6. (Re-)Framing the Iraqi Terrorist in *Howling in Mesopotamia*

> PS from Diana: Before we conclude, I said, 'Salam, I just want to say one thing.' And I said, 'Fuck Saddam Hussein!' as loud as I could without disturbing the neighbours. […] And Salam said, 'Everybody on the street is saying this like a mantra, 'Fuck Saddam! Fuck Saddam! Fuck Saddam […]' (Well, maybe Salam didn't use the word 'mantra,' but you get the point.) I think we can't possibly understand what it's like to be Iraqi. It must be like being in a root cellar for thirty-five years, and now you are stumbling around in the light, blinking your eyes, wondering if what you see is real, or a dream. – Diana Moon (Pax 162)

There are two keywords that the world associates with Iraq: Saddam Hussein and war. This blog posting by Diana Moon, a fellow blogger of Salam Pax,[1] demonstrates this reductionist and violent image of Iraq in a striking manner. In April 2003, the global public celebrated when American troops rolled into Baghdad, bringing the statue of the dictator down. The pictures circulated around the world.

1 Pax started his blog only shortly after the American troops landed in Iraq in 2003. Along with riverbend, he has become one of the most famous war bloggers. His work has come to count as prime example of new media life writing (Whitlock 201). Pax's vivid and emotional account accentuates the opportunities the new mediatic representation of life narrative offers with its focus on immediacy. Despite its origin in online writing, however, the blog was ultimately turned into a written autobiography entitled *The Baghdad Blog*. This marks an example of the transformation of new into old media.

For the *West*, this was victory.[2] For the Iraqis, it was liberation; the moment when they started "stumbling around in the light," as Moon puts it. Watching this moment on TV were thousands of Iraqis who had formerly escaped the darkness of the cellar by immigrating to the U.S. One of them is Haider Ala-Hamoudi. In his autobiographical reflection, *Howling in Mesopotamia: An Iraqi-American Memoir* (2008), he describes his journey to the home country of his parents. Similar to the one suddenly "stumbling around in light," he often wonders in his autobiography "if what you see is real" (Pax 162). For the reader, he thus reveals many facets of Iraq that have not been televised a million times before. Eventually, this constructs a more complex view of the "real" in which the Iraqi is more than a terrorist stereotype.

6.1 LEGAL AGENCY (V_1)

Author and Structure of *Howling in Mesopotamia*

Haider Ala Hamoudi is a second-generation Iraqi American. He was born and raised in the United States as the son of Iraqi parents. As his short bio in the inlet of the book emphasizes, he "grew up speaking fluent Arabic and visiting Baghdad every year." Hamoudi attended MIT and graduated with a double major in Physics and in the Humanities with a concentration in Near Eastern Studies. Later, Hamoudi went to Columbia Law School and ultimately worked at several prestigious law firms in New York (Hamoudi, Home page). Today, he is an assistant professor of Law at Pittsburgh University. Interviews with him have appeared in a series of law journals and other publications. He also writes for newspapers and magazines such as *Asia Times*. He also is the author of a law blog called "Islamic Law in Our Times." The blog contains extensive contributions by Hamoudi on current issues related to law, religion, and economics[3] in Iraq and the larger Middle East.

This short biographical sketch of Hamoudi reveals his initial professional distance to the literary realm. His occupational background is multi-faceted, whereby writing mostly takes place in the form of journalistic and scholarly publications. Both aspects also come into play when looking at the structure of Hamoudi's memoir. The book is divided into two major parts with the first one entitled "Dream and

2 Media studies on the coverage of the Iraq War meanwhile interpret the footage of the fall of Saddam's statue as a prime example of media inscenation. It was supposedly used for propaganda purposes to mobilize pro-war sentiment by the U.S. (Tumber and Palmer 110; Maass).

3 The blog also emphasizes Hamoudi's interest in the economic situation of Iraq. He frequently posts detailed entries on current economic developments that reveal in-depth background knowledge ("Rent Seeking").

Disillusionment" (Hamoudi, Howling in Mesopotamia 1)[4] and the second "Marriage, Election, and Beyond" (*HM* 181). Within each chapter, the sub-structure is clustered according to the seasons of the year, starting with summer 2003 and ending with summer 2004. To each of these headings, Hamoudi adds a short subtitle; starting with "A Time of Hope," followed by "Concerns Mount," "Failure" in the spring of 2004, and concluding with "Hope and Despair" in summer 2004.

There are a total of 68 chapters that are enlisted in the extensive Table of Contents. The chapter names are all very short and to the point. In total, the chapter titles do not reveal a distinct thematic focus. The beginning is made by "Arrival" (*HM* 5). Some chapters have the names of places, such as "Baghdad" (*HM* 15) and "A Trip to Kirkuk" (*HM* 239). Especially with respect to the locations, it is important to notice that several of them refer to places that have become popular in the news coverage on the WOT, e.g., "Basra" (HM 82) and "Abu Ghraib" (*HM* 143). Other chapters merely signal an important keyword, such as "Gasoline" (*HM* 56), "Jogging" (*HM* 148) or "Work" (*HM* 234). Another specificity with respect to the geographic locations thus mentioned is that several Arabic terms are used, e.g., "Halabja" (*HM* 202) or "Ho-Hum" (*HM* 252). These terms stir the curiosity of the reader who is unfamiliar with Arabic and with Iraq.

The thorough and peculiar structure of Hamoudi's work reminds one of the outline of an academic research paper or of the overview of a non-fiction work. This stands in stark contrast to the chronological and diary-like chapter division. Despite the use of emotional terms such as hope and despair, the tone is rather neutral. Nothing indicates a very personal or affective narrative. The multitude of diverse and often unrelated chapter names also suggests that the account does not focus on one dominant issue frame, whereby the themes of the chapters mostly indicate a political and geographic context. This is underscored by the finding that many of the locations mentioned, as well as the political events appearing in the chapter overview, clearly relate to the war. A rather strong influence of the WOT can thus be inferred. Other events bear a more personal meaning, such as "Food" (*HM* 168) or "Wedding" (*HM* 267). These rather conventional topics appear slightly odd in this otherwise academic-seeming compilation. In fact, Hamoudi comes to manage both, the political as well as the personal, from the perspective of a distanced analyst. He derives this unique authorial voice from his position of a strong-minded and highly knowledgable multi-ethnic author who tells the story of present-day Iraq based on multi-ethnic agency.

4 All further references are to the same edition abbreviated by *HM*.

Arab Iraqi Authenticity

The use of Arabic expressions in the table of contents highlights the Arabic background of the author. This is underlined by the subtitle of Hamoudi's book, an "Iraqi-American Memoir," which draws immediate attention to the mixed ethnic origin of the author. It is this dual identity that Hamoudi employs to open up his narrative. Before starting with the narration of his story, he provides a short but powerful introduction explaining the motives and background of his trip to Iraq:

> On July 14, 2003, the forty-fifth anniversary of Iraq's independence from Great Britain, I left Kuwait on a C-130 transport plane bound for Baghdad, the city of my ancestors and a place I had not been, and to which I could not travel, for the previous thirteen years. Two nations could legitimately claim me as their native son. The first was the United States, where I was born and raised, whose influence was, obviously, very real and direct. The second was Iraq. Iraq occupied something of a hallowed place in my childhood home, a rose-colored enigma. (*HM* xi)

Hamoudi in these very first sentences builds up the foundation of his authorial agency that relies on cultural, historical, and political insider knowledge. The very mentioning of the anniversary of Iraq's independence from Britain constitutes a historical date that the average reader is not familiar with. This also positions the narrative that is about to unfold in a political frame that differs from the very personal and vacation-like first impression one gains of Kaldas as a narrator. Hamoudi underlines the close link to the political reality by mentioning his travel in a transport plane. Most importantly, the author assures his readers in this opening statement that the setting of his memoir is not a foreign place to him. Even though he was born and raised in the United States, he still considers himself Iraqi at the beginning of his journey. The hierarchy he sets up by calling the U.S. his "first" parent country, however, gives slight prevalence to his American identity.

The suggested balance between America and Iraq with respect to Hamoudi's multi-ethnic self-definition does not correspond to the political state of affairs. A friendly resolution of the opposition between Iraq as the "rose-colored enigma" and the U.S. has long been prevented by violent conflict, as Hamoudi reminds his reader a few lines later. "But these two countries – America, where I lived day by day, and my own images of Iraq, about which I dreamed every night – had long been at war," he states (*HM* xi). Although Hamoudi in this sentence provides a realistic summary of the relation between the two countries, it can be noted that he, at this point, does not compare two personal realities with each other. Whereas America is the country he actually knows from daily life, Iraq is mostly present in images and dreams for him. With this evocation of popular images dominating over reality,

Hamoudi positions himself in an equal position as his reader. Despite his mixed ethnic origin, he knows Iraq mostly from TV images and newspaper articles. The author then formulates what he perceives as his personal task, namely, to interfere with fictional media images by turning Iraq into a reality for his audience. "I wrote this memoir as an Iraqi and an American, to convey to Americans, as an American, what the lives of ordinary Iraqis are like, by living as closely as possible to Iraqis themselves, as an Iraqi, with neither an American force nor a protected zone between me and the people of Iraq," Hamoudi announces (*HM* xi).

These lines reinvoke the tenor already found in the thorough structure of Hamoudi's memoir. Similar to a research paper, he in this latter passage announces the purpose of his autobiographical endeavor in the form of a thesis statement that reveals the contribution he wants to make to public discourse. He wants to uncover a reality to the American public, a reality that does not focus on either American soldiers or Iraqi terrorists. Instead, he uses the somewhat derogatory-sounding term "ordinary[5] Iraqis" in order to allude to the fact that there exists a life in Iraq which is detached from war and politics. The method pursued by Hamoudi strongly equals the one of an embedded journalist. By living among Iraqis, he seeks to occupy an insider position to convey his experience. This insider perspective is underlined by the closeness to the people, as he promises. It is this immediate and borderless contact to the Iraqi population that separates him from the thousands of American soldiers who also live *in* Iraq but not *with* the people of Iraq. It is this insider position that endows Hamoudi with a narrative authority journalists or American officials lack. The author, as his claims reveal, is very aware of this comparative advantage. He thus underlines that his ability to change pre-existig media images by presenting an alternative reality is based on the fact that he speaks from and for the perspective of both – Americans and Iraqis.

The explicit way in which Hamoudi establishes his multi-ethnic authenticity as an author appears remarkable compared to the memoirs of Ansary and Kaldas. The strong determination driving his endeavor and his self-declared courage to live as an American among Iraqis leave no doubt of his authorial agency. His Iraqi American heritage allows him to arrive at unique insights that others cannot provide, and Hamoudi displays extreme self-confidence in convincing his readers of this benefit. This declaration not only reveals something about the author himself but also about the audience he seeks to approach. He clearly formulates his authorial goal with an

5 The adjective "ordinary" also has a negative connotation in public opinion research. Here, the term is mostly used to conceptually separate average citizens from specific communication elites. The criteria for this division are connected to the cognitive capabilities of audience members who do not count as elite and the degree to which their opinion can be influenced through mediated discourse. The key question driving this vain of research is: "Are the ordinary people able to see beyond themselves [...]?" (Fortner 196).

American audience in mind – not an Iraqi American or Arab American one. In other words, multi-ethnic identity struggle to him is not seen as the primary theme of his memoir. Rather, Hamoudi wants to reach those who lack this dual identity and also the knowledge about a country his family once called its home.

The manifestation of Iraqi American authenticity Hamoudi undertakes in the introduction speaks a powerful language. It again sheds light on the questions of truth and authenticity in autobiographical theory as a whole. Hamoudi nowhere raises doubts about the cloudiness of human memory and the subjectivity that goes along with this. Instead, he strongly confirms the reader that he/she will be presented with a truth-based reality, a reality originating in the empirical experiment of someone living in Iraq who knows both cultures. The explicit way in which Hamoudi builds up his multi-cultural agency also sheds light on the question of intentionality in ethnic life writing. The author at the outset does not regard life writing as a journey to himself or as any kind of psychological task to establish a new or transformed self. Rather, he has a clear and mostly political goal. Memoir for him seems to constitute an instrument to achieve this aim. This belief in the social impact of literature is especially remarkable for someone who otherwise regards positive law as his major subject of investigation. As he soon admits, this legal background does pose a professional challenge to him, yet, it also endows him with authorial agency.

Legal Authority

Whereas the first part of Hamoudi's introduction strongly focuses on his Arab American identity to substantiate his agency, the second part stresses his professional identity. The determination which marks the description of his autobiographical goal also characterizes the professional aim motivating his journey to Iraq. Hamoudi does convey his fear of getting killed and the mental burden of seeing a country ruined by political terror and war (*HM* xii). Yet, he in no instance bows to these circumstances. Rather, the depiction of constanly facing life and death situations underlines his courage. Instead of seeing his trip to Iraq as a journey to his roots, he makes it appear as an adventure. This undertaking itself, however, posed less of a challenge to him than the literary reflection on his experience, as he admits. "My task of recording my adventures has not been easy to accomplish," he explains (*HM* xii). The expression "recording" highlights Hamoudi's insistence on truth-telling as opposed to a personal and possibly diluted reconstruction of subjective memory. The reader soon learns that such a literary approach to memoir would not at all be in line with Hamoudi's professional identity.

In admitting that the literary production of memoir was difficult for him, the author makes no secret of the fact that literary writing is not his major occupation. In contrast to Kaldas for whom "writing" comes first, writing for Hamoudi is a means

to achieve a business purpose, just like the trip to Iraq was motivated by a professional goal as a lawyer. Hamoudi clearly bases his authority to tell his story on his professional standing:

> I am an attorney and a graduate from one of America's premier law schools, and served as a federal judicial clerk in New York before working for one of the largest law firms in New York as an associate. This combined with my Iraqi ethnicity, my Arabic language skills, and my Shi'i religious heritage qualified me more than almost anyone, I believed, to contribute to the rebuilding of Iraq's devastated legal culture. (*HM* xii)

This impressive overview of Hamoudi's attorney career reads more like a brief CV in an application than the introduction of a memoir. The author here unmistakably clarifies that it was not merely personal endeavor which brought him to Iraq. Instead, his legal career and his Iraqi American heritage served as suitable qualifications for pursuing a business which could hardly be realized by less-qualified lawyers. Similar to the multi-ethnic authority he reiterates, he obviously regards the different elements enlisted in his vita as a comparative business advantage. In addition to his reliance on professional and cultural knowledge, this advantage is also based on his religious background, as he furthermore reveals in this passage. This religious characteristic clearly stands out among the other criteria Hamoudi mentions, since it is unrelated to any kind of acquired capability or skill. Obviously, one can hardly plan on gaining this identity trait as one would when planning a career. However, the fact that he mentions it here hardly seems to present an accident.

In contrast to Sunni Muslims, the religious affiliation of Ansary, Shii[6] Muslims originally opposed the idea that spiritual leadership after Muhammad should be given to an elected leader. They wanted religious guidance to be passed on directly to the Prophet's cousin Ali. To the present day, Shii Muslims oppose elected Muslim leaders and instead respect the authority of appointed Imams who, according to their view, were appointed by Muhammad or God himself (Campo 33). Whereas Sunnis make up the largest part of Muslims overall, Iraq counts among the few countries where Shiis have formed the majority in terms of demographic numbers, comprising about 60% of the population. In hardly any other country has the conflict between Sunnis and Shiis had such violent consequences as in Iraq where Shiis under the Hussein regime continued to be oppressed by the minority of Sunnis. After the fall of Hussein, Shiis for the first time were allowed to vote (Campo 277). When emphasizing his Shii identity as a benefit, Hamoudi therefore inherently links

6 There is a linguistic difference between the terms Shii and Shia that is often neglected in the press. Whereas shii refers to the religious belief exclusively, the term shia is derived from the Arabic word for "party" or "faction." The latter term thus has a more political connotation by referring to a collective with shared interests (Campo xxxiv).

his professional task of participating in the rebuilding of Iraq's legal structure to a political project as well. He consequently aspires to support the previously suppressed Shii collective.

Hamoudi's claims for professional, cultural, and religious authority do not end with this biographical summary. Hamoudi adds another layer to his agenda, which allows the reader to learn more about his specific motivation to go to Iraq:

> My ultimate goals were many and varied. Having been a commercial lawyer for the better part of a decade, I wanted to make money. Naively, I imagined investors pumping large streams of capital into this oil-rich and undeveloped land . […] I thought I would be among the best qualified to handle such work. I would bridge the legal cultures, translate the issues of foreign investors in a way that an Iraqi attorney would understand them […]. (*HM* xii-xiii)

In these lines, Hamoudi again builds on his professional and multi-cultural authority in explaining what brought him to Iraq. Whereas the intention to rebuild the legal structure of the country, which he mentions at the very beginning of the book, has more of an altruistic connotation, the given explanation reveals profit-making as another aim. The goal "to make money" indeed underlines the monetary aspect of Hamoudi's self-established comparative business advantage. It is remarkably honest how the author portrays this goal. He obviously does not envision readers to be offended who expect a less egoistic and more culture-related purpose in a narrative like this. Such a negative reaction would most likely be found in the case of an ethnic readership that shares a common concern about the future of Iraq. Yet, Hamoudi with his mission statement underlines that such an audience is not his primary target group. He is writing for an American audience, not an Arab American or other minority audience which might share experiences of multi-ethnic identity negotiation. This business-like mentality even gains an Orientalist twist with his depiction of Iraq as oil-rich but "underdeveloped" country. With this image of Iraq, he positions himself on the American end of the hyphen, perhaps unintentionally.

Toward the end of the introduction, this honesty with respect to his financial purposes seems to appear even too self-centered for Hamoudi himself. He thus relativizes his previously defined goal by returning to the importance of legal concerns. "Material impulses aside, my greatest desire was to participate in the development of a brave new legal world in Iraq – one that depended on the rule of law" (*HM* xiii), he clarifies. On the one hand, this announcement somewhat limits the stereotypical American materialism he displays. On the other hand, he also demonstrates a very American and thus *Western* approach in these lines. While it is certainly a welcome and not merely personal endeavor to bring professional expertise to Iraq in order to contribute to its recontrustruction, the vocabulary Hamoudi uses reinvokes Orientalist divisions linked to ideals of superiority. "Development" here stands in contrast to the idea of barbarism and backwardness – the common markers

of the Orient. In addition, the adjective "brave" used with respect to the new legal structure carries a uniquely American connotation of heroism and success. The use of the term "rule of law" additionally underscores this ambivalent approach to the legal project. It derives from the binary opposition of legal order versus despotism and tyranny. No matter if this condition at the time of writing and maybe even today dominates the legal structure of Iraq, Hamoudi here assumes the position and authority of the cultural and legal superior to intervene in the country's affairs.

Although Hamoudi in the very last sentence of the introduction warns his readers that the euphoria with which he approached his task did not last long (*HM* xiii), one cannot escape the ambivalence emerging from these introductory pages. In addition to serving as an introduction to the narrative that follows, the opening above all represents an introduction to the cultural and professional status of the author. The legal authority which he ascribes to himself sets the stage for his journey and for the memoir. Given the questionable positioning of himself as cultural insider who nevertheless displays the cultural superiority of the American outsider, one wonders if his first goal, the presentation of another reality of Iraq beyond the images of terrorism, can actually be fulfilled.

6.2 REFRAMING THE IRAQI TERRORIST (V_2 AND V_3)

The Law Frame

The heavy emphasis on Hamoudi's professional background as an experienced and prestigious lawyer, as well as his legal business purpose, leave a distinct mark on the memoir from the very beginning. Although he mentions the drafting of laws and the improvement of the Iraqi future as dreamlike goals, his self-constitution as "commercial lawyer" who is more interested in trade than in the general legal condition dominates (*HM* xiii). This stands in contrast to the explicit human angle which Hamoudi also introduces. When remembering the multitude of newspaper articles on civilian casualties in Iraq, he exclaims: "These were human beings in all their wonderful multifaceted complexity […]" (*HM* xii). Although this humanitarian focus at first seems to be irreconcilable with Hamoudi's other professional aim, the memoir takes an unexpected turn in this respect. The author by establishing a legal frame around his reflection retraces an important learning process that shows the audience different approaches to the conception of law[7] itself and ultimately a new path of looking at Iraq.

7 The different definitions of the concept of "law" are exhaustive. With respect to the frame that Hamoudi creates in his memoir, this study follows the conception of law in more philosophical and anthropological terms. Law here refers to "a body of regularized pro-

The way in which Hamoudi describes his arrival in Baghdad equals the beginning of an adventure movie. Just like planes "do not descend gradually" when landing in Baghdad, as he explains, his own arrival equals an abrupt descent from illusion to reality (*HM* 5). The airport and its surroundings display no civilian traces. Military bunkers, tents, tanks, and much armory is what Hamoudi sees at first. The situation clearly emphasizes that he has arrived in a city that is "American-occupied" (*HM* 5). More specifically, it is the American military which is in control of Baghdad and of the country at large. Hamoudi quickly learns in a very personal way what this dominance of the military and rule of guns means in daily life. When he asks a group of American soldiers when the airport will open for civilian traffic again, he is treated with neglect. Diverting the conversation to the favorite American topic of sports does not make any difference. On the contrary, the silly fact that the soldiers are from Florida and thus hostile to Hamoudi's Ohio home state team – the Buckeyes – turns the conversation into a demonstration of U.S. occupational dominance. "They insisted that as an Iraqi, I knew nothing," he states (*HM* 7). As the conversation continues, they even address him as "Iraqi Buckeye" (*HM* 7).

This very first encounter in Baghdad indeed brings to light a different reality than the one Hamoudi previously had in mind. This reality, at the beginning, does not confront him with the "ordinary Iraqis" he seeks to meet. Rather, the Iraqi American travels to Iraq only to meet American soldiers. Most importantly, however, they do not respect him either as an American or an Iraqi American, but mostly as an "Iraqi." This reductionist view and the fact that their uniforms seem to endow them with any right to judge or even discriminate civilians makes them treat Hamoudi in a way that obviously puzzles him. The situation that "American soldiers were everywhere" worsens this unpleasant arrival (*HM* 9). Many places and buildings in the city can only be accessed by American soldiers, Iraqi food has been replaced by American dishes, and the American Forces use the recreational facilities of the former ruler Saddam Hussein. This initial description of the scenery in Baghdad strongly evokes images of the WOT. In sum, it indicates the absolute rule of military power which seems to have replaced the regime of Saddam.

How comprehensively the old and the new military regime rule the everyday life of the Iraqis, Hamoudi learns in his daily efforts to conduct his work. Baghdad traffic is almost insurmountable because the military blocks many roads due to security concerns. When riding in a cab one day, the radio broadcasts an interview with an American officer talking about this issue. When the latter explains that "the interest of Iraqis not wanting to sit in traffic jams" needs to be balanced against "the lives of American soldiers," Hamoudi's cab driver loses his patience (*HM* 16-17). "That man's mother is a whore," Abdullah shouts at the radio. "Bring this chaos to

cedures and normative standards that is considered justiciable – i.e., susceptible of being enforced by a judicial authority [...]" (de Sousa Santos 86).

America and give them our heat and take away their air conditioners and how do you think they'll do? They'll start killing each other in the streets, worse than us," he adds furiously (*HM* 17). Hamoudi in response remarks that he understands these concerns of the Iraqis. Still, his response also reveals that he distances himself from the Iraqis who are suffering under the military regime of the U.S. "Taxi drivers, like most Iraqis, always seemed to be complaining about something. If it was not the Americans, the power cuts, gas lines, and the traffic, it was the brutality of the previous regime," he comments pejoratively (*HM* 17).

Hamoudi with this comment obviously exposes that he does not take the concerns of the "ordinary people" like his cab driver very seriously. To the contrary, the way in which he uses the word "complaining" has a connotation of 'get over it.' This somewhat callous reaction gains an even cruel connotation when recalling how much the people of Iraq previously suffered under the former regime that brought death and destruction to the country. This derogatory position consequently lacks honest concerns for the humanitarian issues of the people. What seems to count for Hamoudi is the fact that the rule of law has not been emplaced so far while his mind is still occupied with the idea of setting up his own "law firm that would assist in reconstruction and earn handsome returns," as he phrases it (*HM* 7). Surprisingly, however, this remains the only detailed reference to the author's legal project in the entire first chapter bearing the telling title "A Time of Hope" (*HM* 4). The remainder of the chapter deals with several other issues describing Hamoudi's efforts to settle in Baghdad. Yet, not much is heard of the successful commercial lawyer Hamoudi seeks to be.

Only toward the end of the first chapter and at the beginning of the second chapter entitled "Concerns Mount," Hamoudi finally reveals why there has been little recollection of business success and the constitution of the "rule of law." When meeting with one of his politically successful uncles, he finally realizes something he has been pushing aside so far: "This was not a place to make money. […] My professional plans were not working and provided me with no satisfaction," he admits. "I needed to do something else" (*HM* 65). Given the previous determination and professional egotism with which Hamoudi approached his law firm establishment in Iraq, this acknowledgement of personal defeat seems quite surprising. The way in which he puts it, however, is in line with the overall tone Hamoudi keeps up throughout most of the narrative. He presents his insight merely as a cognitive conclusion that is not related to intense emotions. As a man of action, as he positions himself, he looks ahead and tries to find a new occupation. In order to do so, Hamoudi leaves the country for a while. This departure brings along another rather unsentimental testimony: "I could prattle on at length about the importance of being in Iraq to serve the country, about the essential goodness of the Iraqi people, and about the heart and the head, but after a good cappuccino […] all of that seemed to be sentimental claptrap, capable of deferral," he states (*HM* 69).

This confession reveals Hamoudi's initial dishonesty about believing in the "goodness of the Iraqi people." Almost ironically, then, it is this confession that brings him closer to the humanitarian side of the law business.

By chance, Hamoudi gets recommended to the International Human Rights Law Institute of DePaul University. The Institute had previously received a contract from the U.S. International Development Agency to help in building Iraqi law schools (*HM* 69). Hamoudi describes his new professional goal as follows: "I therefore embarked on an entirely different mission, of reconstruction and not of commercialism" (*HM* 70). This announcement further underlines that the altruistic purpose Hamoudi conveyed at the beginning was nomenclature. The lawyer in this instance still adheres to his monetary thinking by letting the reader know that the new position will only earn him half the salary he would make at a U.S. law firm. Yet, he also reveals a new emotional side by calling the new job more "satisfying" (*HM* 70). This turn from law as source of money-making to law as humanitarian instrument used to contribute to the reconstruction of Iraq marks an important turning point in Hamoudi's development and in the construction of the memoir. The legal frame constructed by him gains a different connotation from this point onwards. While first employing law as the hallmark of his authorial agency, as source of profit-making, and as counter-part of military rule, this new true concern about the legal management of Iraq ultimately changes the way in which Hamoudi perceives of the country.

An example of Hamoudi's newly awakened sense of humanitarianism is provided when he meets a group of lawyers working for an excavation project to disclose the crimes of Saddam Hussein. When he asks them if they can speak Arabic, he receives a discomforting but nevertheless striking answer. "What the fuck for?" they ask. "We believe in George W. Bush, we're serious Republicans, and we're here to do our part to take back Iraq. Rule of law, baby. Rule […] of […] Law […]" (*HM* 75). Hamoudi is struck by this reply. It reminds him more of the "words of an ESPN sportscaster" than of anything a lawyer investigating crimes against humanity and promoting the rule of law would say (*HM* 75). Obviously, the author in this instance also demonstrates that his own understanding of "the rule of law" has considerably changed at this point. Formerly, he used the phrase as a pretext when really thinking about making money in Iraq. His honest renunciation of the way in which the American lawyers denigrate the rule of law reveals a different mindset.

Hamoudi thus seriously identifies with his new professional task and starts making himself familiar with different models of civil law systems in other countries (*HM* 78). Continuously, the humanitarian concerns he has been passively witnessing from the beginning move closer into the center of his attention. This is a point at which he, by means of using direct speech, increasingly allows "ordinary Iraqis" to raise their voice about law and justice. A striking example of this occurs when his elderly aunt asks him about the pictures from Abu Ghraib the family

happens to see on television. To Hamoudi's surprise, she describes them as "shameful" (*HM* 143). The Arabic term for this, in Iraq, means a real insult. Hamoudi's uncle Nawfal then adds: "I never thought the Americans would do something like this. I did think from the beginning that they came for our oil. I didn't think they would respect our traditions, culture, and religion – but this? Your aunt is right, it's shameful" (*HM* 144).

The reaction of Hamoudi's relatives to the Abu Ghraib scandal and the general behavior of Americans he observes in Iraq trigger further changes in his consciousness and his perception of the "rule of law." He obviously arrived in Iraq thinking that the U.S. is the country that could convert Iraq from the rule of violence to the implementation of law and justice. Now, he realizes that the Americans are trampling down any humanitarian concerns by treating the prisoners in Abu Ghraib as well as the Iraqis in general as non-humans.[8] The inescapability from these events becomes underlined by the fact that Abu Ghraib is not some distant place to Hamoudi, as it is for the American television audience. Abu Ghraib is right in the neighborhood of Baghdad airport, a place that Hamoudi often passes (*HM* 141). Obviously, this closeness to the Iraqi people and to mediated news events changes his personal belief in justice and rights in an unanticipated way. Other events he witnesses contribute to this transformation from the professional hardcore lawyer to the one who sees the human side of justice. The climax of the violation of legal guidelines by Americans occurs when Hamoudi wants to visit his brother in Baghdad. The brother only lives two houses down the street. Hamoudi does not think of this visit as a problem, yet, all his relatives warn him that walking or driving this short distance would be too dangerous. They tell him that if he gets mistaken for a Kurd by accident, he will get shot (*HM* 214). This incident finally lets him give up any belief in the rule of law and convinces him "of the sheer failure that Iraq had become." He concludes the reflection on this incident with the striking remark: "Human beings could not live here" (*HM* 215).

This realization of failure, only one instance of many experienced by Hamoudi throughout his memoir, has a multi-layered meaning. In the first place, Hamoudi notices the sheer impossibility to install the rule of justice as he previously defined it. Linked to that is his own failure to contribute to this process. Furthermore, Hamoudi's emphasis on the fact that "human beings" cannot live in Baghdad points to the overall change of perception he undergoes in the course of his journey. By openly sharing his thoughts on this process, he lets his reader develop a new angle

8 Studies on the specific news framing of the Abu Ghraib scandal in the American media reveal the finding that the media mostly disregarded the inhuman treatment committed by the American soldiers. Instead of evoking any empathy with the victims, the news rather concentrated on the reasons why the victims had ended up in prison in the first place (Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston 110).

of looking at Iraq. By constituting law as a cognitive framework to interpret the events and people in Iraq, Hamoudi at the same time teaches the different aspects of legal concerns. In the beginning, law represents a commercial enterprise, a necessary toolkit to settle contracts and expand businesses. When faced with the reality of Iraq, the humanitarian side of law becomes prevalent. Law gains an international dimension linked to the assumption that there are global human rights that constantly get neglected – both by fundamentalist sectarians in Iraq and by American soldiers. A legal framework provides the primary means to protect life and liberty. This legal frame gains increasing importance with Hamoudi's realization that these rights cannot be enforced as easily as he, in his ambitious and partly presumptious manner, thought before. This presumption still resonates in his comment that "human beings cannot live here," a statement that negates the fact that Iraqis *are* human beings who have to somehow manage living in Iraq, whereas he, an Arab American visitor, can leave the country upon his own volition.

The constitution of law as an important conceptual framework to look at Iraq occupies much room in Hamoudi's reflection. This finding is particularly noteworthy with respect to the dominant public stereotype of the Iraqi as terrorist. Hamoudi's legal lens reframes this stereotype since legal issues from the perspective of law professionals are hardly visible in the mainstream media framing of the Middle East. From a historical perspective, however, the law frame has a long Orientalist tradition which is more distinct than the current notion of barbarism connected to neo-Orientalistm in the WOT. The law scholar Teema Ruskola terms this phenomenon "Legal Orientalism" (179).[9] This concept derives from the question of "who gets to decide who has 'law' and what the normative implications of its absence are" (Ruskola 181). Ruskola compares this legal kind of ethnocentrism to the realm of literature. In quoting Boaventura de Sousa Santos,[10] he states: "As there is a literary canon that establishes what is and what is not literature, there is

9 Ruskola analyzes the issue of legal Orientalism in the context of China. The starting point of the analysis is the lasting claim that China lacks a "tradition of 'law'" (181). Ruskola traces the geneaology of Orientalism exerted by the U.S. by demonstrating that the nation has traditionally defined itself as lawful based on representing Western superior civilization (Ruskola 215). As the author reveals, the special purpose behind this practice was providing a justification for the legal exclusion of Chinese immigrants in the 19th century (216). Another aspect of this legal version of Orientalism is the intentional inferiorization of China's legal system as "stagnant," whereas the U.S. value progress and dynamic the most (Ruskola 224). The study, however, also finds a tendency on the part of the Chinese to "self-Orientalize" by bowing to these Orientalist attacks from outside (224).

10 Boaventura de Sousa Santos is one of the leading international scholars on the relation between law and globalization. He counts as fierce critic of the "Western" legal domination and instead argues in favor of legal pluralism (de Sousa Santos 85).

also a legal canon that establishes what is and what is not law" (181). Consequently, the definition of law and terms such as "Western" or "American law" must be put in quotation marks since they all represent merely cultural ideas (Ruskola 197). These concepts ultimately gain their legitimacy from the self-declared superiority of Western civilization (Ruskola 215). Especially Americans have historically tended to "self-Americanize" by representing themselves as inherently "legal" while denigrating other countries as lawless (Ruskola 228). Lawlessness in this context also has the connotation of lacking modernization which is another key element of Orientalist discourse (Ruskola 228). "The rule of law" thus poses a dilemma while there remains a human desire to enforce it (Ruskola 231). This urge also corresponds to the growing importance of human rights framing in the global media (Whitlock 67).[11] Ultimately, the global debate revolves around the same problem: "So long as we insist that 'real' law is a Western notion," Ruskola summarizes, "it will always be the West that holds the key to the truth about law" (234).

This thorough explanation of legal Orientalism formulated from the perspective of legal studies reflects the dilemma Hamoudi finds himself in. His own questioning of the rule of law, its implementation, and the problem of universalism make the reader think along the same lines. Just like the author cannot escape Orientalist judgement completely when separating himself from the Iraqi people, he nevertheless raises the question of who gets to decide who is human and "who has 'law,'" as Ruskola puts it. Historically, this question has been answered in reference to power trajectories. In the Iraq Hamoudi sketches, this aspect holds true. His law school project is a keen example of this. Although the project's aim is to implement law for the protection of human rights as a universal value, the students participating in the program nevertheless learn "the principles of American law" (*HM* 185).

This paradox is characteristic of the entire law frame created in the memoir. While legal concerns are first presented as referring to mere de jure law and practical decision-making, the issue of law later gains a much broader ethical[12] and normative meaning. This legal lens eventually works to the effect that the structural question of lawfulness cannot be separated from the view of Iraqis as individual citizens and subjects of this law. As the discussion of Legal Orientalism from a historical viewpoint also reveals, however, these legal concerns linked to the image of the Iraqis have to be read in an even larger cultural context. Law therefore serves as a means to "construct cultural identity" (Ruskola 184). This directly hints at the close relation of the law frame with the cultural frame established by Hamoudi.

11 The freedom of opinion and expression itself constitutes a universal right beyond national legal frameworks. It is formally granted in Article 19 of the Declaration of Human Rights (Hackett and Zhao 5).

12 Ethics in this context refers to a normative system which not so much rules what individuals shall or shall not do but rather how the "ethical subject" ermerges (Ruskola 225).

The Culture Frame

'Yo, Iraqi Buckeye. Got a question. […] That little fruit thing on a palm tree, what is that thing?' he [the U.S. soldier] asked. 'Harris, you never hear of a damn coconut?' another said. 'Ain't no coconut on the tree. There's hundreds of 'em up there,' Harris replied. 'Those are baby coconuts,' the other soldiers said. 'Actually,' I added, 'they are called dates, and they are a staple of the Iraqi diet.' 'They must really like 'em, right?' […] 'It's like potatoes to an American, they eat them all the time,' I said. 'I got a different question, how do I tell some asshole to fuck off in Iraqi?' someone else asked. (*HM* 7-8)

This conversation marks the first encounter between Hamoudi and the U.S. soldiers. Obviously, the interest of the Americans in learning about Iraqi culture is fairly limited. The derogatory way in which they talk about Iraqis reflects the language of the superior power depicting inferior barbarians. Hamoudi takes up this reductionist viewpoint and subverts it by evoking the stereotype of the U.S. as potato culture. What at first seems to be a funny incident that proves his ability of cultural translation then quickly turns out to be a metaphor of colonial domination spanning the entire memoir. Hamoudi exposes this Orientalist trajectory not only by painting a detailed picture of what Iraqi culture looks like from his perspective, but also by establishing a cultural frame that unmasks the U.S. culture of neglect.

In contrast to the extensive cultural experiences Kaldas depicts in her memoir, a look at Hamoudi's table of contents already reveals that food, cultural performance, and religious holidays do not count as primary topics. This does not mean that these aspects are completely excluded from his account. In describing everyday life in Baghdad, the family's celebration of religious holidays (*HM* 218), and the cultural difficulties surrounding Hamoudi's relationship with his future wife Sara (*HM* 266), the reader does get a detailed picture of cultural customs in Iraq. These scenes in which Hamoudi exclusively focuses on Iraqi culture, however, are far less visible than the instances in which the primary attention rests on U.S. culture. This practice ends up shedding as much light on U.S. culture as on the Iraqi one. Contrary to common Orientalist stereotypes, the latter is depicted as superior, as various unpleasant experiences of Hamoudi with his fellow Americans suggest.

Hamoudi's first contact with highly armed U.S. military personnel introduces as series of similar encounters with American gun culture. Shortly after his arrival in Baghdad, he gets involved in a conversation with a representative of a large U.S. weapon company. The meeting happens in the middle of a multitude of guns and other armory surrounding them at the airport. Hamoudi is obviously disturbed by this gun-loaded atmosphere because guns are less visible in the U.S. His confusion worsens when the man mistakes him for an Iraqi immigrant to the U.S. "It didn't occur to me that he hadn't thought of me as an American," Hamoudi recalls, "and

that 'my country' would not be the United States" (*HM* 6). Despite the fact that this marks the story of ongoing cultural confusion for him, it also provides the starting point for his lasting confrontation with U.S. gun culture. Although he claims that guns in his home state Ohio do not play such an important role, he soon gets reminded that Ohio might not be the U.S. norm when it comes to gun affection. The outside view of U.S. culture therefore points to a different reality. For the Iraqis, the U.S. constitutes the epicenter of gun prowess. As Hamoudi's cab driver one day tells him: "I read an article about some place in Texas where everyone has guns and they shoot each other for fun. What would they do in this hell of fire?" (*HM* 17).

Obviously, this image of the U.S. as a gun-loving country is not only based on newspaper articles or TV footage. Rather, the conclusion made by Abdullah derivees from the daily confrontation with the U.S. military exerting its power with guns, street blockades, and rolling tanks. Hamoudi soon gets to learn how it feels to be exposed to this violence, even when there are no gun shots involved. When visiting the Shrines of Najaf, a holy site for Shiis, Hamoudi feels deeply humble. Having been raised in the Shii tradition, he takes pride in his religious knowledge of the Quran and recites prayers. Upon leaving the tombs, this sacred atmosphere all of a sudden becomes dimmed. An American tank is parked right on former burial ground. "Two soldiers sat on the roof, their legs idly dangling," Hamoudi recalls (*HM* 24). When he is about to give the Americans a gesture to move, his driver Abbas declines and lets him know he is not upset about the scene. In contrast to Hamoudi, Abbas is used to similar cultural and religious violations. "The Americans did not recognize their error and were in his eyes blameless," Hamoudi remembers the driver's reaction (*HM* 24).

This scene of a tank parking on sacred burial ground presents a powerful image of how the U.S. military power literally rolls over the cultural treasures of the Iraqi people. As the forgiving gesture of Abbas suggests, this cultural trespassing tends to be excused by the lack of cultural knowledge. This is also how Hamoudi seems to perceive of the cultural violence he observes when describing his visit to the Imam Ali mosque on his way to another martyr site in Kerbala. The mosque marks the burial ground of Prophet Muhammad's son in law. Hamoudi illustrates the emotional vigor dominating at these sites. "To a Westerner, no doubt the scene is disturbing, with frenzied crowds screaming the name of the Imams as they surround the tomb and seek to grasp its edges," he explains (*HM* 25). He then adds: "Those from nonwestern cultures more accustomed to such emotional displays are probably not so much disturbed as confused, as emotional urgency of this sort is not unusual in many cultures upon the recent death of a loved one" (*HM* 25). Hamoudi then gives a longer explanation of the meaning of the religious burial grounds and their relation to the division between Shiis and Sunnis (*HM* 25-26).

This comparison between the cultures of "non-Western" versus "Western" obviously transcends the single cultural contrast between Iraq and America. Hamoudi

draws on the century-old cultural dichotomy of *East* and *West* to point to the differences he perceives. His longer digression on the religious history of Shiism underlines that he attributes the reason for cultural neglect to the lack of cultural knowledge. Slowly, however, this presumption of innocence starts fading in light of the repeated cultural offenses and imperialist superiority the Americans display. For Hamoudi, this goes along with further personal encounters with U.S. gun culture. One day, when arriving at Baghdad airport, an American representative of the Coalition Provisional Authority picks him up. The man is armed to the teeth. When they drive off, other American officers load their guns and tell Hamoudi. "Don't you worry […] we'll blow the fucking heads off of any motherfucking Haji who looks funny at us" (*HM* 74). With the authority of the American gun expert, the man adds: "Fucking Hajis, don't know a fucking thing but a gun […]" (*HM* 74). Apparently, it does not occur to the American authorities that Hamoudi himself is one of the "Hajis" they are talking about. As Hamoudi then admits, the only reason why he knows that Haji is a derogative term used to refer to Iraqis, is because he accidentally read a news report explaining it. It is still striking for him to see that this is exactly the kind of cultural encounter Iraqis have every day. Guns are all they can think of when seeing an American. Hamoudi's uncle summarizes this gun-dominated view of U.S. culture after almost getting shot by a U.S. soldier. The "Americans only know about their big guns. They think they will wave around their big guns and everything will be like they want. Can I get money for this? All they have are their big guns, any place they invade they destroy, except Germany and Japan, but those are very resourceful. The Americans are stupid" (*HM* 120).

This statement powerfully underlines in how far the image of the U.S. is ruled by gun-culture and related imperialist and materialist conduct. Hamoudi's repeated personal encounters with this culture and with its condemnation by the Iraqis begin to leave their mark on his cultural self-identification. This question of cultural and national affiliation, though, causes a conflict for him that he first tries to escape. It poses "The Question," as he entitles the chapter devoted to the issue (*HM* 32):

> A day never passed in Iraq that I was not faced with one question from Iraqis and Americans alike – whether I considered myself an Iraqi or an American. […] The question always struck me as absurd and entirely unbefitting this modern global era of multicultural families, dual citizenships, foreign residency, and immigration. The tendency to compartmentalize, to reduce, and to simplify seemed universal, but while it was easy and therefore appealing to the intellectually incurious, it was, for those of us raised as I was, utterly incongruous to the nature of our existence and upbringing. (*HM* 32)

At first, it seems that Hamoudi again elevates his own multi-cultural upbringing by claiming that compartmentalizing and categorizing cultures runs counter to his "intellectual advancement. Yet, as he admits in the paragraph that follows, "anti-

thetical as it was to my own nature to even consider such a question, I had been given cause to reflect on it […]" (*HM* 32). The rather impersonal and complicated way in which he constructs this sentence reflects his lasting attempt to push the issue of cultural affiliation aside. In rational terms, though, "the cause to reflect" is just too pervasive at this point. Hamoudi therefore has to answer "The Question" of cultural belonging – to himself and to others.

Surprisingly, this answer situates him on the Iraqi side of the hyphen. "I am clearly an Iraqi born in the United States because both my mother and father are Iraqi," he exclaims (*HM* 32). In line with his judicially-oriented mindset, this self-identification relies on formal citizenship more than on emotional or cultural attachment. As he also explains, however, his self-identification is not a matter of law but one of parental lineage. This criterion evokes pride in the eyes of Iraqis. He then gives a cultural explanation for his identity affiliation. "If my behavior was ecxessively American, my language skills poor; my respect for my family and elders not high enough, I might be considered Americanized, or even American" (*HM* 32-33). He then explains the American perspective toward this understanding of cultural heritage. As he knows, Americans "regard such genetic determinism as arbitrary and inherently unjust" (*HM* 33). Still, his former and current experiences have also taught him that Americans are the ones who question his identity most frequently.

This first longer and very personal reflection on his cultural identity occurs at a point when Hamoudi has already witnessed much cultural neglect by his fellow Americans. After all the humiliation he has witnessed, he obviously seeks to distance himself from being American. Furthermore, he does not want to count as "Americanized" either, since this term to him signals the opposite of culturally appropriate behaviour. This view highlights his encompassing professional and personal belief in the relevance of laws and its normative implications. For him, culture is characterized by the adherence to cultural norms and values as well as by certain cultural knowledge, such as language skills, as he repeatedly emphasizes. This compartmentalized notion of culture becomes even more prevalent when he explains that Americans tend to raise the same question about his cultural identity as the Iraqis. Both parties want to know on which side he stands. Ironically, Hamoudi pretends he has "no answer" to this question. In fact, however, he implicitly provides one in the statement that follows right after this negation: "I speak fluent English, yet insist on speaking Arabic at any occasion where I can. I love Amerian football, yet find indoor soccer ludicrous and a perfect metaphor for what is wrong with America vis-à-vis the world: we can't just play a game like everyone else, we have to change it" (*HM* 34).

This passage strikingly illustrates that his claim of having "no answer" is a major understatement. Hamoudi does have a very detailed answer, one that is highly political. With his awkward allusion to football and soccer in this instance, he mocks America's obsession with sports and its role as major cultural fulfillment. At

the same time, he draws an accurate picture of the culture America displays to the world and to the Iraqi people. It is one of cultural neglect and superiority, of militancy and dominance – of changing the rules. Iraq, however, becomes more than a game to Hamoudi because he is not eager to violently change the rules in the way his fellow American countrymen do. Cultural neglect and violence doe not correspond to the cultural norms he envisions. Hamoudi still humorously tries to avoid a definite answer to this cultural dilemma. "[I]n the words of Popeye the Sailor Man: Am I an American or an Iraqi? I yam what I yam and that's what I yam" (*HM* 35). Even Popeye, however, cannot help much in this case to resolve the tension. It thus becomes more and more visible that Hamoudi feels a growing distance to America in cultural terms. Two more key events add to this growing cultural detachment.

When walking through the streets of Baghdad, Hamoudi all of a sudden notices a crowd of people gathering around an assembly of Americans. When moving closer, he notices he is standing in a massive puddle of water. Very quickly, the intense smell of gasoline then reveals a different story. The scene was caused by American soldiers trying to take disciplinary action against blackmarket sellers of gasoline by destroying the vendors' containers. To Hamoudi, this incident is eye-opening. "I became witness to a sight I am not likely to forget as a near perfect metaphor of the incompetent colonial exercise in which the United States was engaged" (*HM* 58). Hamoudi's choice of words here explicitly hints at the imperialist and thus Orientalist practice under which the cultural and humanitarian disrespect of the Americans can be subsumed. It divides Americans and Iraqis into "colonials and colonized"[13] (*HM* 38). There is no effort on the part of America to let anything but the language of cultural and political hegemony speak. This also finds reflection in the field of education which Hamoudi finally devotes his energy to.

Hamoudi in the context of his work to develop law education in Iraq also faces issues of gender division. A remarkable encounter with a U.S. advisor gives Hamoudi a lasting sense of how Americans handle this element of Iraqi culture. The official is in charge of developing a program for the advancement of girls' education. After getting a sketch of the project, Hamoudi voices his concern that the implementation might fail because it requires young Iraqi women to travel to Baghdad by themselves. Their families will most likely oppose this, he explains. The reaction of the female U.S. official, however, does away with any kind of cultural

13 Hamoudi uses this vocabulary in an earlier passage in which he explains the political power relations in Iraq and the influence of Islamism. As he states: "Among colonials and colonized alike, there were too many liars and cheats, too much chaos and disorder, too many promises broken and deadlines not kept to believe in much of anything that a current politician, American or Iraqi, had to say" (*HM* 38). Hamoudi here still keeps a high degree of distance between himself and both "colonizer and colonized." This lack of cultural attachment vanishes with his growing disappointment in the U.S. culture of neglect.

sensitivity. Besides claiming to respect cultural peculiarities, she insists that in Iraq, "the culture was sexist and wrong," Hamoudi recalls (*HM* 34). The official "was going to make this program work, so that Iraqis would learn the ways of modernity," he adds (*HM* 34). How such a procedure is perceived by Iraqis, Hamoudi learns in another eye-opening conversation. An Iraqi professor in Basra who works in the field of women's education puts the matter in a nutshell: "The Americans have to understand something about this country if they are going to try to run it" (*HM* 98).

These experiences at the intersection of education and gender add another layer to the devastated picture of U.S. cultural neglect that Hamoudi highlights from a mirror perspective. Not only do Americans enforce their cultural prozalitation against all odds, they also lastingly resist learning about the culture of Iraq. The importance of cultural knowledge as prerequisite for political rule is highlighted by the professor in Basra. He reiterates Hamoudi's own claim to employ his bi-cultural knowledge in order to shed light on a country viewed as the home of uncultivated barbarian terrorists. When learning that Americans actually act as barbarians who are neither able nor willing to learn and respect cultural difference, Hamoudi's distance to America increases. He consequently shares the hostility towards Americans which he senses to flourish at accelerating pace (*HM* 154).

The growing distance to the U.S., however, does not ultimately settle his indetermination concerning his own cultural identity. This inner state of imbalance becomes reflected in the language Hamoudi uses. Sometimes he clearly positions himself among the Iraqis by including himself in the collective of "We Iraqis" (*HM* 180). At other times, he is drawn to his American identity affiliation again. Ultimately, he comes to realize that it is not so much a matter of making the *right* decision of cultural self-identification but one of being given the opportunity to decide at all: "Unlike many others, as an American who had lived most of his life in the United States, I had a choice," he recapitulates. At this stage of his narrative, his choice again falls on Iraq because "what mattered to me most was that I still believed […]. I believed in this land rich with oil […] the home of the gardens of Babylon […] I believed […] I still believed" (*HM* 166-67).

Hamoudi in this testimony to his belief in Iraq, which he reiterates by employing anaphora, acts against his rational thinking and the conviction of Iraq's likely failure. In political terms, this collapse is almost tangible, as Hamoudi lets the reader know. In cultural terms, however, he makes it very clear who fails to understand cultural difference on a very personal level – certainly not the Iraqis. The strengthening relationship to his future wife Sara provides another strong demonstration of the cultural ignorance on the part of Americans. While he is already struggling to avoid cultural taboos in the relationship itself, he finds it even harder to deal with the cultural reaction of his friends. In the chapter "Nuptial Preparations," he reveals the reason for his unease (*HM* 219):

As open and accepting as my American upbringing was, as tolerant and kind as most of my American friends were, there was a tinge of cultural bigotry in American society that time had not erased. There was a sense that those of us from the Arab and Muslim world were in some unexpressed way inferior and silly, the kind of people who traded women at camel auctions […]. (*HM* 220)

Hamoudi in this passage puts the mirror in front of the American reader to remind him/her of prevailing Orientalist stereotypes. Not only does the term "cultural bigotry" strongly oppose the otherwise celebtrated ideals of openness and cultural pluralism, he specifically relates this to the views surrounding Arabs and Muslims. It is this culture of cultural neglect that prevents even Hamoudi's closest friends from knowing his "own deep cultural identity," as he admits (*HM* 221).

In his criticism of American culture, Hamoudi also points to the double standards underlying it. This gap between image and reality becomes particularly visible in another conversation the author has with Iraqi business acquaintances. When they talk about the cultural norm that alcohol is permitted only "for men and whores," Hamoudi almost ironically points out that Americans would consider this statement to be "politically incorrect" (*HM* 223). One of the men then asks what that means. Hamoudi replies that it "means you have to show respect for all genders and ethnic groups and races. You can't categorize any of them." He then adds: "Westerners feel that stereotypes are wrong" (*HM* 223). Upon this politically correct defense of American political correctness, Hamoudi gets a simple but revealing answer: "They aren't wrong, they are usually true" (*HM* 223).

This explicit reflection on stereotypes in combination with political correctness forms a precise summary of the very complex culture frame Hamoudi constructs. This frame certainly has different connotations than the one established by Kaldas. Hamoudi, instead of focusing on cultural details in Iraq, pursues a more offensive strategy to convey cultural knowledge. By directly pointing to the constant violation of cultural code, Hamoudi exposes the prevailing Orientalist and colonialist attitude of the U.S. as imperial hegemon. He achieves this effect by directly confronting his readership with an outside view of U.S. culture. In the eyes of many Iraqis who get to voice their opinion in the memoir, this culture is one of moral and cultural neglect. The Americans' adherence to political correctness as a mere ideal ridicules this culture in a powerful way. At times, Hamoudi's judgement of these cultural offenses makes him distance himself from his American identity. At other times, he cannot resist his American socialization by treating the Iraqis as inferior and by displaying a high degree of cultural arrogance.

Due to the personal struggle Hamoudi faces with respect to the issue of culture, the very concept itself gains a more differentiated meaning for himself and thus also for his audience. One of the most striking findings within this cultural frame is that stereotypes are true, at least in the reality of the people living in both worlds – *East*

and *West.* Hamoudi knows, however, that this reality is hardly ever conveyed in the immediate way that he aspires for his own narrative. Stereotypes are the result of second-hand information which he seeks to correct in his first-hand account. The strongest competitors in this battle for authentic information on Iraq are the media. Hamoudi thus pays close attention to the way in which they uphold the image of the Iraqi terrorist.

The Media Frame

Image 9: Television Is Our World

Source: The front cover of *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Television* showing how television culture turns its audience into 'headless' victims of the media (Postman).

When thinking of American culture as based on military tanks and colonial hegemony, there is another supposed stereotype that, as Hamoudi is aware of, actually contains much truth – America as TV culture. This cultural transition to a brainless "Peek-a-Boo World" (Postman 64) was strikingly illustrated by Neil Postman in *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, published in 1985. Postman in his critical reflection states that television "has gradually *become* our culture. […] We have adjusted to what may have at one time been termed 'bizarre,' and the extent to which we have adjusted is a measure of the extent to which we have been changed" (79-80). Hamoudi during his time in Baghdad also experiences how this change of culture initiated by television and other media has impacted the discourse on Iraq. Since he grew up in the number one television country of America, he is familiar with the images of Shaheen's "*TV Arab*." Partly, these very images shaped his own view of Iraq long before his arrival there. As an Arab American living among Iraqis, however, he looks at the world and America through a different TV set. This causes him to keep a critical analytical eye on the mechanisms through which the media in both worlds, *East* and *West*, frame the image of the Iraqi.

To Hamoudi's initial surprise, his journey from America to Iraq not only takes him from one country to another, but also from one TV culture to another. He constantly catches his relatives sitting in front of the flickering screen for hours.

Iraqis were addicted to hearing the news immediately after the fall of the regime. Both Ali [cousin] and my uncle Isam spent their time watching Arab satellite news channels as if they were highly-regarded films. I had never known anyone who could watch four to six consecutive hours of news programming every single day, but they seemed to enjoy it immensely. (*HM* 19)

By describing the exhaustive television consumption of his relatives, Hamoudi already points to a crucial difference separating the Iraqi television audience from the one in America. As he clarifies, Iraqis do not spend hours in front of the TV watching soap operas or other entertainment programs. Their seeming television addiction is not motivated by the mere need for entertainment, but by the eagerness to gain information. As Hamoudi explains, for the first time after the long-standing regime of Saddam Hussein, they are able to receive news channels that do not rely on the propaganda machinery of a dictator or the limited view of only one Arab news station (*HM* 19). The Iraqis highly appreciate to have escaped the propagandist news framing of the former regime, Hamoudi explains.

Still, the Iraqis as a consequence of their former negative media experience continue to read and watch between the lines. This also causes skepticism toward seemingly independent news stations such as Al-Jazeera. Here, they criticize the "pan-Arabist bias" of the coverage (*HM* 19). In order to demonstrate this point, Hamoudi quotes from a moderated panel discussion on Al-Jazeera on the current state of domestic political affairs in Iraq. The Palestinian commentator calls the Iraqi resistance movement "the shining cause in our blighted Arab world that will lead us over the shackles of imperialism and Zionism and colonialism […]" (*HM* 19). Hamoudi recalls the reaction of his uncle Abu Ahmed to this statement: "Who is this resistance killing," the uncle asks? He then quickly answers his own question: "Ten Iraqis for every American. Idiot" (*HM* 20). This scene reveals that colonial oppression, especially in the context of Zionism, is not a phenomenon that deserves the scholarly prefix of 'post-' in the Middle East. Rather, colonialism is a very *present* experience for the Iraqi people. Hamoudi's description of his uncle's reaction also demonstrates that the television audience in Iraq does not approach this issue from a reductionist viewpoint. The reservations of the Iraqis against biased news reporting thus rely on a nuanced approach to pan-Arab political affairs, the Palestine conflict, and the role of the media therein. This observation reveals that the Iraqis themselves are highly aware of the role news framing plays in the shaping of their worldview. Hamoudi's detailed attention to the media coverage and its reception also underlines his media-theoretic knowledge of framing.

News in Iraq do not only stem from Arab sources, however. Abu Ahmed after his outburst instantly changes the channel to Fox News. After watching the program for a few minutes, he has to admit: "'I wish I knew English. I think the Americans and this O'Reilly fellow on this channel sometimes make much more sense than the

Al-Jazeera people ever did, but I cannot understand what they are saying'" (*HM* 20). Abu Ahmed obviously has trust in American media outlets. This reaction symbolizes the new media freedom Iraq has achieved after the fall of the old regime. What prevents him and the majority of Iraqis from fully taking advantage of this is the lack of education. In fact, this shortcoming also is the result of Iraq's long-lasting political and economic mismanagement.

The lack of education and foreign language skills, however, does not prevent the Iraqi media audience to look for comprehensive information and truthful reports in the media, Hamoudi in his more far-reaching analysis of media consumption in Iraq reveals. As his alertness to the issue of media production and reception in Iraq intensifies, he closely watches the way in which news media information is distributed and perceived in the country. These reflections pervade the entire narrative like a red thread. To further reinforce this mediatic lens for his readers, Hamoudi devotes an entire chapter to explaining the trajectories of news consumption in Iraq. The chapter bears the telling title "Truth and Rumors in Baghdad" (*HM* 45). As the conjunction "and" suggests, according to Hamoudi, the concepts of truth and rumors do not necessarily stand in contrast to each other. This assumption receives immediate confirmation when he explains how much the "truth" was distorted by the Iraqi media in the past. "In light of the lies told by official media sources over the past thirty-five years in Iraq, it should come as no surprise that Iraqis have been ingrained with a healthy skepticism concerning the accuracy of sources of information that are usually taken to be reliable in other parts of the world," he outlines (*HM* 45). This inherent discredit of news reports not only refers to government and military sources but also to American news media outlets. Truth is thus assumed to be lacking independent from the specific news producer. As Hamoudi explains, "Iraqis also rarely trusted any breaking story on television" (*HM* 45). This general mistrust in the media as a legacy of the Saddam regime is further complicated by the different religious and political factions in the media audience. Shiis do not trust Al-Jazeera because of its "pan-Arab and anti-Shii" stance, Hamoudi explains (*HM* 46). Also, they do not trust CNN or European outlets such BBC either because both function as a "mouthpiece" for the American and European governments (*HM* 46).

Hamoudi in the first part of this chapter provides a very detailed analysis of the reasons behind the Iraqi skepticism toward any kind of media content. As he clearly emphasizes, the distrust is not simply a consequence of homogeneous anti-*Western* sentiment in the Arab world. Rather, internal and international political divisions also influence the process of news production and news reception in Iraq. This aspect is hardly illuminated in the common coverage on Iraq. This knowledge, however, provides the precursor for understanding the importance Iraqis ascribe to the issue of truth within the larger social environment and the exchange of information. The author uses a very striking example to demonstrate this point. "Thus, to the ordinary Iraqi, the story on CNN about a soldier who helped rebuild a school in

Kirkuk was clearly untrue because it was a news report, but a street rumor that the sunglasses of U.S. soldiers were designed to see through women's clothing was widely accepted, even to some degree among the educated who really should have known better" (*HM* 15).

Whereas Hamoudi's narrative voice in the analysis of the different news media outlets and their perception appears rather neutral, the above-mentioned elaboration on the Iraqi understanding of truth displays a sense of cultural superioty again. Although he reiterates his goal to provide an authentic image of the "ordinary Iraqi," he at the same time exposes the lack of education and its replacement by superstition and conspiracy theories in the general population. The spreading of "street rumors" therefore clearly contradicts Hamoudi's conception of truthful reporting. The tone in which he describes this Iraqi habit disregards the fact that the belief in rumors is also an attempt to fill the information gaps left by the media. Rather, the author emphasizes the cultural and social backwardness that goes along with the practice (*HM* 46). The unrealistic example of the glasses as screening instruments to see through women's clothing underscores this point even further. The man believing in this information is presented as unintelligent native who believes in rumors as a child believes in fairy tales. Hamoudi makes no attempt to balance the *Western* perspective he occupies in this instance and consequently does not show any sympathy toward the cultural appreciation of "rumors." To him the truth of news media clearly is truer than any rumor. This reveals an ethnocentrist attitude which Hamoudi seems to be highly unaware of in his depiction of the discursive landscape in Iraq. This cultural arrogance is underpinned in another media-related comment he drops. When visiting a movie theater in Baghdad, he mourns the "sad condition of the Iraqi arts" (*HM* 50). Such a judgement underscores the position of a *Western* visitor who is used to fine arts entertainment and a choice of dozens of news channels in the U.S. Given the war-like circumstances in Iraq, such a comment seems out of place.

The situational Orientalist arrogance with respect to the media environment in Iraq slowly gets embanked by the political reality Hamoudi is facing. Life and above all survival to a large degree depend on the media as only source of information, as he quickly learns. Several key events taking place in Iraq or related to Iraq demonstrate this important function of the media in the condition of war to him. The only way in which Hamoudi learns about these events is through the television coverage. An example of this is provided when the sons of Saddam Hussein are found dead. The author first hears about this in the streets, but the ultimate proof of the truthfulness of the information is affirmed when the dead bodies are displayed on television, as he recalls (*HM* 50). A similar importance of the media as Hamoudi's prime source of information appears in the context of the capture of

Saddam Hussein. The coverage of the incident quickly focused on the announcement by chief administrator Paul Bremer "We got him" (*HM* 71).[14]

Hamoudi in the course of his account increasingly interlaces information he gained from the media with his own observations (*HM* 126). Just like the life of the Iraqis is very much determined by the information they receive from the news, Hamoudi's own survival in the war-struck country comes to depend on the news media. The climax of this appears in the chapter "Ashura" that deals with the bombings in March 2004 (*HM* 125). Ashura marks the most important religious celebration in honor of the martyrdom of Prophet Muhammad's grandson Hussein (*HM* 128; Packer 258). For the first time after Iraq's liberation, Shiis in the year of his visit were free to celebrate this event at the holy shrines in Kerbala. Due to security issues, Hamoudi can only watch the commemoration on TV, which he regrets deeply. As it turns out, however, the decision to watch the celebrations at home saves his life. On that day, celebrations in Ashura were replaced by bombings. More than 180 mostly Shiite pilgrims died when terrorists of the resistance movement carried out suicide killings in Baghdad and Kerbala (Packer 256). Al Qaeda was later blamed for the attacks that were directed against Sunnis and the occupational forces alike. "On television, all that we could see were bloody limbs, terrorized people running frantically, buildings falling apart […]. We could make no sense of it," Hamoudi remembers his shock and frustration (*HM* 128). Following the event, Hamoudi describes the deeds of the terrorists in Iraq with more hatred in his voice than ever before (*HM* 128). Despite this emotional impact, the bombings also mark a turning point in Hamoudi's analysis of the media. His major target from now on is the American press.

Hamoudi's increasing skepticism of U.S. media coverage already becomes visible when his uncle tells him about the shooting incident with the American soldiers which the former was able to escape. The author interprets this violent act within the larger framework of the media coverage that obviously leaves out certain events while focusing on others. "The U.S. media, in their never-ending campaign to 'support the troops,' and the U.S. government, desperate to keep public support of the war high, had not reported on these matters [shooting of uncle] at all," he notes (*HM* 120). The Ashura bombing then directs Hamoudi's attention farther away from his analysis of Iraqi news and toward U.S. media framing. He continues

14 Although Hamoudi largely focuses on television as most popular media outlet in Iraq, his own media consumption also includes print sources. Since the selection of print media is limited, he also knows that this alternative news medium makes him dependent on a particular world view that depends on *Western* sources. He even admits that the *International Herald Tribune* effectively becomes a substitute for the *New York Times* for him. It provides him with all necessary political information and in addition serves as a mediator to keep him in touch with the "West," as he states (*HM* 163).

to point out examples in which mechanisms of selectivity and distortion serve the U.S. media as a tool for propaganda purposes. While the Ashura bombings represent the ultimate sign of the political failure of the U.S., he knows that nobody on American television will see or hear this negative truth. "I was angry at the Americans, and the very thought of watching a single U.S. Army of CPA spokesman express regret," he describes his feelings of disgust about the coverage (*HM* 128-29). Besides their constant claims of bringing democracy to Iraq, the U.S. has lastingly failed to guarantee security to the Iraqi people, Hamoudi clarifies. Yet, it is not an exclusively politically-oriented analysis he provides here but one related to the function of media framing as instrument of an occupational force. "Nothing good could come from this type of governance," he derives. "It was not governance at all, only its illusion to satisfy a discontented American public" (*HM* 129).

Hamoudi in his critical analysis of the U.S. media coverage on the Ashura bombings and on further critical events directly attacks the way in which the media serve as political instruments to justify the war in Iraq. Read from the background of his previous comments on the Iraqi media landscape, he indirectly equates the U.S. system of news production to the one of Iraq. While the Iraqi media in former times held their audience hostage to maintain the dicatatorship of Saddam Hussein, the U.S. and eventually the world audience are now taken captive in a similar vein to support the WOT. This investigation of the instrumentalist framing in both media systems highlights Hamoudi's knowledgable approach to the issue and also alarms the American media audience to critically reflect on its media practices. Further examples the author provides from the mechanisms underlying the U.S. media coverage make these critical insights even more unavoidable for the reader:

> I heard the CNN spokespeople, I heard the experts explain how impossible it was going to be to protect so many people […]. I could only think one thing – if it was the Olympics, if it was the anniversary of September 11, if it was the Oscars, if it was the Super Bowl, an event not one-tenth as important as the Ashura, America would have found a way. Whatever the problem, whatever the obstacles, the U.S. would make sure its people were protected. But when it came to Iraq, they sounded like Yassir Arafat. (*HM* 129)

This passage marks one of the most powerful strikes Hamoudi launches at the U.S. media system and its framing of the WOT. The daunting comparison to a figure like Yassir Arafat conveys the strong disappointment resonating in the author's voice. He compares the leader of a highly disputed political organization to the American media outlets to underline how neglectful but also violent the U.S. treats the concerns of the Iraqi people in compasrison to its own. The failure to protect the Iraqi people is therefore not the result of inability, as Hamoudi clarifies. Rather, it is the intentional disregard to take full advantage of the often-praised military and political capabilities existing in the land of unlimited opportunities.

The concerted American coverage on Iraqi affairs as such is only one indicator of the U.S. media's attempts to frame the WOT, as Hamoudi furthermore explicates. This framing also relies on the intentional depiction of the Muslim as enemy within the larger context of the Middle East conflict in Palestine. In the case of the Ashura bombings, this focus on religious identity stereotypes again received confirmation, Hamoudi observes. While "Americans did not actually commit the crime," he clarifies that their media practice gained criminal traces (*HM* 129). The media after the bombings thus exclusively focused on the ones who were responsible for the bombings – namely Muslims, without any further differentiation. The American television audience therefore never learned about the fact that the majority of Muslims actually condemned the crime. Many of them univocally interjected that real Muslims would never commit such violent acts directed at fellow believers. The U.S. media, however, turn this argument around in their reporting:

> CNN misunderstood the sentiment when expressed thus, seeming to think that the statements of witnesses that the perpetrators were not Muslims implied some sort of Jewish conspiracy rather than a simple statement that anyone who committed such an act was not moved to do it by the tenets of our religion. It was not, I was sure, the last misunderstanding I would hear relayed on American television. (*HM* 129-30)

Hamoudi by calling the broadcasting a "misunderstanding" allows for the possibility to attribute the distorted representation to a lack of knowledge on the part of the media. This already exposes an inherent incompetence of U.S. media in foreign affairs coverage. The fact that Hamoudi expects more misunderstandings to happen, in addition suggests that the flawed coverage he mentions from the past is the result of intentional distortion within the overall media framing of the WOT. Hamoudi strengthens this argument by referring to the impact of Zionism in the political framing of the Middle East and hints at the pro-Israeli bias ruling in the U.S. media.

The analysis Hamoudi provides of media framing does not end with his exposure of the WOT. Moreover, he stretches his analytical angle even further by locating the coverage he witneses within the framework of Orientalism, an interpretative pattern that has left a considerable mark on the history of 20th-century media reporting. Hamoudi reminds the reader of several key events that contributed to the framing of the Arab within the common enemy pattern, no matter if Muslims or Arabs actually were involved in any of these events. "Whether it was the Achille Lauro or September 11 […], we found ourselves repeatedly on the defense, attempting to explain our religion and our culture on our own terms," he states (*HM* 134). Other terrorist acts that *are* in fact committed by Muslims pose a particular challenge to those who want to change this image. The other significant problem preventing this reframing process is the media and their selective but also sensational depiction of terrorism. "They [terrorists] made the news," Hamoudi summarizes the phenome-

non while also pointing out that the average Muslim or Arab does not appear in the media (*HM* 134). In light of this reductionist presentation of Iraqis as terrorists, the ordinary – i.e., non-terrorist – Iraqi is mostly fed up with any type of news coverage. The reaction of Hamoudi's grandmother is symptomatic of this attempt to escape the stereotypical images about Arabs and Muslims in the media. "Please don't turn on the news," she advises Hamoudi (*HM* 136).

The detailed explanations Hamoudi devotes to the issue of the media powerfully underline his overall purpose of his memoir as an instrument to depict an alternative reality of Iraq for his readers. As in the case of Ansary and Kaldas, his strategy for achieving this aim does not rely on the simple narration of counter-stories. Hamoudi takes the position of the Iraqi looking at U.S. media framing from outside while at the same time taking the position of the American to highlight particularities of the Iraqi media world. The effect of this juxtaposition is that the Orientalist power-relation separating both countries is dissolved. The American reader is thus reminded that his/her stereotypes of Arabs are based on a similarly distorted media practice as employed in supposedly backward countries in the Middle East. Hamoudi in this context explicitly points to the importance of lasting stereotypes in the minds of Iraqis and Americans. When recalling a meeting of a finance committee, he notices that "Iraqis knew America from recycled sitcoms on bad satellite television only" (*HM* 79-80). One of the most important messages Hamoudi therefore provides by unfolding the logic of framing in front of his readership is that notions of the respective Other in the binary confrontation between *East* and *West* are always mediated but rarely immediate.

Due to the great importance of the media issue in Hamoudi's account, it comes as little surprise that a specific media event also forms a major cause of his nearing departure from Iraq. When he wakes up one morning in Baghdad and turns on CNN, he believes to recognize pictures of the legal education office he works for in Mansour. The report states that three employees have been kidnapped and taken to Fallujah. After his initial shock, he slowly finds out that the coverage is actually spreading false information. The footage shows an office in "Mosul" not Mansour, as the reporters erroneously state. Hamoudi's assumption of this error is soon confirmed by Arab media outlets who give the correct information. Although Hamoudi feels relief after learning that his colleagues are not in danger, the incident is symptomatic of a larger problem in his eyes. The author knows that the confusion about the place names could only occur because of the ignorance and seclusion of American journalists. With a satirical undertone, Hamoudi thus infers that American "correspondents never left Army bases, but the Arabs tended to be better" (*HM* 197). This additional event underscoring the severe role the media play for the political development of the country is one of the last straws that ruin Hamoudi's initial motivation to come to Iraq. "*This was it*," he concludes (*HM* 198). He has

almost no hope left that he can contribute to the reconstruction of the country and thus decides to leave soon.

The media frame created by Hamoudi ultimately changes his vision of the country as well as the angle from which the American audience looks at Iraq and at its own mediated stereotypes. The memoir serves as an instrument to compete with these essentialist notions by providing an alternative and more authentic picture of Iraq. How difficult this competition with the global network of mass media is, however, Hamoudi painfully learns throughout his stay. He finds himself caught in a vicious cycle of depending on and at the same time cursing the media's role in framing the Arab as terrorist. The disillusionment connected to this finding and the constant threat to his life eat up Hamoudi's energy. The only factor that for a long time prevents him from leaving early is his personal economic situation. Unfortunately, this initial privilege also erodes to the effect that the economic lens Hamoudi develops in his memoir triggers even more frustration.

The Economy Frame

In 1996, the political scientist Benjamin Barber published a book that would later be interpreted as prophecy of the current world order. The title reads *Jihad*[15] *versus McWorld* (1992), whereby the author uses jihad as an umbrella term for tribalism and traditional culture in contrast to the corporate globalized part of the world ruled by large corporations (Barber 17). This provocative thesis is in line with the notion that the origin of colonialism largely relied on an economic enterprise. Linked to this stress on economic advancement and exploitation is the constructivist idea that modernism rests on a *Western* metaphor of progress and economic success. Hence, the binary division of the world into First and Third World countries still rests on economic indicators. Hardly anywhere could the clash of both worlds be more visible than in a country struck by the WOT. Especially for someone raised in the privileged environment of American materialism, this confrontation with a country in despair becomes a matter of personal division. As Hamoudi within the economic issue frame of the memoir reveals, McWorld is also starting to conquer Iraq, yet, this does not benefit his own class struggle in Iraq at all.

Hamoudi's self-appraisal of his outstanding education and professional career at the very outset of the memoir underlines that he belongs not only to an intellectual but also economic elite in the U.S. This status and his de-facto expatriate identity

15 Especially following the events of 9/11, the term "jihad" has come to indicate religious fundamentalism and Islamic warfare. In general translation, however, jihad means "to struggle" or "strive" toward an overall goal (Campo 397). Barber in his book also uses the phrase in this broader context when referring to it as a form of identity politics and strategy to represent social diversity (9).

when living in Iraq automatically identify him as a member of Iraq's social elite. In addition, it is his outspoken goal at the beginning of the memoir to make money in Iraq. Despite the geographical distance to the Iraqi people which he overcomes by living in Iraq, his elevated socio-economic status thus separates him from the "ordinary Iraqis." This also becomes reflected in the daily life Hamoudi pursues. He spends most of his leisure time in recreational facilities of the Iraqi Ba'ath[16] elite and at the Hunting Club, a gathering place for American expatriates. The club has also become known as the favorite spare-time place of Saddam Hussein's sons (*HM* 28). The two brothers, who did not gain an education in the "'decadent' West,"[17] as Hamoudi emphasizes, are constantly ridiculed by the other club members for their lack of education and poor manners (*HM* 30). These stories on the special connection between money and education lead Hamoudi to more far-reaching thoughts on Iraqi's social structure. "I left the Hunting Club slightly more uneasy than I had been. Class was a distinction I never favored, and it bore me no pleasure to witness its strong presence. However, it would be a mistake to overstate the class-related problems in Iraq" (*HM* 31). Although Hamoudi upon this early encounter with economic-based social divisions in Iraq tries to downplay the importance of class in society and in his own life, the topic keeps occupying him to an increasing degree. Especially the Hunting Club hereby serves as a microcosm for Iraqi society at large:

> The Hunting Club stories, however, revealed a deeper class-based fault within Iraqi society that is largely not discussed in media circles. In a society torn by divisions over religion, tribe, and ethnicity, class is not the premier distinction most Iraqis make with respect to one another, but it does exist. Families that are prominent and well-known tend to stay prominent and well-known. Individuals from families who are not prominent can graduate as a doctor from a top medical school or as a professor well respected in this field, but the opportunities for social advancement are considerably more limited. There is almost no chance for that graduate to join the Hunting Club, for example (*HM* 31).

16 The Ba'ath Party was the ruling political force in Iraq. The regime dominated the country from 1968 until the overtaking of the U.S. forces in 2003. Originally, the party had emerged as a revolutionary movement against European colonial suppression. Its major goal was the creation of pan-Arab unity. This aim is still reflected in the party's name which stands for "resurrection or renewal" (Campo 81). The official translation, however, is Arab Socialist Party. The faction claims to pursue secularist goals by denying the idea of religion as ultimate truth, though, the Ba'ath ideology equals the one of European fascism and communism.

17 This remark points to the correlation between an education "in the West" and the class status of diaspora members who return to their home countries. Various studies in Postcolonial and Cultural Studies investigate this phenomenon with increasing concern (Ansary, Interview with Menten).

The author here provides insights into the dynamics of upward mobility in Iraq. He thoroughly traces how class generally stands behind in public discourse because issues of ethnicity and religion mostly dominate the picture. This also holds true for the *Western* media coverage on Iraq, where the domestic economic and social trajectories in the country are mostly neglected. Hamoudi's economic insights therefore indeed fill existing knowledge gaps of the audience. While the economic part of the American Dream is still dominated by the vision of rising 'from dishwasher to millionaire,' Hamoudi emphatically illustrates that this ideal is not universally valid and thus ethnocentric. As his example of medical school graduates from average family backgrounds demonstrates, an invisible glass cealing prevents many in Iraq from rising in society. Even a highly-advanced education thus cannot make up for a low-status family background. Hamoudi presents this system as faulty but at the same time reminds the American reader of similar trajectories persisting in the U.S. Here, class has historically been an unpopular topic because of the strong emphasis on the American Dream that supposedly can be achieved by anybody who is willing to work hard. Meanwhile, though, the economic downturn has brought class issues back to the consciousness of Americans. They are thus likely to identify with the situation described by Hamoudi. The importance of family background, however, also directly relates to Hamoudi's personal status. At this stage of his economic observations in Iraq, he is obtrusively quiet about his own elevated status as Iraqi American with an education in America who now enjoys upper-class privileges in Iraq. He does not seem to be aware of the fact that his life in Iraq and his self-constructed authority as an author largely rest on his class position. Slowly, this aspect reaches his consciousness.

Daily life in Iraq gradually reminds Hamoudi of how much his view of economic concerns is rooted in a Western conception of class and socio-demographic status. When he is asked about his tribal origin by another Iraqi, he fails to provide an answer. Although he is well aware that tribal origin to a large extent determines social status in Iraq, as he explains, he has never pursued his personal roots in this respect. To his parents, to him, and to most of his exilic Iraqi friends, the question of tribal affiliation is of no concern. "Growing up, it seemed to me that tribes existed, the uneducated and peasantry paid heed, and nobody else cared," Hamoudi summarizes (*HM* 38). This somewhat indifferent explanation highlights that the very question of tribal affiliation introduces a socio-demographic division because the educated elite obviously does not care about the issue. Hamoudi is aware that the Iraqis do not understand this carelessness. Still, he strongly adheres to a model of social identity that is shaped by money, not by tribal origin. This material conception of self is deeply ingrained in his upbringing as he reveals. His early childhood memories are linked to consumer experiences such as having a "Pepsi in a tall thin bottle" on his outings with one of his uncles (*HM* 61). The maintenance of this upper-class status in his present life enables him to purchase items that normal

Iraqis cannot afford. This also leads to a somewhat idealistic trust in the financial orientation of others. Even when the economy in Iraq continues to decline and markets almost collapse, Hamoudi adheres to the belief that there are "people who will pay American money" for rebuilding Iraq (*HM* 63).

This fierce defense of materialism as opposed to the importance of non-materialistic identity features prevailing in Iraq causes a deep feeling of alienation on the part of Hamoudi. His worldview is so much dominated by the economic well-being of the U.S. that he can show little empathy for the material hardship he witnesses in Iraq. His depiction of the market situation in the country highlights this *Western* standpoint. When trying to buy a car, he gives a comprehensive account of the automobile market in Iraq in which both extremely cheap and luxurious models are available, as he explains. Especially the expensive models can only be afforded by a small group of upscale Iraqis. Although the cars lack amenities such as air-conditioning, as the author ironically adds, they do display famous brand names such as Volkswagen on the outside, which is what matters most to the Iraqis. To Hamoudi, this is a sign of a more general class pattern found in Iraq; "an insufferable predisposition toward ostentation, at times verging on the vulgar," he infers (*HM* 97). To him, "such showiness" supposedly is of little importance, he clarifies, since security concerns matter most. In addition, the problem of choosing a suitable car does not even become relevant for him. As he learns, as a foreigner he is not allowed to own a car without a respective license anyway. "But in Iraq, a short explanation and a handsome bribe would cure the problem," he shares his solution to this problem (*HM* 97).

This inside view of the Iraqi car market based on his own experience allows the reader to gain a more detailed picture of the Iraqi economy which is hardly available from other sources. The derogative tone Hamoudi employs in this instance, however, also underlines his lasting economic socialization in the U.S. His exposure of bribery as the major way to bypass legal regulations in Iraq most likely derived from a truthful account of his experience. Still, it confirms *Western* images of disorder and dishonesty that have served Orientalists throughout the past as major arguments to explain the failure of Middle Eastern countries to thrive. Other scenes of bribery and intransparency underscore this inferior economic image Hamoudi designs. Ultimately, he uses the desperate state of the Iraqi economy to his own advantage and decides to "bribe [his] way through entirely" (*HM* 110).

Bribery and intransparency are not the only characteristics revealing his colonialist attitude when it comes to economic matters. When exploring a grocery store that supposedly "had everything," as he was told by Iraqis, he finds out that the selection would actually be "paltry" and "not impressive by Western standards" (*HM* 108). The same experience bothers him when trying to find a suitable gym. He goes to one of the most luxurious hotels in Baghdad that has a gym that supposedly has "everything." When he sees the inside of the place, though, he is disappointed

again. Everything to him clearly looks different than expected. Yet, he also uses the experience to infer a larger finding about the state of the Iraqi economy. Whereas the outside facilities are lined by nice palm trees and luxurious accessories, the inside to him appears filthy and in need of caretaking. This leads him to the conclusion that the gym simply represents a "metaphor of Iraq" (*HM* 112).

All these depictions of the economic condition of Iraq open up an economic frame of interpretation for the reader which diverges from the common image of Iraq as the paradise for oil-importing countries. Yet, the way in which Hamoudi constructs this frame remains highly ambivalent. On the one hand, he draws an image of a country facing enormous economic hardship. On the other hand, this country is attempting to copy *Western* economic standards for those who can afford respective amenities and consequently denigrate everything else as inferior. Hamoudi, despite his constant claims to sympathize with the Iraqi people, is one of those who display this *Western* economic stance.

The chapter "Health Club" (*HM* 105) underlines this far-reaching economic and cultural fissure dividing Iraq. When Hamoudi discusses his wish to join a gym with his family, they regard this as an "odd form of leisure" (*HM* 105). The oddness, however, does not merely rest on the athletic activity itself but on the logic behind it. Hamoudi meets serious incomprehension. "I just want to make sure I understand what you are saying, Hauder," his uncle addresses him (*HM* 105). "You are going to eat nothing but meat, which costs money, and then spend more money to go running on a machine?" he asks (*HM* 105-06). Hamoudi tries to counter this interpretation by reminding his uncle that this is a "question of how you put it" (*HM* 106). For his uncle this interjection does not count. Rather, "it's a question of whether or not this is what rich people do when they have too much money. Spend money eating too much, and then spend money to lose weight that you gain from spending money. Can't you just eat less," he ironically asks (*HM* 106)? Hamoudi's other uncle Nawfal shares this critical stance by explaining that "paying to climb stairs that aren't even real on a silly machine makes no sense at all." Nawfal always thought "that in the West they did that to meet women (*HM* 106).

The Health Club episode marks one of the most obvious confrontations of the diverging views on money and materialism between America and Iraq in the memoir. This time, it is not Hamoudi who ridicules the Iraqis for their love of bribery, dishonesty, and economic inability. Instead, he finds himself in the position of defending himself for something as unimportant as a health club membership. Yet, as the questions and comments posed by his relatives strikingly underline, this scene is not about the health club itself but about the clash of economic cultures. In a society struck by war and economic suffering, existential needs such as food and safety represent the highest goods. The logic of spending money on too much food, which in return requires spending more money to fight the consequences, is simply inconceivable. Not only does it not make sense in logical terms to the Iraqis, it is

also a sign of a fundamentally "*Western*" flaw of consumerism and saturation. Hamoudi realizes that the different perspectives are difficult to bridge when mentioning that his "American individualism and consumerism" can only be shared by one of his uncles who is a businessman and has experience in spending money "as he pleases." Among ordinary Iraqis, however, "money is a matter in which the community very much takes interest," Hamoudi knows (*HM* 106).

Although the author consequently is aware of the different cultural conceptions of money and class-status, he himself cannot resist following the American pattern of consumerism. It seems that only consumerism provides him with the necessary diversion he needs in order to be able to physically and mentally maintain his strength in Iraq. Increasingly, the economic frame through which he interprets his experience in Iraq dominates his perception. His frustration with the economic and political situation in Iraq thus worsens. When going to the airport, he notices a new Burger King restaurant and a duty free shop as ultimate symbol of *Western* capitalism (*HM* 141). After he realizes these exterior changes in the airport setting, he reflects on its interior transformation. "Other than this, nothing had changed, but I had changed," he reveals his proceeding movement from Iraq toward his American identity affiliation (*HM* 141). This transition is accompanied by a growing aspiration to be amongst fellow Americans. His favorite lunch destination becomes an exquisite Italian restaurant. What he treasures most about the place is not the food, though. As he explains, "I longed, even then, for the company of people who had been raised in the West" (*HM* 161). *Western* leisure activities like in superior restaurants and occasional visits to a hotel pool with fellow expatriates thus become his only pleasures in Iraq (*HM* 168).

The economic lens that finally comes to dominate Hamoudi's observations exposes the socio-demographic clash separating Iraq and America. Eventually, this dualism also irreversibly separates Hamoudi from other Iraqis. The author provides detailed economic insights into Iraq, yet these rational explanations cannot dissolve the strong opposites between American materialism and Iraq's more collective economic culture based on immaterial values. It is within this frame of interpretation where Hamoudi's American identity stands out most pervasively. In no other frame does the term *West* so often occur as in the context of the economic one. Contrary to other frames Hamoudi creates in his memoir, he does not even attempt to enforce a balance between both perspectives. He often ends up speaking from the Orientalist position of the *Western* economic hegemon. This in turn confirms the Iraqis' image of America as the colonizing power with political endeavors that have always been linked to economic ends (*HM* 120). Nevertheless, Hamoudi by allowing his Iraqi relatives to voice their criticism of American capitalism in direct speech reminds the reader of the often absurd characteristics materialism has gained in America. This economic obsession and the belief that everything can be purchased reflecs the image that Iraq holds of the U.S. as the Other. The statement of

an Iraqi car dealer quoted by Hamoudi puts this mirror view and the Iraqi's attitude toward it in a nutshell: "I don't care what the Americans say, this country is not for sale" (*HM* 114).

The growing doubts about the Iraqi economy also force Hamoudi to question his ideal of bicultural identity. His economic orientation and superior class status have no place in Iraq. His affiliation with the Iraqi part of his identity gradually erodes. Another experience with his relatives fosters this growing retreat to his American identity. When his family members tell him they might have to leave their home behind due to security reasons, the first thing Hamoudi worries about is financial "compensation" from the government. "Still thinking like an American," his aunt simply responds in a frustrated manner (*HM* 214). She has given up the hope of countering the materialist impulse of someone who always worries about money first and saving one's life second. These immediate confrontations with this outside perspective on America serve as final indicators for Hamoudi that materialism is just one among too many cultural and social characteristics which separate him from Iraq. His somewhat nostalgic attachment to cultural customs in Iraq that he remembers from earlier visits does not change this. "My place was not here," he realizes when celebrating Eid in Baghdad with his family (*HM* 218). The place where he belongs is mostly defined in socio-cultural terms. He needs his American friends in order to feel comfortable as an American again. As opposed to the Iraqis, these friends conceive of him in ways that he can identify with. "They saw me as I chose to present myself to them, as an American (as they themselves were), certainly of differing ethnic origin and religion, but as a jetsetter, and a well-heeled child of the Ivy League, living in New York or Hong Kong with weekends in the Hamptons or Saigon" (*HM* 221).

This self-portrayal strikingly illustrates how much Hamoudi's identity and self-esteem are connected to his socio-economic status. What connects him most with his friends is his financial status which allows him to share a privileged life style. These characteristics might be stereotypical markers of American identity. Yet, as Hamoudi reveals, they are essential to his self-definition. With respect to his American friends, class status therefore bridges any ethnic or religious divide. In Iraq, however, it is exactly this class difference that ultimately distances himself from his ethnic heritage. In line wih this finding, the author's explanation of his decision to go back to America reads like a manifesto of the American work ethic:

> Nobody would leave Iraq and the Islamic world to go to America to make a positive contribution to Iraq and the Islamic world. I'd given up. I did hope and expect that my future work would prove to be useful […]. I just wanted to be happy and productive. I needed work that was important, not a tangential position on a project in which few showed interest. […] I had to leave, I had to live. (*HM* 237-38)

Hamoudi's notion of a happy life, as shown in this passage, is one in which meaning is mostly defined by productivity, success and material well-being. This highly individualist notion of happiness stands in sharp contrast to the more collective concerns dominating Middle Eastern culture. Here, visits to the opera, a round on the golf course, or outings to the museum are not considered "personal needs" – mostly because these things are not even available. This not only holds true for Iraq itself but for many countries in the "Islamic world," as Hamoudi in a very universalizing manner reiterates. The American work ethic and its focus on productivity have no room in a country where happiness is defined in different terms. Hence, a life in Iraq, even for an American *Iraqi*, is not worth living.

This economic frame drawn by Hamoudi creates a novel interpretative pattern through which the American readership can gain insights about life in Iraq and about its own materialist culture. The identity conflict experienced by Hamoudi underlines the far-raching social and ethnic implications of economic issues. Class here functions as an identity trait capable of bridging and dividing ethnic identity affiliation.[18] Similar to Kaldas whose economic analysis of Egypt underlined her American identity, Hamoudi also ends up on the American side of the hyphen. Both explicitly testify to the American Dream in a materialist and ideological way. Hamoudi, however, even more strongly reiterates the binary between *East* and *West* by actively provoking Orientalist stereotypes in his interpretation. It is this overbearing greatness and superiority of America as opposed to the inferiority of the rest of the world that Hamoudi alludes to in his epilogue.

> From the time I was a child growing up in America, coaches and teachers, not to mention Hollywood movies, taught me that to give up, to surrender is a sign of weakness, and that with persistence and fortitude I could achieve anything I wanted. I fully adopted this outlook and found it, overall, a useful way to lead my life. But right now, I wish I had a touch of the Eastern fatalism. (*HM* 272)

18 This finding is in line with the theory of transnational class formation developed by Leslie Sklair in the field of sociology. The concept holds that a growing transnational capitalist class (TCC) has emerged that is made up of mobile professionals who function as agents in a network of transnational corporations (TNC). This group is assumed to be the engine of globalization (Sprague 500). Classical TCC members are diplomats, government ministers, aid officials, and representatives of international organizations such as the United Nations. They tend to publicly display their class status, which is why they are assumed to severely impact "images of the world and images for the world [...] a proliferation of interpretations of the world" (Friedman qtd. in Werbner 18). Hamoudi certainly displays many of the given characteristics.

He utters these words while continuing his privileged life in New York. The experiences in Iraq merely constitute dark memories at this point. The temporal distance to his journey obviously also causes him to reflect on Iraq in much broader terms. He becomes partly aware of the enormous cultural arrogance of the U.S. teaching anybody that one can "achieve anything." War, desperation, and imperial powers enforcing their economic ideals on others do not appear in this picture. Hamoudi seems to appreciate this uniquely American ideal, which underlines his Americanness even further. Still, his words also reflect the finding that the American self-conception of heroism and greatness is an illusion after all as well as the cause of personal frustration. Living in a country like Iraq brings this sense of failure to light. "Eastern fatalism," a term which again evokes rather negative and violent images of the Middle East, might provide an alternative to the American concept. Hamoudi leaves his readers in doubt what he actually means by this. Nevertheless, he knows that it is lacking from his life since he has left the "Eastern" part of his self entirely behind. His focus now rests on living a "useful" life again – at least in an American sense. This self-centered conclusion makes one doubt his claim to have achieved an "entirely bi-jural and bi-cultural" personality in Iraq (*HM* 272). At least the first part of this statement seems to be true, though. The professional experience in Iraq has obviously benefited his legal career. He now holds a well-acclaimed academic position. The memoir thus ends as it began: with the ambiguous assurance of Hamoudi's professional authority and a spark of hope that Iraq can be rescued (*HM* 272).

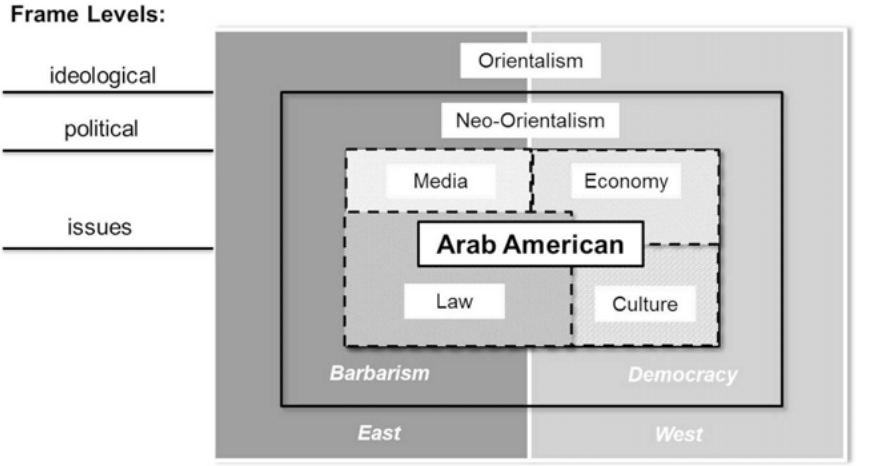
Reframing the Iraqi Terrorist as Theory of Justice

Reframing such a dominant and omnipresent image as the Iraqi terrorist does not constitute an easy task. The shift from euphoria to deep frustration that Hamoudi describes in his memoir points to the difficulty of this endeavor. Nevertheless, his closing lines are an appeal to keep up the endeavor. "Perhaps the readers of this memoir will indulge me in what might seem to them like belief in the fantastic mythologies of children, but like all Shi'a, when I think of all that has happened to Iraq, I cannot help uttering the words recited by us: *quickly, quickly, Companion of the Times. Quickly. Quickly*"[19] (*HM* 273). This acknowledgement underlines the lasting urgency to act on behalf of Iraq. In addtition, the explicit addressing of his audience reaffirms his original intention to employ his memoir as an activist tool to reshape the public view of Iraq from the inside. The clear-cut table of contents in the memoir provided a roadmap for this task. The memoir in its entirety then reveals the detailed method of his authorial project. Although Hamoudi thus ultimate-

19 Hamoudi here quotes from a popular Shiite recitation that refers to the testimony of the companions to Prophet Muhammad known as Sahaba (Campo 162).

ly fails to contribute to the recovery of Iraq as a lawyer, he does succeed in re-framing the image of the Iraqi terrorist as the author of his memoir.

Graph 7: Frame Model of Howling in Mesopotamia



This graphical recapitulation again displays the four major issue frames found in the textual analysis of the memoir; namely, law, culture, media, and economy. Similar to the memoirs of Ansary and Kaldas, the most dominant issue frame shows a close relation to Hamoudi's occupation. His professional authority as a lawyer is built up at the beginning of the memoir and reiterated throughout. The issue frame of law as it further underlines Hamoudi's competence in the judicial field, is characterized by the conflict area between written law and normativity. This especially accounts for the overlapping of the law frame with the one of culture. Both issue frames are shaped by strong value judgements by the author. Hamoudi mostly concentrates on the moral misconduct of Americans to illustrate the cultural code existing in Iraq. This focus on America and the reversal of othering also differentiates Hamoudi's culture frame from the one found in Kaldas who mostly focuses on Egypt in her account. Whereas Kaldas develops her frames with a strong didactic focus, Hamoudi reframes based on a theory of justice. A remarkable emphasis on domestic U.S. practices is also found in the case of the media frame created in *Howling in Mesopotamia*. Hamoudi also demonstrates strong value judgements when exploring the Iraqi and the American media landscape. His most critical stance is found when he reveals the mechanisms of framing applied by the U.S. in support of the WOT. The economy frame as the fourth issue frame again forms around the topic of class divisions. This constitutes a parallel to Kaldas's narrative. When looking at this series of issue frames in comparison to the frames found in

empirical framing studies on the Middle East media coverage, the peculiarity of Hamoudi's reframing efforts unfolds. None of the frames created in his memoir correspond to the ones ruling public media discourse. Hamoudi thus creates an entirely new interpretative pattern for the media audience to look at Iraq.

This autonomy on the level of issue frames is not confirmed in the case of the higher-level political and ideological frames. Especially in the context of the economic issue frame, the binary opposition between *East* and *West* dominates the account and Hamoudi's identity definition. This points to the reproduction of the neo-Orientalist and Orientalist framework as it circulates in the public media discourse. In contrast to the instrumentalization of Orientalism in the memoirs of Ansary and Kaldas, Hamoudi's position to Orientalism as imperialist practice is more ambivalent. At times, Hamoudi consciously employs Orientalist binaries as a conceptual tool to stress the differences between Iraq and the U.S. to thus convey insider knowledge. At other times, he does not distance his own position from an Orientalist stance and strongly embraces stereotypical notions of *Western* superiority without balancing them. This underlines his strong identity attachment to the U.S. concerning many of the issues he raises. Whereas this attitude is problematic from a post-colonial standpoint, it might endow him with additional agency on the part of the American reader whom he clearly addresses in the end. Overall, Hamoudi presents the least emotional and most scientific approach to his memoir. Both aspects are particularly interesting starting points for the investigation of resulting audience frames.

6.3 RECEPTION: THE (RE-)FRAMED IRAQI TERRORIST AND HIS AUDIENCE (V_4)

On December 6, 2011, Haider Ala Hamoudi posted an entry under the title "A Shii's Lament" on his blog. It was the day of the Ashura, the holy day of the Shii which brought so much blood and frustration to Iraq in 2004. In his memoir, Hamoudi creates a vivid picture of these events from the perspective of the Iraqi insider. Seven years later and back in the U.S., Hamoudi again decides to reveal his thoughts and feelings in the form of writing. In contrast to the other posts on the law blog, this entry represents a testimony to the American public and to the Arab collective. "I wish to give license to my heart and not my head, for just this day, just this once, so you know how we, the others in the Arab midst, feel," Hamoudi introduces the final lines of his blog entry. "Here's what I think today, or feel rather, straight from the heart":

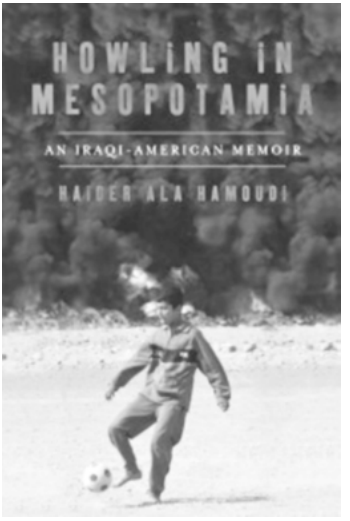
Tyranny or democracy, it's always the same in the Arab world. You won't accept us, you won't even make an effort to see the world through our eyes. You demand loyalty and offer no tolerance. You ask for support, and abandon us or are silent when our children our [sic] killed. When you come to accept the others, and all the others, […] when some modicum of mutual respect, honor and tolerance reaches or even just perceptibly registers somehow in civil discourse, penetrates even one tenth of a millimeter, give us all a call, we'd love to join in. Until then, go fuck yourselves. ("Shii's Lament")

This blog entry displays a much more emotional tone than the entire memoir. Still, the parallel in terms of authorial intent is obvious. Making others, especially the American audience, "see the world through our eyes," is what Hamoudi explicitly seeks to achieve with his inside perspective from Iraq. With *Howling in Mesopotamia*, the lawyer who rarely reveals his innermost feelings as forcefully as cited above chose the literary format of the memoir to achieve his discursive aim. His method largely rests on his profession as a lawyer, which also leads to a less literary and more scientific style, structure, and language. The memoir therefore in many respects differs from common conceptions of autobiography as the personal sharing of one's life story. Hamoudi establishes himself as a strong agent who focuses on facts, not on feelings. This helps him to constitute a series of issue frames that do not reflect the common cognitive framing pattern found in the media landscape. Since framing relies on both the affective and the cognitive component, the reception analysis promises to reveal particularly insightful results.

Howling in Mesopotamia in the Marketplace

When clicking on the "Selected Publications" button on Hamoudi's site at the Law School of the University of Pittsburgh, *Howling in Mesopotamia* stands at the top of the list. This is not because it is the most recent text by the author. Rather, the memoir remains the only book-length publication by Hamoudi so far. In addition, it is the only text that is unrelated to any kind of legal or journalistic contribution (Home page). The memoir was published by Beaufort Books in April 2008. This was almost four years after Hamoudi's return from Iraq. In line with his prophecy at the end of the memoir, the situation in Iraq indeed has not improved much since then. The year of publication, as many years before and after that, was characterized by rising civilian death tolls and the continuation of the WOT (Exoo 151). In addition, the Americans witnessed another type of war at the political homefront with the hot battle for the presidential office. The fight against terrorism – at home and abroad – again was one of the major issues in the presidential campaign.

Image 10: Book Cover of Howling in Mesopotamia



Source: Front cover of the memoir ("*HM*, Front Cover").

Howling in Mesopotamia's appearance in the marketplace reflects the political circumstances and the dominance of the WOT frame surrounding Iraq. The cover shows an Iraqi boy dressed in an old jogging suit. Barefooted and alone, he plays with a soccer ball in a rocky desert landscape. Behind him in the background of the cover image, only a few yards away from the boy, black smoke covers almost two thirds of the picture. The smoke comes from glowing red and yellow flames suggesting the detonation of bombs. The title of the book is printed in red capital letters. The same red is used for the flames and the name of the author. Only the subtitle "An Iraqi-American Memoir" is printed in smaller white letters. The font reminds one of a newspaper article. This impresson also summarizes the entire look of the front cover which parallels the one of a political magazine or nonfiction book. The visual appearance therefore stands in contrast to the emotional and somewhat nostalgic title of the memoir. The term "Mesopotamia"[20] points to the setting of the memoir, whereby many readers might not immediately be able to establish this connection.

The orange-colored back cover does not contain a picture. There are no excerpts from the text or any biographical information. Instead, two reviews are printed in yellow font, both written by distinguished scholars as the names and respective titles reveal. The first one is by Kanan Makiya, a professor of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies. He also is an Iraqi immigrant who has published several books on Iraq such as *Republic of Fear*. "Honest, delightful and touching" are the words Makiya uses to describe the memoir. In addition, he phrases the wish "that America and Iraq had encountered one another through many thousands of people like Haider Ala Hamoudi." Makiya obviously sees a balance between truthful fact-telling and emotional elements. Most importantly, the memoir is depicted as a medium to facilitate the mutual encounter between America and Iraq. The focus on reciprocity suggests that the reviewer does not identify Americans as the only target audience of the book but also Iraqis and possibly diaspora members of both coun-

20 The area around Baghdad along with other ancient cities, such as Babylon, was formerly known as Mesopotamia (Campo 83-84).

tries. Makiya also stresses the important role of Hamoudi as author and translator between the two worlds.

This aspect of cultural negotiation based on insider knowledge and truthful personal storytelling is emphasized even more by Cherif Bassiouni in the second review provided on the back of the memoir. Bassiouni is described as Distinguished Profesor of Law and President of the International Human Rights Law institute at DePaul University, the very institution that employed Hamoudi after his business idea in Iraq had failed. Bassiouni divides his short reflection into two parts dealing with the memoir itself and the author's background. "However narrow a witness's view of history may be, it is often more telling than volumes of facts and analysis by distant observers," Bassiouni writes before describing the historical moment in which Hamoudi went to Iraq. This contrasting of a supposedly "narrow" subjective account versus the recitation of facts at first seems to suggest an inherent difference between the two modes of writing. As it turns out, however, Bassiouni, underlined by his own scholarly agency, values the learning effect of personal storytelling even more. He explains this especially with the perspective shifts accounting for the revealing effect of the personal in opposition to the factual. Bassiouni in the remainder of the statement centers on Hamoudi's outstanding professional position and legal work which also granted him access to the political and religious Iraqi elite. This point strikingly reflects the focus on personal and socio-economic status the author himself continuously reiterates. Bassiouni in addition labels the memoir a "useful reader" which provides important insights into the present state of Iraq and its possible future.

Especially these final remarks reaffirm the peculiar status of the memoir which both reviews point to. Above all, they value the historical and political knowledge conveyed by Hamoudi. The comparison to a "reader" underlines this textbook-like function. With respect to the theory of ethnic life-writing, it is particularly noteworthy that none of these two reviews mention the aspect of bicultural identity struggle as major concern of the memoir. Consequently, the selection of reviews therefore does not reflect a marketing attempt to especially attract an ethnic-minority readership. The focus on historical, political, and cultural fact-telling clearly stands in the foreground. In sum, the appearance of the book is more journalistic than literary, more objective than personal. This general impression is strikingly underlined by the small subject description provided by the press on the backside of the cover which lists the title under "Current Events."

The left-hand side of the inner cover contains a quotation from the opening line of Hamoudi's memoir describing him as son of Iraq and the U.S. The citation is followed by a comment depicting the book as "groundbreaking memoir of hope and hardship." These emotional terms are further underlined by the mentioning of several key events appearing in the memoir. All of them are to varying degrees related to the WOT. The remaining lines, however, divert the attention away from this

frame by inviting the reader to "experience a new side of the country that has featured so prominently in our nightly news." This explicit reference to the news stresses the role of the memoir as medium in the larger public discourse. The "new side" of Iraq confirms the reframing efforts of Hamoudi. As the comment further points out, this capacity is based on his bicultural identity. The memoir thus provides an answer to the question that seems to be most pressing for the marketing of the book – the open question of "What went wrong in Iraq?" that concludes the description. This directly points to the WOT frame surrounding the image of Iraq in the public. Above all, the country, according to this dominant interpretation, is a problem. Based on these lines, the reader is made to believe that Hamoudi provides answers to solving this problem. This impression is furthermore underscored on the other side of the book's inlet. It provides the biographical information on Hamoudi featuruing his career as a lawyer and his journalistic contributions. The text is accompanied by a large photograph of the author in suit and tie.[21] The image corresponds to the professional authority Hamoudi sets up in his story.

Some of the comments provided in the book inlet overlap with the editorial review provided by Beaufort Books online. Here, the focus rests more on the cultural knowledge Hamoudi provides. After again stressing the fact that his trip to Iraq made him leave "his comfortable life in the United States" in order to rebuild the legal structure of Iraq, the review centers on the cultural divide in his insider account (Rev. of *Howling*, Beaufort). As an example, the reviewer contrasts the warmth of Iraqi culture and hospitality with the bloodshed taking place in the streets of Baghdad. In highlighting the security concerns accompanying Hamoudi's stay in Iraq, the reviewer raises fear while at the same time celebrating Hamoudi as a heroic figure. The most outstanding characteristic of the life account is seen in the "intimacy" Hamoudi provides in his encounters with members of all ranks of society. Overall, so the editorial review closes, "Hamoudi's first-hand experiences […] give the reader an inside view of life in Iraq that we don't see on CNN" (Beaufort).

The journalistic marketing of the book and the heavy emphasis on the professional and ethnic authority of the author position the book apart from other ethnic memoirs found in the entertainment section of the book store. In fact, Beaufort Press after originally listing the book under "Current Events" meanwhile categorizes *Howling* as "non-fiction" (Lucie). As was the case with *West of Kabul* and to a somewhat lesser extent also with *Letters from Cairo*, this non-fiction genre classification has important implications for the reception process. The readers approach the text in a different way than they would in the case of fictional or semi-fictional accounts. The most striking confirmation of Hamoudi's discursive impact beyond

21 As to the aspects of materialism and socio-economic status which Hamoudi clearly values, it is a curious detail to note that the inlet even displays the designer brand of the jacket Hamoudi is wearing in the picture.

the literary realm is given by the reviewer's explicit reference to the media. The CNN coverage here is used as an umbrella concept to point to the dominant media frames that the memoir competes with. The media frames reproduced in the memoir resonate in this review. Hypothetically, one could assume that this issue frame is of particular relevance for the journalistic audience of Hamoudi.

The Journalistic Readership

In juxtaposition to the outstanding media presence of Tamim Ansary as opposed to the public invisibility of Pauline Kaldas, Haider Ala Hamoudi occupies the middle ground. In February 2008, about a month before the publication of the book, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* published a longer article on the author under the title "The Catch 22 of Iraq: Pitt Law Professor's Book Recalls Trying Experiences in 'Mesopotamia'" (Rouvalis). The article represents a symbiosis of a review and a portrait of the author, whereby the focus rests on Hamoudi's Iraqi love story with his future wife Sarah. In addition to this emotional angle, the article mostly centers on the contrast between Hamoudi's privileged life in America and the hardhip he endured in Iraq. In this context, the article also points out that the most visible cultural differences in the memoir are the American optimism and self-determination Hamoudi represents versus the fatalism and distrust spread by official American news and government sources (Rouvalis). Hamoudi, however, does not blame the American forces for their behavior, as the reviewer clarifies, because Hamoudi knows that demoralization causes the misconduct. In sum, the review draws an overly positive picture of the book which avoids many critical issues concerning U.S. foreign policy issues. Still, the impact of the media frame surrounding the American notion of Iraq is pointed to, although any form of intentional manipulation on the part of the U.S. is ruled out. This rosy picture also shimmers through the concluding sentence of the review which deals with Hamoudi's recent marriage to his Iraqi wife. "The couple has not experienced much anti-Iraqi sentiment - except an occasional anonymous rant sent to his blog," the author Rouvalis acknowledges.

The positive image drawn in this article not only serves as a marketing tool for Hamoudi's book, it also fosters the author's popularity on a larger scale. Hamoudi's blog, for example, which the article also alludes to, offers new posts almost on a daily basis. Hamoudi's authorial voice is thus permanently available for those who want to access it. In addition, he meanwhile counts as a welcome expert in public media outlets. In 2011, he commented on the possible release of post-mortem pictures of Osamah Bin Laden on *CBS*. He outspokenly opposed the publication of the pictures. The explanation for this decision was somewhat characteristic of the judicial and normative stance he displays in his memoir. "To show that we in the United States operate on a much higher plane," Hamoudi introduced his argument, "I

like that idea of a global demonstration," he said (Jackson). This "global demonstration" eventually sought to show the moral and ethical superiority of the U.S. Despite this exemplary political issue, Hamoudi's expert status on questions of media ethics and law underline his personal concern for the workings and effects of media production displayed in the media frame of his book. His repeated media appearances contribute to his public status outside the field of law.

In how far the sales figures of Hamoudi's book have benefited from his media popularity remains speculation. At the time of writing, a total of 500 books have been sold. This figure is about twice as large as the number of books sold by Kaldas. Still, it only represents about one fifth of the total print run (Lucie). In light of these rather low sales figure, the journalistic responses to the memoir were quite numerous. Given the fact that Hamoudi does not count as a noteworthy author outside the realm of special interest law journals, this might indeed be a result of his general media visibility. In addition, the lasting impact of the WOT frame still dominates the American and global book market. Journalists are thus eager to provide their readers with new insights from troublesome Iraq.

A review by *Publishers Weekly*[22] can be suspected to have had an effect on the outcome of the book's market position. It was published in August 2008 in the section "Nonfiction review." Similar to the way in which Hamoudi himself introduces his persona at the beginning of the memoir, the review first centers on the brevity and professional authority embodied by the author. Shortly after the fall of Saddam Hussein, Hamoudi "decided to leave his cushy home behind to aid in reconstructing Iraq, his parents' homeland," the reviewer explains. His journey to Iraq is furthermore depicted as a heroic "mission" of reconstruction and development. Hamoudi is described as participating in the installation of "a brave new legal world in Iraq" (Rev. of *HM*, *Publishers Weekly*). The review also stresses Hamoudi's conversation with the American soldiers at the beginning of the book in which he admits his limited knowledge about the everyday-life of Iraqis and their picture of America prior to his trip. The memoir is presented to convey his explorations as a series of "punchy episodes, in which his ignorance and naivete are stripped away by small revelations and details […]" (Rev. of *HM*, *Publishers Weekly*). After recalling some specific instances of these vignettes, the reviewer focuses on the balancing of hope and despair found in Hamoudi's autobiography. The review ultimately praises

22 Analyses on the causal relationship between reviews and sales figures show that reviews in well-known newspapers and magazines, such as the *New York Times* or *Publishers Weekly*, do have a considerable effect on the distribution of books (Greco, Rodríguez, and Wharton 49). For decades, *Publishers Weekly* was the leading review medium with an average of 8,300 reviews published in 2004. Since then, the numbers are steadily declining whereas online reviews are increasing (Greco, Rodríguez, and Wharton 50).

Hamoudi's story as an "illuminating guide" to get to know different facts of daily life in Iraq (Rev. of *HM*, *Publishers Weekly*).

Despite the very positive and optimistic tone drawn by the *Publishers Weekly* author to attract rather than scare the readership, several frames are reflected in this journalistic reception which overlap with the ones found in Hamoudi's text. Its strong emphasis on Hamoudi's authorial and professional agency is one example of this. The high degree of credibility deriving from this is linked to the importance the reviewer grants to the topic of legal development in Iraq. He eventually looks at the narrative through the legal frame. Another indication of frame resonance occurs with respect to the overall categorization of the book as "guide" to Iraq rather than a personal account. Similar to the textbook comparison found on the book cover, the reviewer appreciates the memoir as source of knowledge on daily affairs in Iraq which covers both perspectives – the American and the Iraqi one.

The didactic effect of Hamoudi's memoir is also highlighted in another journalistic review by the *Midwest Book Review*. The journalist here especially endorses Hamoudi's capacity to present "a different look at the Iraq conflict […]" ("War in Iraq"). This conception clearly reflects the impact of the WOT frame found in the book. The reviewer does not limit the overall contribution of Hamoudi's work merely to the political realm. Rather, he praises *Howling* as a recommended complementation to the "current events shelves" of libraries. This classification again denotes the non-fiction status of the memoir, whereby the direct reference to current events specifically points to its role in the media discourse on Iraq. This journalistic review overall confirms the success of Hamoudi's authorial intention to draw a different picture of Iraq based on detailed insider knowledge. In the larger context of life writing theory, this also testifies to the importance of authorial intent and strategic framing as keys to life writing and reading.

The frame resonance found in these journalistic reviews hints at the effectiveness of Hamoudi's efforts to reframe the image of the Arab in the public. The size of the journalistic audience discussing the book remains limited, however. No further reviews have appeared in national newspapers or other bigger media outlets. The scholarly audience has not dealt with Hamoudi's memoir at all. Since the same held true for Ansary and Kaldas, this shortage of scholarly work on contemporary Arab American literature outside the field of fiction remains prevalent. Yet, this does not prevent the popular culture readership from participating in a lively discourse on the memoir. As it turns out, general readers are eager to share how the frames established by Hamoudi changed their perceptions of Iraq and its people.

The Consumer Audience

Hamoudi's memoir steered a fairly high number of reactions on the part of the general audience. On Amazon, eight long and detailed customer reviews on the book appeared. The memoir receives an overall ranking of five stars on Amazon, an evaluation which suggests a very positive feedback. All reviews were posted in the year 2008, shortly after the book was released. This is an indicator that the immediate publicity around the memoir motivated respective consumer purchases. Since the readers' reflections on the book followed in immediate succession, they in a way speak to each other. The analysis of these voices reveals that Hamoudi's memoir indeed represents an outstanding example of how reframing through life writing can interfere with the public discourse.

One of the most striking parallels between all reviews on *Howling* is the audience's high appreciation of the author's narrative authority. The readers are well aware that Hamoudi did not just travel to Iraq as a private person exploring his roots. Rather, the comments strongly underline his professional agency as a "bilingual lawyer from a prominent Shi'a family," thus conceiving of him as a "privileged and highly educated man, idealistic and religious but also secular" (Littrell). This differentiates him from the vast majority of ethnic memoir writers, journalistic authors, and American professionals who seek adventures in the war zone to turn them into literary bestsellers. As one reviewer therefore notes, "Hamoudi is not just some ex-pat returning to his homeland […] to reap the spoils of war" (Littrell). This perception again reflects the authority and multi-ethnic agency Hamoudi establishes from the outset of his story. His professional and intellectual status especially contributes to the way in which his memoir is read. The academic style the author employs in this context is almost ironically highlighted by the previous reviewer. In his discussion of the book, he repeatedly uses the academic title "Professor Hamoudi" when referring to the author (Littrell). In addition, "Hamoudi reveals himself (as one must in telling such a long and personal story) to be sincere, hard-working, intelligent, diplomatic," the reader acknowledges (Littrell).

All these references to Hamoudi's professional prestige underline how much credibility Hamoudi enjoys in the eyes of the audience. As a likely effect of his self-positioning, they are thus willing to enter the autobiographical pact without doubting the author's authenticity. The previous review furthermore points to yet another aspect of this authority. The remark that it is an inherent obligation to display characteristics such as sincerity and intelligence when engaging in an autobiographical task like Hamoudi's signals how well-reflected the audience approaches the memoir. Different from the reading of a novel or of memoir as merely personal storytelling in the grey zone between fact and fiction, readers have clear expectations toward the honesty and sincerity represented by the author. This view is shared by

other reviewers who describe the memoir as an "honest" (upe)[23] and "real" (Littrell) account of life in Iraq.

The importance of honesty and authenticity is closely related to the format and style of the book, as the reception analysis also brings to light. Readers note that Hamoudi does not engage in mere prose writing but presents his experience in the form of "vignettes" (Adams), "observances," and "anecdotes" (McBride), as well as by allowing other Iraqis to voice their opinion (Carey). The reviewer upe from New York especially emphasizes that "this memoir is written without unnecessary drama, hyperbole, or an agenda – just keen, plain observation […] (upe). Other readers acknowledge that this fact-based approach to memoir writing does not at all override a "whirlwind of emotions" (Carey). This emotional aspect is especially mentioned with respect to the romantic relationship which develops between Hamoudi and his future wife in Iraq (Littrell).[24] The unusually intimate insights the author reveals in this context in the latter part of the memoir seem to balance the objective narrative style employed in other sections.

Overall, the "just-the-facts-style" dominating the memoir strongly resonates in the comments of the readers. It seems to underline the "power of Hamoudi's words," as one reader points out on the discussion platform *curledup* (Adams). This non-fiction perception of Hamoudi's autobiography is also summarized by the reviewer Carey: "The writing in this book is impeccable," he states before adding that it "almost seems too surreal to be true. Some parts read like a work of fiction. But make no mistake: this is a work of non-fiction through and through, even though the author probably wishes it was a fictional novel rather than the cold, hard truth" (Carey). This contrasting of truth versus fiction and the determined urge to categorize the memoir as non-fiction emphasizes how reflected the audience deals with the question of genre. Contrary to the practical elimination of Lejeune's authorial pact from contemporary autobiography theory, the readers make a clear differentiation between different literary genres. This ultimately guides their expectations and their reception experience.

Hamoudi's "disarming honesty" (Littrell) as a substantial requirement for framing successfully sets the stage for changing the conceptual framework around the stereotype of the Iraqi terrorist. One of the most dominant frames to achieve this

23 The user names of many online reviewers rarely correspond to real first or last names. They are thus often spelled in lower-case letters. The given citation in the case of the user "upe" and some reviewers that follow gives credit to this new media convention.

24 The reviewer presents long quotes from the memoir that particularly deal with the romantic relationship of Hamoudi and his future wife (Littrell). This detailed reference to the text is exemplary of several other customer reviews. Many of them are of considerable length, well-structured, and hardly contain any colloquial language. This indicates how well-reflected the literary audience outside the academy contributes to literary discourse.

effect is the one of law, as the reviews further reveal (Community Reviews of *HM*). The readers identify Hamoudi's task to "educate the people of Iraq on the rule of law and help the nation transform itself to a democratic and just society" as the most important frame structuring the experience of the author (Carey). As is the case with the professional change Hamoudi undergoes in the text following the failure of his business, the readers acknowledge that his focus does not merely rest on the "practical and personal nature of his concerns" (Littrell) but on the larger goal of "rebuilding" (Carey). The reviewers contrast this engagement in reconstruction to any "personal gain" (Littrell).[25] In addition, Hamoudi's legal conception of country development is put in sharp contrast to the military operation undertaken by the U.S. The judicial recovery of the country is thus perceived to underscore the ethical and normative concerns which gradually gain prominence in the course of the account. Hamoudi is described to depict these issues in a "genuinely human way […]" (Littrell). These detailed elaborations on the importance of legal aspects confirm the resonance of the law frame in the audience.

Hamoudi's legal authority and his focus on humanitarian rights are closely connected to the cultural issue frame in the text. This also corresponds to the way in which the audience reads the memoir. The reviewers frequently point to Hamoudi's bicultural and Muslim identity which allows him to present a "heartfelt perspective of Iraq from the ground" (upe; Littrell). While on the one hand presenting unique insider knowledge from the other world of Iraq, Hamoudi on the other hand is seen as a "stranger in both worlds" (Adams). This special insider/outsider status, as the readers attest, allows for the necessary analytical distance to reflect on the Iraqi and the American perspective in an equally intriguing way (knotheadusc). His goal to shed light on average Iraqis who normally do not appear on television is especially appreciated by a reviewer who plays on the Hamoudi's own term of the "ordinary Iraqi" by stating that the book depicts the "ordinary person living in Iraq" (Fishel).

One of the most important insights connected to this portrayal of daily life is the economic situation in Iraq. The readers refer to the economic hardships Hamoudi

25 The reviewer in this context explicitly mentions Ahmed Chalabi as counter-example. Chalabi is described "as just another of those privileged exiled Iraqis [...] [who] promoted the invasion of Iraqi [sic] for personal gain" (Littrell). The Iraqi politician and famous opposition figure was once favored by the U.S. as possible successor of Sadam Hussein. He mostly fell out of favor because of financial misdemeanors and accusations according to which he used the Iraqi National Congress opposition movement to further his own ambitions. Chalabi now counts as a highly controversial figure ("Profile: Ahmed Chalabi"). The explicit reference to Chalabi by the reviewer sheds further light on the well-informed background of many readers. In addition, the use of Chalabi as counter-example highlights that Hamoudi in the course of the narrative is able to overcome his own materialistic concerns in the eyes of the readers.

reflects on but also to the U.S. culture of materialism the author draws attention to. The way in which Hamoudi describes his own struggle with "air conditioning failures" and the "lack of recreation" leaves a particularly vivid impression on the readership (Littrell). The reviewers do not interpret these difficulties as unavoidable for a spoiled upper-class lawyer who is not fit for ordinary Iraqi life. Rather, they see it as an indicator of the real life struggle endured by the Iraqis who have to cope with the poor state of the economy (Carey). In turn, this makes the American readers reflect on their own position. As one reviewer states: "Not long after getting into the book, one quickly appreciates what they have and takes for granted" (Jonathan). Although Hamoudi clearly remains rooted in the U.S. culture of materialism, his insider elaborations help the readers to shift their perspectives.

This direct transfer of Hamoudi's experiences to the situation of the U.S. points to a larger conceptual finding related to the culture frame. Obviously, the reviewers of Hamoudi's book do not belong to a multi-ethnic audience seeking shared cultural experiences and common identification as major motivations for their purchase of the book. Ethnicity only plays a role in their comments to the extent that Hamoudi's dual ethnicity allows for perspective shifts related to the specific issues he explores. This indeed allows the readers to self-identify with the author's observation, independent of ethnic background. Not only do the reviewers point out *that* they are able to learn about their own culture based on Hamoudi's memoir, they also closely examine *how* he achieves this effect. As the reviewer Fishel states: "The author uses superb analogies of American culture to explain Iraqi culture" (Fishel). Another reader adds that this technique allows Hamoudi to reveal "a number of unexpected cultural differences between Iraqis and Americans" (McBride).

Both comments underline the didactic result of the comparative method the author employs. Eventually, this focus on binary opposites facilitates the cultural learning process of the audience. In the first place, it allows the American readers to look at themselves through the eyes of the Iraqi. Furthermore, it makes the audience realize that its own lack of knowledge about Iraq is similarly reflected on the part of Iraqis. This fosters the empathy American readers build up for the position of the Other. Instead of conceiving of Iraqis as hostile to anything American, the readers learn that possible reservations are a result of the lack of knowledge about the U.S. The reviewer Brian Carey describes this positive impact on mutual understanding by explaining that conflicts mostly appear "with Iraqis who don't quite understand the American way of life and cannot understand why Americans speak and act the way they do." As the use of the pronoun "they" instead of 'we' demonstrates, it is not an inferior Orientalist stance the readers infer from the lack of cross-cultural knowledge in Iraq but the insight that this lack of knowledge exists on both sides.

The constant binary contrasting used by Hamoudi helps overcome seemingly insurmountable differences. Especially the law frame and related thoughts on human rights play a crucial role in this respect. The readers appreciate the way in

which Hamoudi makes them see Iraqis as "people who are trying to make their way in life, just like everyone else" (knotheadusc). The Iraqi therefore not only loses the label 'terrorist' but is presented as human being sharing similar needs and concerns as the American. This insight also provokes the readers to think about the origin of stereotypes in public discourse. "Just like many Americans judge an entire group of people by their experiences with just a few," one reviewer states, "I could see that the Iraqis were also prone to making such judgements." Negative evaluations of the Other and possible conflicts ermerging from it are thus presented as a human tendency rather than the intentional project of backward barbarians (knotheadusc). This also explains the reviewer's ultimate tolerance for stereotyping. As he adds to his former statement, "I can't say that I'd fault them for that."

The idea of universal humanity based on global human and legal rights is even more forcefully underlined by another reviewer who puts the memoir's capacity to reframe in the context of the American credo of the freedom of opportunity:

> 'Howling in Mesopotamia: An Iraqi-American Memoir' will remind you that Iraqis are individuals just like everyone else in this world and even though the US government and media will many times make it sound like they are lesser people because of the harsh world that they live in, this book is a stark reminder that given the right opportunities they are no different than anyone else. (McKinnon)

This passage strikingly underscores the effect of the binary and often conflictual method of contrasting found in Hamoudi's narrative. It deconstructs otherness by pointing to the ways in which seeming differences are commonly reinforced and instrumentalized. This passage also identifies the agents who usually fill existing knowledge gaps about other countries and peoples with one-sided information. McKinnon mentions the government and the media as dominant actors shaping stereotypes of Iraq. This notion is in line with the position taken by Hamoudi. Its resonance in the review signals the importance of the media issue frame.

The political relevance of instrumentalist framing alluded to in the given review also reveals further findings in the context of the WOT. With no exception, the reviewers implicitly or explicitly acknowledge that their perception of Iraq before reading the memoir was dominated by the WOT frame as it is created and reinforced by the media. Titles such as "Rebuilding a War-Torn Nation" and detailed reflections on the desperate security state in Iraq demonstrate the omnipresence of the WOT frame in the audience reactions (Carey). Hamoudi's double perspective on the military culture, his legal authority, and his critical treatment of American gun culture, however, force the reader to think beyond this pattern (knotheadusc). The reviewers consequently display a critical treatment of the military presence in Iraq. In addition, they question the official media narrative of military control in

Iraq by adopting Hamoudi's conclusion of Iraq as failure of U.S. foreign policy. The reviewer Carey in his detailed elaboration also emphasizes this trajectory:

> [F]requent mention is made of the seemingly indifferent attitude of the Americans in Iraq and how they have done little to nothing to help transition the nation from dictatorship to democracy. In the minds of the Iraqi people, the American forces either do not care or do not know what to do. With people dying from gunfire on a daily basis, Iraqis don't feel much safer than they did under Saddam and they long for the day when the U.S. forces are gone and they can reclaim their land.

This passage signals the sudden erosion of the belief in Iraq as victorious military endeavor – an image that builds the center of the WOT frame in the media. This image is successfully turned upside down by the authority of an author who claims to have detailed political insights into both countries, America and Iraq. This effect therefore does not only rest on Hamoudi's national or ethnic background but on his ability to unveil the methods underlying media-created myths. This knowledge, which is independent of national, political, or ethnic self-identification, is what creates a powerful persuasive effect. Another reviewer thus points out that it does not matter for the reception of the book whether one is "for" or "against the initial invasion of Iraq." The book is a "must read" for anyone interested in Iraq, as he suggests (Fishel). How much he appreciates the contribution of Hamoudi for the political discourse on the WOT, the reviewer underlines with a powerful parallel to the Vietnam War. "When reading the book, keep in mind Robert McNamara's rationale for why we lost in Vietnam, in that we did not understand the history and culture of that Southeast Asian nation. History does repeat itself, but never in the same way," he concludes (Fishel).

The evocation of the trauma in Vietnam underlines the reframing effect of the memoir. Due to the provided cognitive framework, the readers are able to infer the knowledge they gained from the book to look at Iraq and the Iraqi people in different and less stereotypical contexts. Even more far-reaching historical and political inferences are thus facilitated. Some reviewers even explicitly describe this reframing effect in the context of the general media discourse. Carey states that Hamoudi provides "different images" of Iraq that are not directly related to the WOT. Another reviewer establishes the impact of the book on the public media discourse even more insistently: "I can only imagine what the world and US policy towards Iraq would be like if the public read this book, rather than relied on the common reporting, where everything is politicized as pro-war, anti-war, red vs. blue – and really understood the complexities on the ground, the practical realities, and history and dreams of the Iraqi people" (upe).

This reaction directly situates the memoir within the dominant media discourse and grants it a substantial influence on the WOT frame. Hamoudi's technique to

unveil the framing processes of the media, however, reaches even further into the logic of public discourse theory. Based on the knowledge the readers gain on mediated stereotypes, many of them start questioning the larger trajectories of knowledge creation and distribution. As the reviews demonstrate, many readers are not uninformed about the situation in Iraq. "I feel like I've read 100s of news article [sic] and watched hours of news broadcasts on the war on Iraq, and after reading this memoir was amazed by what I didn't understand. I hadn't the faintest clue what life in Iraq, is, was, and could be," the reviewer recalls the knowledge gain derived from Hamoudi's memoir (upe). Another reader shares a similar experience: "While we can understand on the surface what's going on in Iraq by reading news accounts, we can't really get the sense, the feel, of what's going on deep inside the country. Reading this book will give you the inside view" (Hutcheson). Others point out that the book left them with "a new understanding and appreciation of the Iraqi people" (Littrell). The reviewer Carey concludes: "This book explains the current situation well, and it ranks as one of the best books I have read on this subject."

What combines all these testimonies on reframed images of the Iraqi is their focus on the aspect of learning in a very comprehensive sense. One of the review titles highlights this focus on cognitive knowledge gain in plain language: "A great way to understand what's really going on" (Hutcheson). Others point to the complexity of the situation in Iraq which Hamoudi is able to communicate in an intelligent and easy to read way (McBride). This complexity and his ability to convey it derive from his cultural and professional expert status. Knowledge and not publicity is what differentiates Hamoudi's narrative from the content of mainstream media coverage. A reviewer on *Ibookreviews* stresses the author's unique position in direct reference to the media: "Hamoudi offers an insight into the tragedy and transformation of Iraq that few others can provide with such intimacy and firsthand knowledge. Iraq isn't just a news story to Hamoudi. It is his life" (Hanania).

The sharing of complex knowledge in a well-structured format and not the simplified countering of stereotypes sets the basis for Hamoudi's success to reframe the Iraqi in the public eye. The binary oppositions he uses facilitate the cognititive processing on the part of the readers. Their realization that stereotypes are the result of lacking knowledge is a key finding of the reception analysis. Not only does this impact their thinking about the Other, it also changes the way in which they think about themselves – as individuals and as members of a national and global collective. The effect still is a binary but at the same time more complex image of Iraq and of the world. One reviewer summarizes the multi-layered impact of Hamoudi's memoir by stating that the relevance of the book exceeds "the situation in Iraq" and represents "a product of this transcultural, globalized world we live in" (upe).

As the comparison of the textual with the audience frames suggests, Hamoudi's efforts to reframe the public view of the Iraqi Arab/Muslim are largely successful. All the issue frames found in the textual analysis are reflected in the audience

statements, sometimes with differing salience. Whereas the cultural frame in the memoir itself is less visible than the law frame, the audience stresses the knowledge gain on culture more. This finding does not stand in opposition to the text analysis, since the law frame has been found to overlap with the issue frame of culture to a large extent. This is fostered by the fact that many reviewers use the term 'culture' as an umbrella concept for different issues. With respect to the remaining issue frames, the reception analysis displays that the audience proves less susceptible to the adoption of the economic issue frame. The opposite holds true for the media frame. This issue frame strongly resonates through the audience reactions. In contrast to this dominance of the media frame in the general audience, the journalistic readership mostly neglects this issue in its discussion of the book.

Table 5: Frame Resonance Matrix of Howling in Mesopotamia

Frame Level	Frame	Text (Production/ Medium)	Journalistic Audience (Reception)	General Audience (Reception)
Ideological	Orientalism	••	•	•
Political	Neo-Orientalism	•••	••	••
Issue Level	Law	•••	•••	••
	Culture	••	••	•••
	Media	•••	•	•••
	Economy	••	•	•

Legend: The number of dots marks the salience of the respective frame, as based on the close-reading analysis

With respect to the higher-level frames of Orientalism and Neo-Orientalism related to the political WOT, a striking finding emerges. Whereas Hamoudi does not use the vocabulary of *East* versus *West* as frequently as Ansary and Kaldas, he shows a decisive tendency to adopt the normative superiority of the imperial hegemon implied in Orientalism. Surprisingly, however, this normative view is not reflected in the audience. Rather, the readers welcome the didactic effect of the binary method because it seemingly facilitates the learning process on different Iraq-related issues. In total, the frames created by Hamoudi to some extent overlap with the ones created by Ansary and Kaldas. All of them create a cultural frame to give insights into the daily life and customs of Arabs and Muslims. This culture frame is missing from the mainstream media coverage. In direct comparison to other dominant media frames, Hamoudi is least susceptible to this framing influence. All of the issue frames he creates are largely missing from the public media discourse.