*, area of ISIS conquests which laid the infrastructure upon which lie contemporary state-projects and informal governing bodies. Jettisoning the presumed unilineal qualifier of conventional state-formation processes, the chapter accounts for the creation of

authority and the distribution of wealth responsible for social-property relations in the area. In Chapter IV, I use ISIS as a case study to demonstrate the historical patterns of CCC as militarization, tribalism, and rentierism, which were enabling factors for governance, however turned responsible for the demise of the group's conventional/territorial statehood project. I argue that these patterns present, *stateness* can persist through informal groups, as demonstrated by *de facto* governing authorities throughout the Middle East, be it ethnic or tribal networks.

Given the difficulty of access to information pertaining to ISIS, I methodologically relied on the grand patterns of the fiscal and moral economy in the region instead of one that is momentary or ephemeral. The lack of quantitative information in this study is also purposeful, as it is more concerned with a Historical Sociology (HS) of state-formation than with its contemporary political economy. Having no access to informants, I use secondary resources, media investigations, scholarly works, and historical studies to back the *longue durée* claims. A full-fledged overview of the domestic economy of ISIS is farfetched, but a study of the patterns of the political economy behind it is possible. It is those patterns that bridge between the ramifications of the international and local processes, extremely present in post 9/11 discourse. The maintenance of this binary by post-colonial studies (Matin, 2013) in search of authenticity is also conducive to a *cul-de-sac*, one where detachment from liberal and illiberal constructs is impossible.

This study hence is an addition to those focusing on the material state formation in the contemporary Middle East, with the addition of positioning itself along the *rapprochement* between IR and HS that Teschke (2014) outlined and also criticized.

I find the framework employable as it serves to dilute the positivist aspect of mainstream IR theories through the mobilization of theories from social sciences, to mark the move from the scientific to the historicist aspect of the narration of state-formation. Following Matin (2018, p. 8), I focus on the tributary social structures, such as tribal, ethnic, and sectarian supra-national affinities partaking in a bottom-up challenge to the nation-state. And while it would not be a one-fit-all narrative of state-formation in the area, and while it would require constant specialization and temporalization, the adopted theory could be employed for other state-like formations such as Rojava and Eastern Kurdistan, or an additional understanding of the Saudi state building process.

CHAPTER II

A BELLICIST THEORY OF STATE FORMATION, TRAVELED

The state's 'legitimate' monopoly over the use of power is being increasingly contested, across the globe and in the Middle East. The existence of armed groups to which populations are sympathetic challenges the state's control of coercion. This study thus adopts a modified Weberian definition of a state³ that does not abide by an *a priori* normative standard of legitimacy. The state is a political infrastructure not necessarily successful at monopolizing the legitimate use of armed force, but rather is claiming such monopoly within a specified territory it governs. This infrastructure operates over a territory claimed territorially sovereign⁴; it regularly extracts resources from the land and the population and has some claim in managing the local affairs. Such a definition excludes tribes, clans, and lineages, but is broad enough to encompass forms of organizations that are not internationally recognized as states such as the UN, Iraqi Kurdistan, and recently, albeit briefly, ISIS.

³ A state is "a human community that successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory." (Weber & Gerth, 1948, p. 78)

⁴ Sovereignty can be nominal (real), like that of early European lords that exercised absolute authority, or legal, where the state's sovereignty relies on the supremacy of the law to rule over dispute and have final command, or political, which is the sum-total of influences that grant authority to the legal sovereign, be it the people or the patron, or popular, designating the "one man - one vote," rule. Sovereignty can be territorial or judicial, de facto or de jure. Tilly concerned himself with a Westphalian type of sovereignty that is domestically exercised, echoing a state-centric approach to understanding the concept. Interdependence theorists, however, see many interlinkages between "internalist" and "externalist" processes, virtually indistinguishable, influencing sovereignty and making it an ideal that is beyond the realistic capacity of states. .

So what facilitates the emergence of territorial areas of governance resembling the state? How can a bellicist state formation study further our understanding of contemporary state (de)formation and ‘violent’ forms of organization?

A. Towards a Tillyan Trilogy: Capital, Coercion, and Contention (CCC)

Tilly’s study of states concerned itself with critiques of Northern/Capitalist scholarship on the symbolic and material parameters of its formation. Tilly started from a general dissatisfaction with the existing theorization of the state, such as the micro-foundational approach (Levi, 1989), the state-centric/organizational materialism approach (Mann, 2012; Skocpol, 1979), and the class-centric approach (Brenner, 1977; Jessop, 1991; Poulantzas, 1978; Therborn, 1978). Against these approaches, Tilly studied states both internally and externally, as coercion wielding organizations exercising distinct priority over all other institutions within a territory through centralized, differentiated and autonomous structures. Tilly argued that war (un)makes states: it is at the intersection of capital, defining the realm of exploitation, and coercion, defining the realm of domination, that states emerged. Warriors had to administer lands, goods, and people in the territory they have conquered and became involved in extraction and redistribution. The administrative tasks diverted from war towards institutional formations. (Tilly, 1990, p. 20)

1. *Early Account: Violence by the State*

Studying European states from the 1500s to the 1900s, Tilly observed four stages of military fate (Tilly 1990, 71) evolving through patrimonialism, brokerage,

nationalization, and specialization. Up to the 15th century, it was characterized by tribes, feudal levies, and urban militias operating on a capital extracted as tribute or rent. For the next three-hundred years, mercenaries were recruited and paid by money gained through taxation. From 1700 to 1850, states drew armies from their population, absorbing existing militias into formal institutionalization. The national identity formation made for armies that fought better than mercenaries. The army's standardized training and equipment put rebellious lords at a decisive disadvantage vis-à-vis the state. By 1990, the military branch of national government and a separation of fiscal and bellicist activities occurred.

Understanding states as protection rackets, Tilly argued that coercion and capital operated through "banditry, piracy, gangland rivalry, policing, and war making [that] belong on the same continuum:" (Tilly, 1985, p. 170) States sent troops to enforce collection of tribute and taxes, but allowed the populace to avoid the violent intervention by a timely payment: at a price, they protected the populace against evils they would inflict or allow to happen against them. (ibid, p. 171) The economy followed military needs as states shifted from their agrarian activity to capitalized trade, speeding urbanization and making the economy more mercantile: States required capital to sustain their activity, and capitalists required protection. Thus, an interest cycle of extraction and protection was formed.

To grow as ultimate centralized sovereigns, states necessitated coercive power which was most often than not positively linked to feelings of nationalism ensuring a level of legitimacy. War changes the moral economy of the areas where it erupts, and when the threat is external, it increases nationalist feeling. Those who did not follow a

bellicist trajectory perished and were swallowed up by more powerful states, while processes of coopting or disempowering state-rivals created the imaginary distinction between internal and external politics. (Tilly, 1984; 1990, p. 70) It became virtually impossible for dissidents to confront the state without military cooperation. Rulers found sergeants in the clandestine world, simultaneously disarming populations to minimize the chances of revolt. By the 19th century, capital and coercion transitioned European states towards an effective monopoly of violence, overshadowing other forms of political organization in the 1500s. Modern European states of today have emerged through successful war-making, while their enemies perished or were integrated within their territories. They coopted bandits and traditional authorities to avoid competing legitimacies and to centralize the use of violence. This activity made for the artificial distinction between ‘legitimate’ and ‘illegitimate’ forms of collective violence, making states *de facto* hegemons.

2. Modified Account: Violence by the Populace

As European states were successful at disarming their populace, the early account disregarded competing authorities. However, in his later work, Tilly added the upwards process of contention as a social force competing with coercion, and leading to the formation of the state. In addition to discussing governmental agents and institutions, he theorized the role of networks of trust, groups of connected people within a regime to whom a definition of shared stakes in the polity is available, as actors in state-formation. Ethnic and religious groups, tribes and lineages, veterans and militias often find themselves engaged in this contention, marking another cycle of state

formation. The central state thus attempts to break networks of trust, to remove class collusion. (Tilly, 2005) Both coercive and contentious processes are necessary and cyclical, as the regime influences the type of violence that occurs within its territory.

To create an administrative apparatus, states standardized populations; their homogeneity decreased the cost of transferring the administration across territory. The homogenization of the population also had a side effect, whereby its probability of rebellion in response to state-building efforts increased. Internal class struggle ranged from bargaining to revolt and resulted in settlements and distributions that affecting state-formation from below. Contention was most potent when it connected formerly un/disconnected sites, and when it was directed by experts of violence such as demobilized elites or tribal leaders. Classes whose activity was detrimental in war and the preparation for it left an imprint on the state structure.

While Tilly withheld from applying his Capital, Coercion, and Contention (CCC) framework to state formation in the Global South⁵, other scholars did. The contextualization of Tilly into Global South is not entirely absurd as many of its states had Western educated leaders install institutions of Western inspiration from Soviet socialism to US capitalism. To migrate the theory to fully developed capitalist states, scholars made amends to accommodate for the central temporal difference in state-formation: classic theories dealt with morphing not *de facto* developed capitalist states.

⁵ Tilly was concerned with the condescension of Western academic advice to Southern countries. He abandoned “political development” as it established a standard track towards participation inspired from European states.

B. Tilly Traveled: from Master-Processes to Historicism

There has been a considerable disagreement on the relevance of CCC to the Global South, recognized by Tilly himself, who said that “Third World state formation should be distinctly different and that the changed relations between coercion and capital should provide clues to the nature of the difference.” (Tilly, 1990, p. 195) Realizing contextual differences between European and non-European settings, the scholar admitted having simplified the state model using metonymy, referring to statehood and class by their vulgarized attributes, and reification, associating attributes to groups of people in an essentialist way, such as his understanding of armies as monolithic. However, the model traveled, accounting for a major qualitative difference in state formation comparative analysis for contemporary times: The international system guarantees sovereignty to *de facto* states (Centeno, 1997; Davis & Pereira, 2003; Herbst, 2000; Heydemann, 2000; Taylor & Botea, 2008), making standard bellicist state-formation inapplicable, as wars face inwards not outwards.

The systemic changes brought about by the age of the nation-state were not present at the time of European state formation. Today, *de facto* states can survive on a negative judicial sovereignty, as decolonial and international norms, such as non-interference and self-determination, protect them from external wars to some extent, with armies facing inwards instead of across borders⁶. (Ekpo, 1984) Facing inwards, domestic challenge to normative states is understood as insurgency against which the United Nations provides a life-insurance guaranteeing the “absence of an external

⁶ Not necessarily the case for Middle Eastern countries rivaling among each other or bordering with Israel.

mortal danger.” (Sørensen, 2001, p. 346) Lustick, for instance, explains that European state formation was possible as “there was no external club of preexisting great powers able to penetrate their continents and enforce paralyzing fragmented status quo on behalf of “civilized” norms of interstate behavior.” (Lustick, 1997, p. 675) However, nowadays such club exists. Unlike in the classic theories, war nowadays is seldom studied in relation to state-formation. Its effect on the state is only opportunistically brought up in relation to “state failure,” when international norms start discussing the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) instead of non-interference.

We are no longer dealing with classic theories of state-formation as we study developed capitalist states facing bellicist challenge. Historically specific forms of Uneven and Combined Development (U&CD) are proposed to determine non-Western state-formation trajectories. (Anievas, 2010; Anievas & Nisancioglu, 2013) To that effect, capital is not a timeless Weberian condition, rigid with lawfulness and manifesting itself in similar ways across contexts. Tilly had referred to the development of the interstate system and the rise of capitalism, but as master-processes that were nullified by his discussion of capitalists as timeless actors existing before capitalism. (Teschke, 2014, p. 20) Instead, it is a historically distinct social power not exclusive to inter-elite relations, that does not abide by epochal transitions, and allows for more diversity and multi-linearity instead of uni-linearity. A broader discussion of capital trespasses elite circles into different social networks of trust and kinship, and trespasses the fiscal economy to one that is moral.

To adopt Tilly, the model needs to include “at a minimum, the constitutive role of the peasantry in the differential resolution of class conflicts over the sources and

modalities of extraction, property-relations and the power configurations that institutionalized these conflicts,” (Teschke, 2014, p. 21) where agrarian systems are potent. A theory of war defining its scope, type, and conditions required for its pursuit, , differentiating it from dissent or resistance where spheres such as external/internal and international/domestic exist, is necessary as geopolitical fragmentation feeds into coercion and contention. To move away from trans-historical abstract categories that hold independently from space and time, we need to consider the critiques provided by contemporary state-formation theories and to historically specify the CCC trilogy.

1. Capital: Landed and Otherwise

Interstate rivalry is positively linked to the increase of extractive capacities of the state, confirming capital accumulation as central to bellicist practice. (Thies, 2017) However, where extraction is not territorially dependent but instead is dependent on international aid or on availability of bounty, control over land decreases and territorial sovereignty becomes a passive formality. Economic systems where wealth is not landed challenge statehood. African States’ ecological and geographical⁷ lightly populated differentiated zones, for instance, increased the cost of territorial administration and made border control obsolete. (Herbst, 2000) As colonists focused their development on urban areas, the hinterland was left unattended which increased the mobility of peasants

⁷ It is not geographical determinism but the ways African rulers have chosen to deal with the environment at hand, that makes the conception of borders and the relations of capital to hinterland significantly different from that European.

and farmers to evade taxes or despotism. Where territorial loyalty was absent, so was the legitimacy of the state.

Capital can also be provided through international funds, foreign aid, and arms supply for waging war, further decreasing the necessity to extract territorially. While such external provision of capital decreases the legitimacy of the state, war mends the gap by providing incentive for extraction from the populace. (Ikegami, 2003, p. 118)

External aid influenced state-formation: European patrons, for instance, prevented wars in the Middle East in the 19-20th centuries, preventing the expansion of states into regional hegemonies, instead turning them into niches to their patrons' interests. (Bates, 1988; Sørensen, 2001)

However, where states succeed at branding themselves as sole providers of revenue for the populace, other social links grow weaker and decrease contention through breaking the social ties. The socially negotiated patterns of access and control of resources hence redefine the nature of capitalism: petro-states extractive capabilities shift the traditional moral economy from kinship groups to the state (Thies, 2004, p. 56), thereby influencing the forms of alliances.

2. Coercion: Type of War and Warriors

The nexus of war making- state making was also reexamined in relation to the composition of the warriors. The original Tillyan model assumed a conventional understanding of armed forces as the primary mode of militarized conflict. Currently operating in fully developed nation-states, we need to not only address formal militaries but also irregular forces, and variations in military character and capacity. (Campbell,

2003; Reno, 2003) Traditional studies of the military have been elite-centric. (Teschke, 2014) However, the military is not a cohesive unit in the service of the state. It is a heterogeneous body whose members are part of institutional or religious networks⁸ (Batalas, 2003; Romero, 2003) such as veteran associations or intelligence agencies. (Davis & Pereira, 2003) They also are part of networks of kinship such as tribes that are diluted in traditional scholarship confining warfare to formal militaries. These social and political institutions are decisive in molding the outcome of war, as interstate (Centeno 2003, 82) and intrastate (Stubbs, 1999) warfare is tightly knit with the social, fiscal, and political bases of the states.

The type of war, limited, involving military only, or total, militarizing the entire society, similarly influences state-building. The former, of short duration, isolated moments of lethality, and restricted geography, is fought mostly by professional mercenaries. The latter encompasses civilians and is often associated with moral imperatives of complete destruction of rivals, and leads to the militarization of the society. It puts the polity under non-negotiable direct military authority. (Centeno, 2003, p. 83; O'Kane, 2000) The state capacity to extract resources, centralize power, and dilute regional loyalties increases, making for richer states with more intimate connections to their populace. Conversely, limited wars had varied results, although they shared common indisputable features: a debt crisis, military with little popular

⁸Militarization and irregular forces are particularly interesting to explore in the case of ISIS, as a lot of its officials are from such ethnic, religious, and institutional networks, as the dissident group found many of its influential followers in jails, or from the Baath party.

participation, and no positive institutional development, (Centeno, 1997, 2003) which in turn affects the extractive capabilities of the state.

The existence of a strong tradition of irregular warfare and the unavailability of extractable resources weaken the government's ability to monopolize power. The state then purchases the protection services of irregular forces in a process of "inverse racketeering." (Batalas 2003, 152) The development of the state is dramatically different in accordance with which classes or social forces the military wields its power or articulates its claim. The cooptation of irregular forces into the government changes both the nature of the warfare and of the state. The legal sovereign loses in authority, and the state becomes hybrid where ultimate command is not centralized.

3. Contention: Local strongmen and Demobilized Veterans

Ethnic homogeneity persisted as a central criterion contributing to state consolidation in warring countries of the Third World. (Centeno, 1997; Taylor & Botea, 2008) Otherwise, states required the cooptation of networks of trust, that, at times, had no interest in contributing to the state's coercive institutions in men, money, or legitimacy⁹. The indigenous structure of contention thus influences the state. In collapsed states where networks of trust have more momentum than the regime, they are decisive in the shaping of the state.

Contention is further complicated by the disbanding of the military, (Campbell, 2003) insofar like "demobilized ships became pirate vessels, demobilized troops

⁹ Quite the contrary, in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, strongmen relied on their militias and international networks to weaken the state.

became bandits.” (Tilly 1985, 173) It was a necessary bargain as states moved from professional to conscripted armies; arming the citizens increases the potential of violent revolts, especially that the end of war eliminates the necessity for a class compromise. Richer governments attempted to pacify veterans by means of cash or social mobility. Otherwise, unemployed veterans demand retribution.

Military regimes continuously produced soldiers but needed to create an external enemy to avoid introspective violence. But when competing loyalties arose, the negative sovereignty of the state was brought to question. In the case of ISIS, Baathist military officials¹⁰ have joined the insurgent and contributed to the process of state (de)formation.

C. Conclusion

Part of the Global South, the Middle East was subject to historical processes affecting its state-formation such as U&CD, colonial heritage, and artificial borders separating networks of trust and kinship. The Syrian *Jazirah*, area of our inquiry, is no exception. Its bellicist study is thus possible through a modified CCC framework, as these intersections of inter and intra-state conflicts, landed capital and external rents, as well as the mobility of networks of kinship within and without governments due to the porosity of borders inform the war-making/state-making nexus, accounting for:

¹⁰ Few studies, namely Whiteside's, show that the influence of former Baathists on ISIS is exaggerated, as it is the veteran of salafi-jihadi movements who had most say in group membership and decision making. (Whiteside, 2017)

- Capital's existence in form of rentierism, due to the abundance of oil. Paired with foreign funding's intervention where confessional interests are on the line, the abundance of external rents and the sale of natural resources such as oil removed the state incentive of building an apparatus of capital extraction affecting the capital-extraction nexus.

- Contention's existence in the form of tribalism. As rentierism removed the state's need to bargain with the population, its ability to consolidate was affected. The negative sovereignty of states, product of their artificiality, links to political violence¹¹ to the extent that the populations are divided along irredentist lines. It calls for a more generous inclusion of irregular armed groups within contention.

- Coercion is manifested through militarization¹², which is in turn sustained by geopolitical interests. The source of insecurity is then blurred between domestic and foreign, and is further complicated by the almost indistinguishability of formal and informal militias in terms of level of legitimacy, especially that traditional authorities are coercion wielders themselves.

To illustrate these interplays, the next chapters will discuss a *longue durée* effect of CCC in the Syrian *Jazirah*, before moving to the case of ISIS.

¹¹ State artificiality can be measured by the extent of the separation of ethnic groups, and the abundance of straight territorial lines. (Alesina, Easterly, & Matuszeski, 2011)

¹² Military control assumes that military officers hold key political positions under martial law. It is also when the extrajudicial authority is exercised by political forces, political control over armed forces is not centralized, or when a country is under occupation. (Sivard, 1997, p. 24)

CHAPTER III

What Governs Tribal Mobility? A Brief History of the Syrian *Jazirah*

Studies either downplayed the importance of tribal networks¹³ in ISIS (Cockburn, 2015, p. 28) or exaggerated them as an essentialist security threat. While this study finds tribes to be a significant variable, it addresses their material potency more so than their symbolic value alone, as they hold resources necessary for regime subsistence.

Tribal societies are not understood through patrilineal descent and the logic of kin alone, which often confine them into an essentialist identity. (Taute & Sierra, 2014) Instead, *Segmentary Lineage Theory* is proposed to understand ways in which shared value and solidarity formed social groups that interacted in predictable ways leading to a balance of power. (Dukhan, 2012) The balance of power is preserved through the solidification of ties that are not solely familial, but based on property-social relations, the organization of trade, and the distribution of resources. (Gellner & Micaud, 1973) The process of bargaining is not only result of these social formations, but also their source: regimes create new tribal lineages of their own, in order to acquire a traditional

¹³ Cockburn reported that “[p]oliticians and diplomats tended to treat ISIS as if it is a Bedouin raiding party that appears dramatically from the desert, wins sweeping victories and then treats to its strongholds, leaving the status quo little changed.” (Cockburn, 2014a)

form of support to their authority.¹⁴ The phenomenon is common between states and tribes in the Syrian *Jazirah*. Some networks of trust were promoted by rulers¹⁵ and patrons into a nation-state and became state-like structure themselves. (Asad, 1970; Fandy, 1994; P. S. Khoury & Kostiner, 1990; Strakes, 2011) Others fought such inclusion and remained on the margins, both of geography and of rule, albeit heterodox Islam provided them with means of dissent. Others preserved the balance of power, abiding by the Khaldunian cyclical theory: they submitted to the strong state by adjusting their economy, but they dominated during its weakness.

Political opportunity has governed the choices of these tribes; such opportunity recently came in the form of an “event” or a rupture to the order of things (Badiou & Toscano, 2007) in Iraq and Syria. Border porosity enabled by kinship ties proved sturdy in the few years of ISIS’ governance. If not for this connectedness in the social fabric of the region paired with an ability to self-fund, a speedy emergence of ISIS would have been unlikely, absent massive coercive power and geopolitical support. The historical formations of tribes and their interests would partially explain the ways in which the political opportunity was used in the Syrian *Jazirah*.

¹⁴ Some tribes were created from above: Yawir and Assi from Jarba Shammar and Sha'lan Ruwala by the Ottomans. Other have morphed as they migrated from Najd towards the Jazirah where they gathered new followers relying on mediators and resources, (Khoury & Kostiner, 1990) similarly to ibn Saud’s Wahhabi tide.

¹⁵ Tribes in the region are not coherent and do not subscribe to predictable patterns of decision making and behavior. They are only predictable when they are governmentalized following their leaders access to state based legitimization. (Asad, 1970)

This chapter thus looks at tribal formations as sites of non-monolithic contention. It explores the origins of trust that mobilized tribes in anti-state collective action. The area of this investigation covers the historical Euphrates peninsula¹⁶, as it refers to the area which Truman called Mesopotamia (Barout, 2013, p. 670) following a tradition of Zionist greed and landed interest in Syria and Iraq. The understanding of this area as continuous is not alien to literature: Jordanian Socialist Nahed Hattar, for example, found the Iraqi Mosul and the Euphoretic Syrian *Jazirah*'s social history undiscernible, as it includes the *Bedia* of *Shaam* (South-East Syria, West of Iraq, East of Jordan, and North of Saudi Arabia), which came to be an ISIS stronghold.¹⁷ (Hattar, 2016)

The *Syrian Jazirah* was subjected to interests of the Ottoman Empire, French and British colonizers and local rulers. It has had multiple varying borders, both literal and metaphorical: Lausanne-imposed, contested, ethnic, and urban. But all borders had something in common aside their artificiality: they were porous. The question of the invasiveness of national borders on *dirah*, peripheral tribal land used for grazing, is only approached from a state-logic of difficulty of control; their socio-economic implications are seldom tackled, and if so, only to assess developmental policies. (Bocco, 1990, p. 102) The interactions of tribes with the environment and the authority have contributed to the shaping of contention in the *Syrian Jazirah*.

¹⁶ It is composed of the Turkish upper island, Iraqi lower island, and the main or the central island that encompasses today's Syria. The North is bound by Diyarbakir and Gaziantep, the South by Hamrin mountains of Iraq and Deir Ezzor in Syria, and the East by the Tigris and Euphrates. (Barout, 2013)

¹⁷ Like most of Al Akhbar's writers, Hattar was favorable of Bashar al-Asad. (Hattar, 2016)

A. Capital: Economic Transformations and Border Porosity

Subjected to governmental alienation, tribes had to position themselves along a spectrum of interests, along urban/rural and sedentarized/nomadic divides¹⁸ (Batatu, 1978, 1981) and the type of labor. (Haj, 1991) However, as tribal networks are segmentary and not class-based, these divides can only inform us of the discursive trends in writing tribes: the perceived divide is not to be taken at face value. Existing literature equated sedentarization to pacification and mobility to bellicism, as a narrative produced by and for the state. Those who were mobile evaded taxation, further troubling the extortion mechanism of the state. Literature has also conflated nomadism and tribalism (Bocco, 1990) constituting them as a threat. These narratives shaped our understanding of tribes as a discursive unit: they were continuously produced according to the interests of the ruler. However, ecological conditions outside people's control acted as a *force majeure*, and contributed to the molding of tribal patterns of organizing. (Salzmann, 2004; Velud, 1991; White, 2011)

Tribal relationships to the regime varied to the extent they were in/excluded from rule and services. (1) The agrarian transition and urbanization process were first picked up by the Ottoman *Tanzimat* motivated by capitalist expansion and European threat to secure access to water and arbitral trade positions in the post-draught era. (White, 2011) The attempts to revive irrigation systems were an effort to both

¹⁸ Despite largely present in literature, these divides are speculative and might reflect a Khaldunian understanding of urbanism or a Western homogenization of Bedouin relations that seeped into local literature.

“modernize” and control Bedouin mobility. The uneven access to development and services have deepened disparities and differentiated social classes. (2) Subsequently, the French colonization attempted to suppress Syrian resistance by surrounding it with belts of ethnic groups and sponsoring religious and ethnic distinctions, a task made easier by the post WWII centrality of the nation-state. (3) The making of Syrian borders with Turkey and Iraq took thirteen years as they ran against Khaldunian “blood bonds” (Barout, 2013, p. 824) creating informal permeability that enabling informal trade and movement. Paired with the French manipulation of identitarian tensions following the discovery of Syria’s natural resources and its confinement in irrigable land, the “politico-institutional” project of divide and conquer took a new turn. (Mundy & Musallam, 2000) After the independence, the neutralization or incorporation of these tribes into national regimes’ state-formation were a priority to benefit from their resources and to control the opposition. Some of these networks eventually rose to power and put their efforts in containing other ethnic, religious, and kinship groups.

These historical processes are relevant to a contemporary phenomenon such as the emergence of ISIS, as its first geographical strongholds were set in peripheral areas which porosity enabled expansion. The insurgent most easily reached rural areas historically subjected to alienation of tribalized populace.

1. Metaphorical Borders: on Labor, Land Tenure, and War

A state’s control over a population relies heavily on controlling the mobility of individuals and grounding them to landed property subject to tax, when foreign rents and natural resources are absent. This was true of the early *Jazirah* prior to the

discovery of oil and gas. Distinctions between populations dependent on labor accessibility and land ownership were molded by the state assigned identitarian characters. Landed populations were narrated as docile whereas their mobile counterparts were understood as prone to war.

During the early Ottoman Empire, land ownership was obsolete: communal farming was the rule enabling the mobility of nomadic pastoral tribal confederations such as *Shammar* and *Aneza*. (Batatu, 1999; Büssow, 2011) The latter, powerful in the outskirts of Syria with linkages in Najd¹⁹, worked in agriculture seasonally, residing in Hauran and camping near Baghdad. (Burckhardt & Ouseley, 2010) Similarly to Herbst's observation in Africa, the ease of mobility affected the state's ability to project power over land. Subsequently, governmental policies on private property gave momentum to land ownership making tribes who permanently engaged in agriculture an easier prey to the Ottomans.

During the late 16th century, peasants and nomads organized with lords against the center-state due to the change in the market-state relations in Anatolia. (Barkey & Van Rossem, 1997, p. 1357) Market changes were similar in the Syrian *Jazirah*, but it was the ecological crisis (White, 2011) paired with the Wahhabi surge in the 17th and 18th centuries that led to a nomadic surge destabilizing the state model of inclusion/exclusion. Nomadic power expanded with the weakening of the Ottoman empire as tax farmers turned directly to the Europeans bypassing the central state. The

¹⁹ Aneza, in particular its *Ruwalla* branch, were treated as the most Bedouin by the sedentary population in Mosul. This qualitative ascription was enabled by their involvement in sales of camel for pilgrimage caravans with Ottoman support.

vacuum of state power was significantly influenced by the harsh impact of the ecological crisis, or the “Little Ice Age,” which led to migration to urban areas. (White, 2011, p. 298) As the moral economy of nomad farmers, accounting for the type of labor and trade interaction, is affected by ecological conditions such as draught or desertification, environmental changes prompting mobility of sedentarization need to be accounted for. Thus, in addition to the association of Bedouin invasion of the Syrian *Jazirah* with the rise of Wahhabism, an ecological explanation would account for tribes fleeing plague areas. Lineages from *Shammar* and *Aneza* moved to the North during the climate of rebellion, so while their migration is often associated with Wahhabi tides, it could have been prompted by survival against the drought.

A century after, the Ottoman continued with a sedentarization process in deserted areas of *Shaam* after their defeats in Europe from 1683-1699, to make up for the loss of money and men. *Shammar*'s elite migrated increasingly to the *Jazirah* escaping Wahhabis in the 18th century and were sedentarized on the Euphrates. (Cicek, 2017) The *Aneza* tribe, already of Wahhabi inclinations at the time of Burckhardt's travels, settled on the coast north of Deir Ezzor and until the Khabur, and *Shammar*'s elite was settled on the left coast of the *Jazirah*.

At the beginning of the 19th century, the area was characterized by a line between settlers and nomads to the East of Hama, Aleppo, and Homs, that was later pushed eastward. Steppes cultivation pushed people into “impoverishment and indebtedness” as erosion was brought about by extensive cultivation. (Lewis, 1987, p. 192) Nomads pushed the frontier settlement back to the desert. The Ottomans developed the lands for a second time (1856-1908) starting from Deir Ezzor. Semi-nomadic tribes

were given land for agricultural purposes and exempted from military service in exchange for taxes on the crop, (Barout, 2013, p. 70) leading to the creation of a new elite. In Ali Wardi's words, a new '*Asabiya* was created shifting from tribal to "urban" or "municipal" affinities. (Al-Wardī & Aboul-Enein, 2012) The Ottoman *Tanzimat* and the new 1858 Land Code protected peasants from Bedouins, but subjected them to the new class of landowners that emerged with urban municipal growth. Those who became peasants were ascribed peaceful qualities, whereas nomads required bounty for subsistence keeping the warring culture intact. The state-sponsored binary of Warrior-Bedouins/Good-Peasants emerged. (Barout, 2013, p. 81)

The pattern of land-ownership traveled into the 20th century. The French mandate created ethnic belts to support it against dissident local armed projects, further complicating tribal positionalities. For instance, Qamishly was built in Syria in 1920 to settle Christian refugees, Armenians and Assyrians. Christian city-dwellers were middle-class investors, whereas Kurds and Arabs were rural Bedouins. (Sato, 1997, p. 197) The French Mandatory land policy also created Bedouin Cotton Sheikhs. The land reforms from 1958 to 1963 changed the composition of classes as it destabilized the resources of tribal leaders²⁰, and became a turning point in the lives of peasant women from tribal backgrounds who were no longer "slaves of the Skeikh." (Sato, 1997, p. 196) After 1963, agriculture was no longer the main form of wealth, as oil and gas provided employment opportunities changing the demographics of the city. The most important peasants were state-supported urban leaders with rural ties, while the richest

²⁰ It mostly affected Damascus, Hasakah, Homs, Raqqa, Aleppo, Idlib, and Hama, but only minimally disturbed Latakia, Tartous, As-Suwayda (Druze Mountain), and Deraa. (Batatu, 1999, p. 85)

rural peasants were plutocratic but connected to the Baath party through rent. (Batatu, 1999, p. 115)

Nevertheless, most scholastic works maintain an essentialist bellicist nature of nomads and peripheral tribes, which reflects orientalism at times, and disregard to social property relations at others²¹. (Haj, 1991, p. 47) A careful rereading of the history shows the tribes of the Syrian *Jazirah* as monumentally important in state-building and differentiated in accordance to their property relations. Tribal economy shifted from productivity to rents in urban areas, but peripheries were more difficult to control and relied on networks of kinship for subsistence. This illuminates the diverse ways in which members of the same tribe have chosen to position themselves in regards to ISIS considering the economic and ecological needs of the time and their historical accumulation.

2. Physical, yet Porous: the Iraqi-Syrian Border

The Iraqi-Syrian border's permeability was put to test by ISIS expansion from al-Qa'im to Deir-Ezzor to Raqqa. It is telling of the historical patterns of mobility relationship between the two modern states. In 1918, Iraq and Syria had no distinct borders. The Lausanne Accord of 1923, divided the *Jazirah* between the British in Iraq and the French in Syria. It assigned the upper mountainous areas to Turkey, the lower

²¹ Burckhardt ascribed cultural characteristics to tribes without investigating the social and economic relations responsible for political behavior towards the state. (Notes on the Bedouins and Wahabys, collected during his Travels in the East, by the late John Lewis Burckhardt, 1831) Batatu, on the other hand, held the changes of the Syrian traditional moral economy responsible for the disruption of tribal principles. Such thesis resonates with Haj's study of Arab tribes from lower Ottoman Iraq from 1850 to 1900s recognizing the historical formations of these tribes through their interactions and social ties.

part, Tikrit, to Iraq, and the center including Raqqa, Al-Hasakah, and Deir Ezzor to Syria. (Barout, 2013, p. 43) Nevertheless, Middle Eastern borders were not drawn by occupiers alone, as they were also shaped by contested sovereignties. The Iraqi-Syrian border is such example, where Iraqi soldiers in the Syrian army have precipitated the annexation of some lands from under British-occupied Iraq to king Faysal's Syria between 1918 and 1920. Faysal was in the position of reconciling the contradictory demands of the populace under guise of nationalist identity, however, the territory on which a nationalist Syrian state would expand were disputable.

Getting the lion's share of the region, Britain maintained a good relationship with Faysal, against French aspirations. (Salhi, 2012, p. 276) The Iraqi-Syrian rivalries grew showing separatist tendencies between the two countries. The nationalist organization *Al-'Ahd*, which defended the interests of both countries against the Ottomans and had centers in Damascus, Aleppo, Mosul, and Baghdad, had then split into two factions under the French and British colonists. The Syrian grew unimportant, but the Iraqi fraction was pivotal in Faysal's Syria. The ruler's frequent travels allowed nationalist organizations to determine local policies. (Tauber, 1991, p. 361) The Iraqi fraction's personnel filled most military positions both in Syria and in British-occupied Iraq. They had centers in Damascus, Aleppo, Mosul, and Baghdad, allowing them to precipitate the annexation of some lands from Iraq to Syria between 1918 and 1920.

Al-'Ahd emerged from Deir Ezzor, located between Raqqa and al-Qa'im. While populated by a few nomadic tribes, Deir Ezzor was claimed to be a "no-man's land" and (Williams, 1931, p. 227) Tribal Sheikhs disliked the Arab governance of Deir Ezzor as they perceived it complicit with the Turks. They have secretly petitioned

Britain to annex the area to Iraq until a permanent border is defined is defined. (Tauber, 1991, p. 365) In 1919, however, they have regretted their decision now petitioning the Syrian government to annex Deir Ezzor. Tribes have since been submerged in the fate of the border. *Shammar* and *Aneza* stirred up anti-British sentiment and the Iraqi *al-Ahd* managed to annex Deir Ezzor to Syria. It is hence said that its inhabitants, who wanted independence from the British but not the Syrian nationality, tended to consider themselves Iraqis.

While since 1920s a lot has changed, the artificiality of the border remained felt and alive. It neither broke tribal affinities nor permanently challenged mobility. To erase the commonwealth autonomous nature of tribes, colonialists and national regimes alike attempted to impose a social class system²². Communities of trust were at once confessional, tribal, and local (Haj, 1991), and their tribal affinities remain present despite the “reality” of Arab tribal lives not matching with the sense of identity. People who have no memory of land reforms still identify within tribes and have an egalitarian outlook towards tribal sheikhs, while remaining subordinate. (Sato, 1997, p. 198) In Syria, “*Aneza* and *Shammar* [...] still maintain close tribal connections with their relatives in the Arabian Peninsula,” (Dukhan, 2014, p. 2) affecting the politics of the country till the present time. Tribes are thus not class-organized, they are not prisoners of their own infrastructure, but they are segmental with differentiated contention. And despite the attempted discursive erasure of their presence, some tribes were able to

²² National regimes in Syria and Iraq did not overthrow the artificial border, as the Baath in Baghdad was closer to Aflaq, and the Syrian party was a patron for Alawites. (Kienle, 1990)

sustain their networks and survive the shocks of consecutive governments, whether in the *Jazirah* or in the larger area.

B. Coercion: Militarization and State Building

1. Syrian Baath

The history of the Syrian Baath morphed through its inception, transition (60s), to its modern form of a *Gumlukkiya*²³. Its founders, white-collar Alawites from al-Maidan rural intelligentsia, descended from families working in trade and to whom borders were imaginary. (Batatu, 1999, p. 266) However, this combination changed in the 1960s after the Baath created a secret military fraction that moved away from the United Arab Republic in its path and politics, without the old white-collar party leaders' knowledge until 1964. (Batatu, 1999, p. 282) Regimes across the Middle East were changing, as pro-Western oligarchies faced coups “where artificial statehood frustrated Arab identity” like in Iraq and Syria. (Hinnebusch, 2010, p. 203) The Baath responded by “cleansing” the government from people whose loyalty was questionable to the founders, and filling it instead with peasant families from tribal backgrounds. The Alawites, about one 8th of the Syrian population, grew more present in the government as they could not afford the military service exemption fee that sky-rocketed in 1964. The Alawites appeared to act in accordance to their party belonging, something that cannot be said about the “cleansed” Sunni lieutenants. (Batatu, 1999; Cronin, 2014, p. 7; Van Dam, 1979, p. 306) Hafez al-Asad made army recruitment exclusive to members of

²³ An authoritarian state of a hybrid form between republic and hereditary monarchy.

the party in 1968, which created the new sectarian, tribal, and familial based military. (Batatu, 1999, p. 332)

By 1970, the military nature of the Syrian leadership became clear to the public. Civilian officials were demoted to secondary roles creating the sectarian and authoritarian Syria of Asad.²⁴ The most contemporary form of Baathism centered a cult of personality, where lines between loyalty to the leader, the party, and the cause were blurred. (Wedeen, 1999) Hafez al-Asad started coopting tribal elders when facing opposition in Hama in the same year through representation in parliament, ministry of interior and the security apparatus. Similarly, to his father's strategy, Bashar al-Asad used tribes to bring down the Kurdish uprising in 2003. (Dukhan, 2014, p. 6) The familial rule of Asad was institutionalized and the elite *'asabiya* was substituted with new forms of patrimonialism favoring clientelism. This made for the hybridity of the regime: despite republican, the system borrowed from monarchies in legitimizing tools.

While during its inception, Baath's membership was based on ideological belief, the active recruitment after Asad's coup made it ideologically heterogeneous. Baath's size increased as partisanship was the shortest way to upward social mobility for peasants and workers, whereas the urban residents of Damascus and Aleppo did not experience a similar need. National Baath membership varied along rural/urban and religious/ethnic lines, due to the party's disproportional presence in different regions of

²⁴ Hinnebusch argues that the 1973-oil boom has affected the political economy of the region as a whole and moved it towards a policy of *infitah*, complicated with the factor of existence of rent in Islam, which pushed parties to include different factions in governance, yet to keep a solid grip on power. (Hinnebusch, 2010)

the country, and its appeal to those who benefited from the agrarian reform that shaped contention.

2. Iraqi Baath

The Iraqi Baath rejected tribalism as "the [remnant] of colonialism" in its first communique in 1968. (Baram, 1997, p. 2) The party was first composed of lower-middle-class urban youth from tribal backgrounds in Nassiriyya and Baghdad. To avoid competing legitimacies, only few had high lineages of sheikhs in their families. Tribalism was perceived as antithetical to pan-Arabism and Iraqi nationalism, as Baath equated tribalism to feudalism, blaming the slow development of the relations of production on its persistence. However, tribes in Iraq after the end of monarchical rule have evolved in ways allowing them to form interest based alliances that are more reflective of class than kin, through which the birth of Baath itself can be explained. (Batatu, 1978) The relationship between the state and the tribes during the modernization phase was characterized by both conflict and mutual-service. (Hamza, 2017) Further transforming social relation, the Baath party purposefully created social units such as peasant associations aimed to constitute docile families living under the state's rule. While Batatu concluded that social differences between Iraqis are based on land-tenure, party-affiliation, and tribal belonging, he was convinced that tribal affinities will morph to eventually disappear. (D. R. Khoury, 2018) Such was the task of the early Baath, however, with difficult times came difficult decisions.

Saddam was of *Albu Nasir* tribe from which whom he recruited his security personnel in addition to *Juburis* and *Ubaydis*²⁵. Coming to power through a coup, Saddam relied on networks of kinship to support his rule. Further disturbing the tribal order, Baath limited land ownership through the 1969 May decree separating tribal peasants from sheikh landowners. Saddam described the reforms as a rescue of the poor and cheated from the "reactionaries" who spread "tribalism, religious factionalism, and regionalism." (Baram, 1997, p. 3) The reference was aimed at tribal leaders of Shiite sympathy and Kurdish populations disdaining Arab Sunni rule²⁶. Yet, whenever party rule was crumbling under criticism, such as during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) and the Shiite Intifada, the Baath would opportunistically abandon its rejection of tribalism. Saddam's 1994 faith campaign, for instance, instrumentalized piety to gather support locally and regionally against the US and other governments deemed oppressive of their Muslim populations. Reappearing in Iraq after the faith, Wahhabis contributed to the creation of a Sunni *'asabiya* against the Shiite rebellion. Then, Salafism started morphing from its traditional to its Jihadi nature²⁷. The war also changed the nature of

²⁵ The recruitment policies backfired in 1990, when Jabbari officers, disenchanted with the president's policy of tribal land expropriation, plotted to assassinate him. These policies have also backfired provoking a revolt around Ramadi in 1995 after the assassination of execution of Air Force Major General Muhammad Mazlum al-Dulaymi. The climate of distrust grew larger, and by the end of 1996, the regime had an uneasy relationship with major Sunni groups: Jabbaris, Ubaydis, and Dulaymis.

²⁶ "To break and weaken the strongest tribes, especially those too close to Baghdad for comfort, the regime expropriated large areas of their land. In the case of the Sunni Jubbur, for example, many lands in the tribe's domain west of the Tigris, near al Mada'in south of Baghdad, were taken and given to other tribes. Saddam Hussein used the same policy with the Shammar Jarba in the Jazira, the 'Azza just north of the capital, and a few tribes between Baghdad and the Iranian border." (Baram, 1997, p. 3)

²⁷ It completely morphed starting 2001, and in 2003, it made its armed nature explicit, feeding off the anger about the US invasion, as well as Bucca, Baghdad Airport, and Abu Gharib prisons. (Al-Ibrahim, 2015, p. 113)

the economy from one sustained by oil rents to one of military nature “sustained by a growing state debt financed mainly by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.” (Costantini, 2015, p. 134)

In the late 1980s²⁸, Saddam started a process of tribalization of Baath. Sheikhs became legitimate partners in power-sharing. Saddam “even called the Baath party itself ‘a tribe’,” at least once. (Baram, 1997, p. 1) Neo-tribalism mended bureaucratic practices according to custom in exchange for oaths of allegiance to Saddam focused on the belonging to religion, tribalism, and the Mesopotamia.²⁹ Tribal leaders received financial support in money and arms to fill in for the formal military who was consumed in the Gulf War. Furthermore, the regime made an alliance with the *Naqshabandi* Order (JRTN), through Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri, Saddam’s second in command, who went to collaborate with ISIS despite different ideologies. (Jawad al-Tamimi, 2014, 2015) To secure itself with armed militias, the regime has given up on being the sole “legitimate” user of violence, and has also paved the path for religious armament.

C. Contention: Tribalized Peasantry of the *Jazirah*

Despite the Ottoman and French superposition of identitarian and geographical boundaries, networks of trust whose participation within the government was constrained, mobilized towards sub-state or supra-state organizing. The tribalized

²⁸ This year marked the beginning of the "unmaking" of the state. (Schwarz, 2012)

²⁹ “In the name of God ... We, men of the monotheistic religion [Islam] and chiefs of tribes ..., the sons of the District of Babylon, Babylon of history and invention and struggle, Babylon of Nebuchadnezzar ..., Babylon of ... Saddam Husayn, we swear by God . . . and by his ... prophet ... our readiness to sacrifice ... till martyrdom.” (Baram, 1997, p. 12)

peasantry's political stance vis-a-vis the ruling authority varied opportunistically. Contention took the form of liberation and intra-communitarian struggles motivated by unequal access to resources. Under the Ottomans, contention was mobilized through informal networks of kinship, friendship, and acquaintanceship, making neighborhoods more important than unions. (Barkey & Van Rossem, 1997, p. 1346) So while capitalism constrained the expression of traditional social ties, it also motivated cross-border mobility insured by these same networks.

National governments have also faced dissidence. In 1991 in Iraq, Saddam referenced the Prophet to argue for giving high authority positions based on one's own kinship. And thereafter, the leadership of Baath would exclusively come from good (tribal) family backgrounds. Similar to the Asad-sponsored cult of personality, Saddam constructed a culture of authoritarian legitimization around his persona. (Faust, 2017) Tribal custom was injected into the legal system placing tribal values before the state. The tribal nature of the country has grown geographically; tribes have appeared in unlikely places where they were thought to be an extinct social structure. Government officials who in the beginning of their political quest dropped their tribal identifications, such as al-Tikriti and al-Duri, were addressed by their *Albu Nasir* and *Harb* lineages, respectively. Saddam now envisioned tribes as organisms that transcend the Sunni-Shii divide, claiming, albeit unconvincingly, that "Baath is the tribe of all tribes." (Alexander & Assaf, 2005) These shifts in policies were put in place as socialist reforms of the party alone were not sufficient to suppress or prevent the Intifada. Instead, the creation of the Arab tribal common denominator gathered some unlikely tribes into an alliance with the regime, it has also pushed some tribes to either fight it or refrain from joining

dissent. To some extent, Saddam's policies have induced the militarization of people with competing loyalties, that identify with supra-state networks.

The Syrian Baath, on the other hand, minimally disturbed the tribal order in the countryside when it reorganized the agrarian due to the low concentrations of landed property. The more imperialism was felt in the premises and the higher social classes exploited peasants, the stronger socially-oriented movement with pan-Arab agenda grew. (Hinnebusch, 2010, p. 207) However, the Baath was differently attractive to peasants depending on their geographical location. The mobilization for war also acted as a "democratizing" factor as Syria included masses into the military and increased their access to social benefits and their upwards mobility simultaneously reducing contention. The opening of the military to lower-middle strata created a binary between the elite government and the army. Syria resembled a populist authoritarian regime due to the availability of rents and the familial/traditional standard of legitimacy of its ruling class. The government used "modern" techniques of professionalization of the party members while maintaining "ancient" familial appointment of key command.

The peasant background of the Syrian Baath made for competing legitimacies with other lineages and ethnic/religious backgrounds. At times when the regime was weak or unable to deliver services, competing tribes would make their presence heard. An insult to tribal leaders during the Syrian uprising in 2011 was sufficient to vocalize dissent. With access to arms and help of defected military officials, ISIS found a host environment in the hinterland of Syria constantly alienated by rulers, foreign and local. Militarization in Syria continued to target ethnic and religious minorities like it did in

the times of the French Mandate, enhancing the Muslim Brotherhood's disdain Baath. These tensions surfaced most visibly and recently with ISIS.

D. Conclusion

With the state penetrating the *Jazirah*, tribal ideology became idiom for getting resources through the state when possible while bypassing it through supra-national networks when opportunity arises. Modernization promoted narrative entails that sedentarized tribes do not organize through kinship modes; this bias made the visibility of cross-border ambiguous. The transformation of the peasantry and the property relations added onto the hybridity of the states and the porosity of its borders. Transnational projects of statehood are hence palpable in the minds of the tribes whose power was suppressed but not lost. Militarization has both sustained oppressive governments and granted dissenting networks access to military training, strategies, and arms. Tribal networks hence did not retain a "primordial" shape, but are both autonomous and instrumentalized through state formation processes. Like other rulers, ISIS necessitated these networks in its own formation process.

CHAPTER IV

ISIS' MOBILIZATION: RENTIERIST DILEMMA UNSOLVED

The geographical locality of ISIS in Iraq at the time of its emergence is not a contested fact; it is the location from where its first branch has emerged under Zarqawi before expanding into post-2011 Syria. However, the theological origins and material conditions of its emergence are contested. Fingers point at the state-building failures of the despotic regimes of Iraq and Syria that left public grievances unattended, the US invasion of Iraq, the deepening of the Shi'a-Sunni divide, and the turmoil in Syria giving rise to a terrorist group. (Gerges, 2016, p. 18; Hall, 2015; Stern & Berger, 2015) While these arguments accurately depict the void from which ISIS emerged, they still ignore the state building features of this emergence. ISIS rose at a time of unraveling of states and made use of the available infrastructure. It adopted many of the operational methods of the conventional states of Iraq and Syria, relying on networks of trust for its expansion, militarization for its warring, and rentierism for its economic sustainability. Being a non-productive source of income requiring geopolitical support (Schwarz, 2012), rentierism made ISIS vulnerable to the US lead coalition. The rise and fall of ISIS thus requires a Tillyan material study of greed and grievances, not a theological study centering US foreign policy.

Aside the fiscal economy, the rise of ISIS relied on the moral economy of tribalized networks. Scholars (Batatu, 1978; Hinnebusch, 2010; Provence, 2005, 2017;

Seale, 1966) have already established that the post-independence Syrian/Iraqi history is that of a struggle between the landed elite formerly complicit with mandatory powers, on one hand, and the rural and lesser notables, on the other. The great Syrian Revolt (1925), for example, drew its leaders from rural sheikhs and demobilized military officers. The French mandate failed to suppress it through “ageless” identitarian divisions of sect and ethnicity as it underestimated the connectedness of this fabric. (Provence, 2005, p. 149) A modern discussion of social ties and loyalties in Syria and Iraq would similarly illuminate an upwards narrative of the rise of ISIS. Granted, the rampant economic and social injustice in Syria and Iraq were a favorable environment for ISIS to fill with not only with dissidence but also with a material project competing with the nation-state. ISIS’ alleged statehood project attempted to transnationally bringing together a portion of the MENA’s population under one *Ummah*. In doing so, it made use of irredentism separating kinship networks. For while inspired by earlier missions of Al Qaeda, ISIS was fundamentally and over-ambitiously different from the matrix: It charged itself with the creation of a physical state with all its derivatives of means of governance.³⁰

In order to rise as an alternative to national statehood, ISIS necessitated both the institutional failure of states and the identitarian failure of their nationalisms. In order to strategize its state-project, ISIS required military expertise and equipment, both made available in the highly militarized societies of Iraq and Syria. It required

³⁰ “Unlike the original al Qaeda, which showed little interest in controlling territory, the Islamic State has also sought to build the rudiments of a genuine state in the territory it controls. It has established clear lines of authority, tax and educational systems, and a sophisticated propaganda operation.” (Walt, 2016)

brokerage through the connection of sites across national borders for its expansionary project provided by networks of kinships. It also inevitably required capital to sustain its activity, and benefited from rentierism. While state failure provided the two former components, the economic side of the equation proved more difficult. This chapter thus studies ISIS' history of emergence from a Tillyan bellicist lens to evaluate its claim to statehood. It accounts for capital, coercion, and contention, manifested as rentierism, militarization, and tribal lineages in the Syrian *Jazirah*.

A. State Failure and the Rise of ISIS: Interplays of Coercion and Contention

Convinced that the US will attack Iraq, Jordanian Abu Mussaab al-Zarqawi, former political prisoner but once a petty criminal, received a \$200,000 loan from Al Qaeda to establish a training camp which was named *Jama'at al-Tawhid wa' al-Jihad* (JTWJ) in the country. (Wagemakers, 2016, 2018) Similarly to post al-Qaeda generation who was more interested in fear and spectacle³¹ than it was interested in theology (Gerges 2017, 89), Zarqawi displayed no religious interests before his imprisonment. It was in jail that this interest awakened prompting his travel to Afghanistan and then to Iraq where he started building a base in 2004. (McCants, 2015) In the same year, Zarqawi pledged allegiance to AQ renaming his local franchise to AQ in Iraq (AQI).

³¹ The composition of ISIS officers was mostly rural, peasant, poor and non-ideological, like Zarqawi himself. The absence of political thought in ISIS' hindered the translation of its military victories into political leverage.

Nevertheless, the organization stood apart from the matrix due to the centrality of anti-Shiite sentiment to its organizing.

Exacerbated by the atrocities of the invasion, the Sunnis of Iraq and the population at large³² remember the US bombing not only military facilities but also water and electricity purification centers, leading to typhoid and cholera. Iraq was subjected to international sanctions, leaving the people feeling cheated and succumbed to sentiments of helplessness under Saddam's mercy. The US invasion not only humiliated Iraq but also intensified identitarian politics by reinforcing sectarianism, providing AQI with a political moment to mobilize Sunni populations against both the US and the Shiite government. Alone, border porosity does not translate into a violent challenge to statehood; it requires the connections of formerly disconnected groups and their activation by professionals of violence. The emergence of a bellicist alternative to a state requires connection with the formal military to "the extent that many of these alternative armed forces comprise previous military personnel [...] may carry with them traditions, techniques, and networks (not to mention arms), that still link them to national defense ministries although they are formally separate from the national armed forces." (Davis & Pereira, 2003, p. 5) The emergence of ISIS leadership from defected Baathists, former inmates, and tribal elders comes as no surprise and signals Iraqi state failure and the weakening of its control mechanisms. The historical militarization of a populace with transnational loyalties also provided foot-soldiers for the group.

³² Shia in lower Iraq suffered from the post 1991 sanctions as well.

1. The Dissolution of the Army

The militarily-influenced expansion on the East Mediterranean is a continuation of a historical pattern. (Hourani, 2013) The leadership of ISIS being an alliance between religious zealots and ex-Baathists who have lost power in Iraq is not a historical rupture. It was the result of the de-Baathification of Iraq post-invasion: The US sanctions disenfranchised two thirds of the army who became unemployed. (Gerges, 2016, p. 98) Many of Saddam's era Baathists have joined the insurgent out of desire to return to power and not out of religious belief, (Hall, 2015, p. 69) arguably similarly to how they have joined the Baath during the faith campaign out of interest and not political affinity. Soldiers who expected to keep their jobs under the US occupation felt cheated as the army was dissolved: "Well-trained officers [flooded] into the resistance, with devastating consequences for the occupying forces: a year later the Americans controlled only islands of territory in Iraq." (Cockburn, 2015, p. 115) This demobilization troubled national sentiments, creating an opportunity for alternative identifications that Al Qaeda's supporter at the time successfully used.

Strong links exist between militarization and the demand of social and economic welfare. Demobilization, in turn, is linked to impoverishment. Troops were unable to project themselves in a future under the new order established by the US and their careers ended abruptly. Grievances and greed grew in the absence of an authority that would guarantee the soldiers' plunder. Post 2003 Iraq failed to accommodate the rampant unemployment. With no attempt at class compromise, war provides a temporary answer to poverty. Soldiers had to grasp a historical moment to organize, as unlike other workers, the market does not produce jobs for them through the cycle of

production and consumption. Soldiers hence organize on the basis of military experience and could create fascists, pacifists, and communists, etc. (Davis & Pereira, 2003, p. 104) Many of the disenfranchised Baathist Iraqi military commanders found themselves in US prisons face-to-face with religious zealots, and contributed to the creation of ISIS.

The rural areas of Anbar, Diala, Salaheddine, and Ninwa, poorer and marginalized, created an opportunity for the Islamic State's thrive on social injustice. ISIS worked with Baathists to militarize citizens, and upon its victory, it neutralized some of them in Mosul in 2014. The demobilized military and militarized tribal networks had bleak prospects, for if one was "in the security forces during the previous regime, then [he was] a Saddamist and a terrorist." (Dagher, 2009) They were of monumental importance to the rise of the group as they activated sites of contention. ISIS showed willingness to cooperate with Sunnis by talks with Army of the Men of the Naqshbandi Order (JRTN). Mostly Sunni, the population of Mosul shouted at Iraqi troops that they are sons of Maliki and of Mut'a: the fall of Mosul was both due to a military assault and popular uprising, as the Iraqi army was branded as a foreign Shiite occupying force and Iranian puppet. (Cockburn, 2015, p. 16) The Iraqi security forces of millions crumbled against a 6,000 ISIS soldier: such miraculous success was made possible by the support of the Sunni population.

2. The Tribal Contention

Multiple Sunni armed networks were against both the US invasion and the Maliki government. They neither existed nor acted in a unitary manner (Tripp, 2007),

instead, they changed alliances to balance out the odds of each party. On one hand, multiple tribal networks mobilized since 2006 against AQI cooperating with the US after the Shiite government and associated militias. In Fallujah, for example, tribal elders attempted to create an arrangement with the US against Zarqawi in exchange for some of the war spoils. (Gerges, 2016, p. 65) On the other hand, six Sunni organizations joined forces with AQI in September 2006.

The anti-ISI collaboration crystallized by early 2007 as the *Anbar Awakening*, was formed under *Abu Risha*'s command. (*ibid*, p. 102) The Sons of Iraq endorsed the coalition with 80,000 members and the US provided it with military and financial support. After ISI's murder of Abu Risha in September of the same year, Maliki created *Isnad*, a Shiite organization similar to the *Awakening*, not only to fight the dissident Sunni group but also to neutralize his Shiite competitors. In 2008 and after the US withdrawal, Maliki froze the activity of the *Awakening*, after originally promising to incorporate its quarter into formal governmental institutions. In the March 2008 elections, 511 Sunnis were forbidden from running for the government. The tribal leaders that once fought alongside Maliki's military were fatigued and felt cheated. Fearing that *Jihadis* and former Baathists would infiltrate into the state apparatus, Maliki exacerbated tribal grievances providing ISIS with a survival opportunity.

The *Awakening* ended up facing two fires, being targeted by both the government and ISIS. The government started letting go of the group's personnel in 2010, stripping the fighters from their military ranks and reducing their pay. The dissolved *Anbaris* were targeted by ISI and faced an ultimatum: to be killed or to be recruited. ISI promised larger amounts of money than what the Iraqi government used to

pay in a “carrot and stick” manner. (Gartenstein-Ross & Jensen, 2015, p. 106) By mid-2010, they were recruited into ISI’s ranks (Bunzel, 2014) due to the economic imperative of grievance and greed. The economy of tribal networks was disrupted and the rentier economy tying them to the state fell through, making space for new lucrative alliances between insurgent and local strong men. (Hattar, 2016) Similar dynamics were at play in Syria; many former Asad allies collaborated with ISIS who allowed them greater access to financial benefits³³.

The army of Maliki was not willing to die in the battlefield against ISIS like it did under Saddam whether out of ‘fear’ (Makiya, 1998) or due to systems of patronage³⁴. (Faust, 2017; Sassoon, 2016) It has crumbled because it became an extortion racket after the US imposed reforms of outsourcing food and sidelining professional Sunni officers. Some even speculate the existence of an unspoken agreement between the military and ISIS based on the idea that the enemy is common and that it is Baghdad. (Hattar, 2016) The fall of Mosul on June 10, 2014 turned ISIS into a fully equipped modern army overnight. (Hall, 2015, p. 55) While everyone rightfully blamed Maliki, it was the fiasco on the Syrian Iraqi border singling state failure, that had more to answer to: the revolt of Syrian Sunnis caused a similar one in Iraq. (Cockburn, 2015, p. 137) The ease of ISIS navigation between the two countries permitted the generalization of contextual conflicts and their mutual sustainability.

³³ For instance, the tribe of Bou Azzdine fought with JAN over the oil revenue and aligned itself with ISIS because the latter allowed them to sell oil in Raqqa, Deir Ezzour, and Iraq. ISIS then created a section for tribes to mediate their conflicts. (Gerges, 2016, p. 180)

³⁴ The private sector during Saddam’s rule was one of financial patronage, it encompassed multiple sectarian backgrounds, insofar they were tied to the Tikriti family in power. (Costantini, 2015, p. 135)

3. The Fall of the Border

ISIS considered the “land of the Bedouins” to be its state all across the *Jazirah* and acted accordingly expanding from Iraq into Syria (Hattar, 2016): Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, former prisoner of camp Bucca where he was placed by the US and leader of ISIS, sent one of his top fighter in 2011, Abu Mohammad al-Julani into the neighboring country and planted former military officials in it. Due to border mobility, ISIS state-project appeared tangible and functional, disrupting the barrier between Syria and Iraq. The border first allowed human and arms flow from Syria to Iraq during the war, and later reversed the flow as ISIS expanded in Syria. (Stern & Berger, 2015, p. 41)

In the years leading up to the uprising, Syria has experienced a drought that increased poverty in rural areas where the protests started. In addition to the drought, Daraa, Syrian city bordering Jordan, was suffering from the regime’s reforms towards capitalism that bypassed peasants dropping the poverty line below former standards. (Gerges, 2016, p. 158) When a dozen boys were arrested for graffiti in Syria, the protests soon moved to neighboring provinces, while the army’s sectarian composition favored the side of the regime. (Cockburn, 2015, p. 84) Some fifty thousand protestors walked the streets as a thirteen-year-old child, member of a tribal networks, was delivered back to his family from under regime torture, with his genitals removed and body mutilated (Stern & Berger, 2015, p. 40), an event that allowed for a more radical mobilization of the grieving population. Asad’s amnesty released some political

prisoners that went to form Jabhat al-Nusra (JAN) who first collaborated with ISIS.³⁵.
(Hall, 2015, p. 48)

ISIS and JAN used lists of social, regional, and tribal elites to incorporate them in their project or eradicate their presence. (Reuter, 2015) These networks facilitated cross-border mobility. Iraqi politicians warned that the conflict in Syria would exacerbate the destabilization of the status quo in Iraq. Many Sunnis understood that the only tangible way to exploit the situation is to organize in a Sunni versus Shia way: First, the sectarian balance began shifting in 2011 with the take-over of Sunni sentiment backed by the Gulf financing of the so-called Spring, and second, the predominantly Shi'a government and historical exclusion did not provide Sunni networks of trust with many options. After all, in a time of crisis, groups tend to retreat to a traditional form of authority and organizing and to rally around the flag, be it national or tribal. The Iranian protection of the Syrian regime added to the sectarian tensions and aggravated foreign patronage as clusters of countries and para-states formed alliances against each other: Turkey, Qatar, and Saudi faced Iran, Iraq, and Hezbollah. Those countries neighboring Syria and Iraq such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Lebanon contributed to the illicit porosity of the borders whether through their formal channels or paramilitary groups. By May 2015, half of Syria's territory and all Iraqi border crossing points were under

³⁵ By 2013, during the Ghouta chemical attack, JAN started creating further alliances irrespective of politics as long as the parties they collaborate with are interested in ousting Assad, which set it apart from ISI. JAN provided a lifeline to Syrians who despite seeing it for the violent insurgent it was, were grateful for the service and goods provision. When in 2013, the group grew in prominence, Baghdadi announced that Julani is his underling aiming to expand ISI into Syria to create ISIS, (Hall 2015, 44-49) and thereby claimed himself as the leader of both organizations. Unwilling to share power, Julani appealed to Zawahiri to mediate between him and Baghdadi, attempting to deny JAN's ties with ISIS and claiming to receive his orders from AQ. (Gerges 2016, 168) The mediation fell through, and ISIS and JAN's split crystallized.

ISIS' command. So despite external interventions' attempts to contain ISIS, the moral economy of the Syrian-Iraqi border allowed for temporary thrive.

B. Another Rebel's Dilemma: Failures of Capital Accumulation

The traditional rebel's dilemma deals with the challenges in the face of expanding violence against the state into collective action. However, the rational choice model does not look into the economic sustainability of such action. Collective violence is not obtainable through ideological radicalization, but through individual incentives in the mobilized group as public goods are not excludable and allow for freeriding.

(Hegghammer, 2013)

In the case of ISIS, these groups were tribalized networks of kinship: so while individual recruitment might have happened through salary provision to soldiers from the hinterland, expansion over territory required an administrative capacity to extract and manage rents. Traditionally, when administrative activity distracts soldiers from war, administrators become more potent and institutionalize the group into a state.

(Tilly, 1990, p. 20) In the quest to extort, extract, protect, and administer, ISIS required (1) networks of patronage and (2) renewable capital.

1. Broken Networks of Patronage

The army in Syria was a creation of the French mandate, composed of Christians, Circassians, Alawites, Kurds, and Druze from rural poor classes. After the independence, its core remained dominated by these minorities, especially Alawites, intensifying the Sunni discourse on the Syrian army being a French creation. (Cronin,

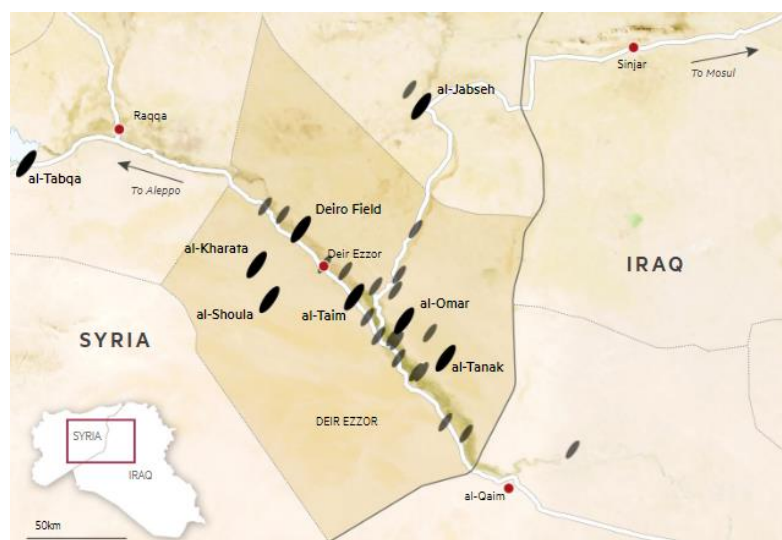
2014) The power relations were altered due to the minorities' identification with the Imperial power. Similarly, in Iraq, the faith campaign under Saddam's rule shifted the party from its secular Baathist nature to an Islamization apparent in the *Naqshabandi* troops. In Maliki's Shia government, however, Sunnis were at disadvantage. The *Awakening* asked the US to recruit Sunnis into the predominantly Shia security apparatus, only to later defect and join ISIS.

Understanding the paramount importance of incorporating professionals of violence into the state project, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi started bolstering ISI's leadership with "disenfranchised Baathist and Saddam era commanders." (Hall, 2015, p. 28) To maintain the military-financial nexus, he also orchestrated an attack on Abu Gharib prison the night of July 21, 2013 to free prisoners who became answerable to ISI. In Mosul, ISIS targeted the bank, from where it acquired four hundred million dollars, and the Badoush prison where it found 1440 *Jihadis* for its troops. (ibid, p. 59) While traditional armies require orders from a higher up commander, ISIS military was decentralized making its moves unpredictable. However, the mobilization of resources proved more difficult. The need to sustain ISIS military victories required the creation and maintenance of an administration. The rentier model of the state made ISIS activity unsustainable as it lacked access to state-to-state markets.

2. Capital, Administrative Apparatus, and ISIS Failure

In the bellicist state formation model, the insurgent group requires a cycle of state making, war making, protection, and extraction, which ISIS briefly managed. It performed administrative and service-oriented tasks, establishing elementary court

systems, religious police, and punitive and educational systems. For the state to project its power, a level of public support or ideological contagion and appeal are required. However revolutionary states' spread requires resources first and foremost. After consolidating militarily, "ISIS generally progress[ed] towards religious police, stricter punishments, and a concerted educational system. These types of programs require more dedicated personnel, resource investments, and greater support from the population." (Caris & Reynolds, 2014) The group practiced both taxation and extortion; however most of its money was made through sales of oil. Taxes were collected on utilities such as water and electricity, telecommunications, staff salaries, entrance fee of trucks moving through checkpoints. Taxes and extorted goods were only minimal in comparison to rents: ISIS owned some of the most fertile lands in Syria and Iraq and it operated oil and gas fields. However, relying on rents did not last. Syrian oil did not work to their capacity due to the deaths and fleeing of professionals. The fields reached only 10% of their potential, which pushed ISIS to sell back some of its acquired fields in Eastern Syria in 2012 to the regime. (Stergiou, 2016, p. 193)



Map 3 Oil Extraction Under ISIS in 2016 (Solomon, Kwong, & Bernard, 2016)

In its administrative effort, ISIS even went into accommodating to the demands of its populace by allegedly purchasing gas from Turkey in July 2014. To sustain a managerial role in governance and a military success in war, ISIS improved public services as they were first free of charge prior to 2015. ISIS laid a taxation system in Mosul and Tikrit, with an estimated income from taxing vendors and construction companies in Mosul mounting up to 8 million per month. (Cockburn, 2015, p. 49) While ISIS imposed heavy taxation on farmers, it sold them subsidized fertilizers in exchange for the exclusive right of purchasing their crop. Farmers of course remained burdened since ISIS effort to subsidize wheat to meet the demand of the population came at the expense of first hand producers. ISIS also attempted to insure its polity cheap oil creating a relationship of dependence (Stergiou, 2016, p. 194) resembling relationships of rentier states to their populace. By the summer of 2014, ISIS controlled 95% of oil in Deir Ezzour after winning over JAN. The latter needed oil and allowed ISIS to use passage on Syrian-Turkish borders in Aleppo in exchange for the natural resource. (Gerges, 2016, p. 177) ISIS has similarly sold oil to the regime, signaling another transformation: the insurgent was no longer interested in fighting Asad as much as it was interested in territory control. (Hall, 2015, p. 64) The trade patterns mimicked Wahhabi moral economy forging necessary mercantile alliances despite ideological differences.

Weakened by international airstrikes, Russian deployed military, ISIS lost its strongholds and with them its access to resources. In September 2016, the Iraqi oil ministry announced the recovery of all oil wells in Iraq. (Caris & Reynolds, 2014, p. 142) By November, ISIS lost its single biggest oil source, as an airstrike took out “the

machinery that allowed oil workers to centrally control the wells at al-Omar field.” (Solomon et al., 2016) The pragmatism of tribal networks also left it weaker: smaller tribes no longer necessitated ISIS protection and larger tribes needed not to compromise their ideology any longer. Iraqi forces regained Ramadi, Fallujah, and Mosul over the period of two years. The Syrian regime regained Palmyra and Aleppo. This power shift was possible because of the heavy artillery and traditional warfare made available by foreign powers. As ISIS depended on its territorial presence, these victories went towards its weakening and dismantling.

Weak statehood is the norm in the Middle East, argued Schwarz (2011, p. 420) *contra* Weber as states in the region commonly buy off armed groups with rent in exchange for their maintenance of state supremacy. These states are coercive but not necessarily strong. (Ayubi, 1995) While rentierism secures “patrimonial nature of social interactions and primordial loyalties” in the region, it also prevents the symbiosis with civilians which allows statehood to consolidate. (Schwarz, 2011, p. 439) The case of ISIS is a flagrant illustration of such weakness: while traditional states have had geopolitical support that sustained external rents and state-to-state relations, ISIS had no means of sustaining its resources, failing at the accumulation of capital due to the non-productivity of rents.

C. Conclusion

ISIS was on the very edge of the definition of a state, possessing infrastructure and expertise that allowed it to be a *de facto* authority and to govern intermittently. ISIS was fundamentally different from previous insurgents, not only in thought, but also in

modes of organizing as it was affected and enabled by the hybridity of the states it emerged in. It pushed the boundaries of the definition of insurgency and nationhood: it incorporated local parameters of statehood in its project, notably tribalism, militarization, and rentierism. These three variables made the material manifestation of the project possible in the Syrian *Jazirah*. The socio-historical setting first provided sites of transnational mobilization where tribes were used as pivots between kin-based and territory-based organizing. Second, it enabled ISIS' military apparatus through defection of professionals from formal armies. And finally, it enabled financing and the creation of new alliances according to material benefits provided by rentier economies. The insurgent state-project grew creating an administrative apparatus to govern the land and populace following a bellicist state-formation method, with a significant differentiation: its capital was dependent on rent not tax. Rentierism appears to have caused both the rise and demise of ISIS, first through the readily available landed resources for expenditure on the state-formation project and the populace, and second through their exhaustion and absence of an infrastructure for renewable capital.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: ISIS AS A MANIFESTATION OF STATE WEAKNESS

It appears that successful state building is directly and positively related to access to concentration of coercion and capital, in a war-making/state-making nexus. While historical examples offer little explanatory power to modern state formation, a study that is theoretically informed yet empirically grounded would require historical investigation. Since the bellicist theory was studied mostly in Europe at the rise of the nation-state system, the model was comparatively traveled to settings of developed states of the Global South, where it was specified more so than challenged. It accounts for warring conducted by informal armed groups such as militias, military veterans, and tribal networks. As ISIS warred, the study of collective violence at the time of state-failure in Iraq and challenge to the national state in Syria is appropriate. Border porosity increased contentious violence as the government was both unable to extend its coercion to the hinterland and distracted on other fronts. If we grant the weak distinction between external and internal paths to state formation some importance, we can speak of external competition or war creating internal states. This is a process that took place in the Syrian *Jazirah* with ISIS, among other groups. This thesis thus discussed the *longue durée* and immediate effects of capital (access to resources and rentierism), coercion (border control and militarization), and contention (military veterans and tribal networks) on state-formation processes that enabled the rise of ISIS, an example of irregular state-like entity formation, as follows:

The success of the coercive power of the state in procuring income from the populace is dependent on the extent of the autonomy of the people and whether they can evade taxes, move freely, escape areas of control, and/or fight back. Their ability to navigate their lives outside of the state or in manners that go against it forms contention, another key element in state-building projects, especially in areas where the governmental monopoly over the use of violence was not achieved. When rents were available, states did not require the building of an extensive administrative apparatus, and their coercive power was channeled towards aims other than procuring a concentration of capital. As follows, statehood in the Middle East is weak. Governments relied on strongmen to rule in the remote areas away from urbanized centers: in the Jazirah, they were tribal leaders and their networks. The shared rule with traditional authority, paramilitary groups, and networks of trust and kinship made for the hybridity of the Jazirah states. When ISIS emerged, it followed the same pattern, intermittently governing as a state, albeit a weak one.

The presence of natural resources, rents, and foreign aid further complicates state formation because it absents the bargaining process. (Altunisik, 2014; Hinnebusch, 2010; P. S. Khoury & Kostiner, 1990; Schwarz, 2011, 2012) Instead, governments create a reciprocal relationship of clientelism whereby they ensures economic and political favors in return for loyalty from local strongmen. So it is not about whether tribes had unitary patterns of engagement with the insurgent, but about the ways their

moral economy has facilitated certain victories over other. It was not confessional affinity³⁶, but geopolitical support that allowed contention.

This does not shed light on the nature of the state-like formation and how its methods of operation. There is little common among the formal state of Saudi Arabia, the informal state-project of ISIS, and areas of independent governance in Rojava that have gained international recognition, as well as Eastern Kurdistan, or with political parties such as Hezbollah. However, they exhibit strong links between the demand for social and economic welfare on the account of the existence of strong kinship bonds, history of militarization, and landed resources. There is no inherent experience in the way military veterans or armed groups for whom the market does not provide a sustainable income have organized historically. They have historically organized as fascists, pacifists, and communists (Campbell, 2003, p. 104) – inevitably, these groups have been influenced by the local/regional property relations and the international order, geopolitically, influencing their final form.

Perhaps the clearest regional historical precedence to ISIS is the Saudi first state. In fact, having no religious clergy, ISIS took a lot of its teachings from Wahhabism, which emerged in the mid-eighteenth century in the Gulf. While Salafism and Wahhabism are often used interchangeably designating literalist and puritanical approaches to Islamic scripture and law, the former predates the latter by hundreds of years and merely refers to the adoption of the way of prophet Mohammad's

³⁶ Ali Hatem al-Suleiman, opposition leader, claimed that “when [they] get rid of the government, [they] will be in charge of the security file in the regions, and then [their] objective will be to expel terrorism—the terrorism of the government and that of IS.” (Wehrey & Alrababa'h, 2014)

contemporaries. Wahhabism, on the other hand, refers to the adoption of Mohammed Abdul-Wahhab's ways: it is a militarized transnational religiously motivated movement first attempted by al-Saud's family symbiosis with Abdul-Wahhab and coercion of populace into submission. The first Saudi state adopted a warring tradition of expansion in collaboration with the networks of trust provided by blood and religious bonds. It used the thought to procure itself with finances, through the collection of taxes, prior to the discovery of oil which turned it into a rentier state. The Saudi state stopped its expansionist project crushing under the demands of the contemporary world-order. It fell under the pressure of the UK imperial moment which assigned put end to the expansion but gave its benediction for the existence of the Saudi state. At the age of the retreat of imperial powers from conventional colonialism, the UK necessitated to exit the region territoriality but to maintain its presence through local authorities, an opportunity it found in Al-Saud family. The third Saudi state emerged as one that has geopolitical support, but its formation took a bellicist path the relied on informal networks. Despite the assigning of borders, tribal mobility from and to Najd was maintained through spiritual journeys to the pilgrimage, hidden routes for bootlegging, or 'asabiya bonds of affinity. Border porosity did not vanish. However, during the US imperial moment, whose "liberal peace" relies on the maintenance of the negative sovereignty of conventional states, the survival of ISIS as a competitor to the state was not probable.

Rojava is another example of contested sovereignties, as it became a de facto autonomous area in the years following the uprising in Syria. (Hosseini, 2016) The model exhibits socio-political features of statehood, without falling in the trope of top-

down state-building. Instead, it relies on *Communalism* which rejects the nation-state, in its three cantons, Kobani, Jazira and Afrin, which it popularized during the violent events in Syria. The borders of the self-governed area are similarly porous and indefinite, which would remove it from a Weberian definition of the state. Its leaders have indeed distanced themselves from conventional statehood by stressing the need to overcome the nation-state³⁷ as a mode of social organizing in the Middle East. (Hosseini, 2016, p. 256) However, the militarized aspect of Rojava's warring groups remains reliant Western armament: while this has not changed the nature of their political commitment, it has affected their prospects in regards to the dependence on geopolitical support, which is a challenge to their independence. It is not able to benefit of a large economy either as it lacks natural resources such as oil and gas due to uneven distribution of resources, similar to its counterparts in Turkey and Iran, where the periphery has been kept underprivileged for easier control by the center. The absence of such industrial territorial capacity partially exempts Rojava from greedy territorial interventions, but it also limits its territoriality and administrative growth. Cemgil (2016) thus suggests that to bring social forms of organizing closer to freedom as non-domination, we need to move past the institutional-territorialization of means of coercion and capital, equated to conventional state-building processes. We are experiencing the demise of the age of the nation state direly in the already and weak conventional states of the Syrian *Jazirah*. Transnational loyalties and moral economies transcending territoriality continue to exist through networks that conceive

³⁷ However, leadership positions in Rojava are reserved on the basis of the Syrian citizenship. The practice discriminates against the Kurds who were denied the Syrian nationality by the Baath party.

of themselves as ‘authentic’ or ‘local.’ We are witnessing multiple socio- political formations that exhibit *stateness* but go against statehood. Granted, it is increasingly difficult to emerge as a conventional state in a fully-developed capitalist settings that subsist on negative sovereignty; alternative authority to the state would require geopolitical support in order to access markets to renew its capital. Such geopolitical support could come through patrons associated to networks of kinship in the region, and with the existence of financial interest in present leadership. However, alternative self-administrated units that exercise a form of authority over a territory for a contingent period of time are not only possible, but common. ISIS failed on the account of its over-ambition: had it not antagonized similarly religiously founded states and their clients and patrons, it might have subsisted. Its administrative body needed first to purchase loyalty from networks of kinship and trust by the trade of natural resource, which required the availability of a state-to-state economy. Such market was not available for ISIS which led to its unmaking, something that cannot be said about Rojava, an informal autonomous area of self-governance, or Saudi Arabia, a conventional state that employed a similar bellicist logic of state-formation.

To sum, if we distinguish between the conscious state-building process, whereby an entity sets the formation of the state as rationale and goal, and state-formation, which happens more organically through the placement of resources at the hands of some networks that rise to be a ruling class, ISIS, the case study, might have failed at the first, but it has contributed to the latter. In the context of the Syrian *Jazirah*, the political opportunities conducive to alternatives to conventional statehood, namely militarization

histories, revival of networks of kinship and trust, and rentierism as source of finances, remain felt and vibrant.

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