

# Instrumentalization of Chaos: Habit and Crisis Routine for Constructing (in)security in Iraq

## Kaosun Araçsallaştırılması: Irak'ta Güven(siz)liğin İnşasında Alışmışlık ve Kriz Rutini

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### Abstract

*This study argues that the relations between the various identity groups that constitute Iraq and the developments experienced in the country after independence constitute a 'crisis routine' and that 'habit through routines' provides ontological security. In this context, the study explains ontological security in Iraq through the basic threat perceptions of social groups and the habits they have developed. It is aimed to contribute to the literature by offering a different perspective for the ontological security studies of the phenomenon of habituation, which is a concept based on psychology and sociology and rarely used in international relations. In this sense, the concept will be used within the framework of deepening the concept of routine. The study reveals that the routinization of crisis in Iraq creates a form of stability that maintains the identity of existing social actors and depends on the continuation of the crisis. Large-scale crises in Iraq, events affecting different identity groups and developments that disrupt the routine and cause uncertainty will be explained with the concept of crisis routine. The levels of habituation created by the crisis routine order in society produce various results in different segments of society. Habituation within the scope of identity will be exemplified by the ontological security perception of the Shiites, one of the country's components. These dangerous habits also prevent the adoption of a common Iraqi identity.*

**Key Words:** Ontological security, crisis routines, habituation through routines, Iraq, Shiite identity.

### Öz

*Bu çalışma, Irak'ı oluşturan çeşitli kimlik grupları arasındaki ilişkilerin ve ülkede bağımsızlık sonrası süreçte yaşanan gelişmelerin bir 'kriz rutini' oluşturduğunu ve 'rutinler aracılığıyla alışkanlığın' ontolojik güvenlik sağladığını savunmaktadır. Bu bağlamda çalışma, Irak'taki ontolojik güvenliği, toplumsal grupların temel tehdit algıları ve geliştirdikleri alışkanlıklar aracılığıyla açıklamaktadır. Uluslararası ilişkilerde nadir kullanılan, psikoloji ve sosyoloji temelli bir kavram olan alışmışlık olgusunun ontolojik güvenlik çalışmaları için de farklı bir bakış açısı sunarak literatüre katkı sunması amaçlanmaktadır. Bu anlamda kavram rutin kavramının derinleştirilmesi çerçevesinde kullanılacaktır. Çalışma, Irak'taki krizin rutinleşmesinin, mevcut toplumsal aktörlerin kimliğini koruyarak varlığını sürdürdüğü ve krizin devamına bağlı olan bir istikrar biçimi yarattığını ortaya koymaktadır. Irak'taki büyük ölçekli krizler, farklı kimlik gruplarını etkileyen olaylar ve rutini bozan ve belirsizliğe neden olan gelişmeler, kriz rutini kavramıyla açıklanacaktır. Kriz rutini düzeninin toplumda oluşturduğu*

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*alışmışlık düzeyleri toplumun farklı kesimlerinde çeşitli sonuçlar üretmektedir. Kimlik kapsamındaki alışmışlık ise ülke bileşenlerinden biri olan Şii kesimin ontolojik güvenlik algıları ile örneklendirilecektir. Bu tehlikeli alışkanlıklar aynı zamanda ortak bir Irak kimliğinin benimsenmesini de engellemektedir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *EOntolojik güvenlik, kriz rutini, rutinler üzerinden alışmışlık, Irak, Şii kimlik.*

## Introduction

For ontological theory, the actors' relationships with other actors they code as the 'other' create a routine. This might be a conflict or cooperative routine. This study argues that there is a crisis routine in Iraq, and argues that within this crisis routine, groups feel safe and fear/anxiety about losing their current state.

Although crises mean chaos and confusion, the continuity of these can also lead to a certain and predictable situation. In other words, individuals' ability to show the will to protect the status quo may provide predictability. This may be revealed when establishing and maintaining a routine, even when crises or uncertainties occur in different areas. Certain crises creating physical insecurity can also lead to ontological anxiety. Giddens defines chaos as 'the loss of the sense of reality of persons and objects.' The shared sense of reality is as fragile as it is strong.<sup>1</sup>

In international relations, chaos is generally seen as a state of uncertainty. However, it can also be described as a consistent form of disorder. In this sense, it can be expressed as 'order in disorder'. Rix defines ontological security as the process of chaos and radical uncertainty. He asserts that both factors rely on a framework that renders the inherent chaos of existence comprehensible and manageable.<sup>2</sup>

Iraq's political and social structure provides a favorable atmosphere for examining ontological insecurity from the perspective of different groups. Although various countries have been examined as case studies in the theoretical literature,<sup>3</sup> it is striking that the number of studies on Iraq is

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- 1 Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* UK: Polity Press, 1991, p. 53.
- 2 Meredydd Rix *Putting the Ontological Back into Ontological Security* Canova: Graduate Institute Publications, 2021, <https://books.openedition.org/iheid/8227#anchor-fulltext>; Jennifer Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma", *European Journal of International Relations* XII/3, 2006b, pp. 341-370.
- 3 Maysam Behraves, "State Revisionism and Ontological (in)security in International Politics: The Complicated Case of Iran and its Nuclear Behavior", *Journal of International Relations and Development* XXI/4, 2018, pp. 836-857; Adrian Pop and Ioan-David Onel, "(De)securitization and Ontological Security: The case of the US Withdrawal from Afghanistan", *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* XVI/1, 2023, pp. 84-105; Paul James Gregor Crawford, "Ontological Security and Migration: Beyond Securitisation and Identity Politics" PhD thesis, University of Queensland, 2020; Christopher S. Browning, "Geostrategies, Geopolitics and Ontological Security in the Eastern Neighbourhood: The European Union and the 'New Cold War'" *Political Geography* 62, 2018, pp. 106-115; Tal Dingott Alkopher, "Socio-psychological Reactions in the EU to Immigration: From Regaining Ontological Security to Desecuritisation", *European Security* XXVII/3, 2019, pp. 314-335.

quite low.<sup>4</sup> Filling this gap in theory-case interaction and contributing a new concept to the ontological security literature reveals the original value of the study.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, examining the ontological security perception of the Shiite society, an original contribution is presented in the light of interviews with various figures from the region. And the interviews were conducted in accordance with the ethics committee statement and audio recordings were made with the consent of the participants. Online interviews were recorded in writing. A total of 25 interviews were conducted, 25% of whom agreed to disclose their names. 75% provided their opinions on the condition that their names would not be disclosed. Participants were from business circles such as engineers, teachers, academics, and journalists. In addition, 68% male and 32% female participants were interviewed. Records were obtained from participants in Iraq via WhatsApp and correspondence, and face-to-face interviews were conducted in Ankara at different times during a one-year period from July 2023 to July 2024. Content analysis method was used in the analysis of the data obtained.

The first chapter of the study, which is divided into three parts, discusses the concept of routine and ontological security. The second part examines the crisis, chaos and habit and the third and fourth chapters discuss the ontological (in)security of Shiite identity and main narratives and routines of Shiite society.

## Concepts of Routine and Ontological Security

Before detailing the concepts of identity and self, and in this context routine and ontological security let us remember the constructivist theory which devotes extensive space to identity formation and the relation between identity

4 For Iraqi studies on securitization and identity see. Özlem Kayhan Pusane and Ash Ilgit, "Ontological Insecurity, Anxiety, and Hubris: An Affective Account of Turkey-KRG Relations", *International Relations*, XIX/73, 2022, DOI: 10.33458/uidergisi.1085441; Soner Akın, Ontological Insecurity and Regionalism in the Middle East, *IKSAD*, 2022; Ayman Triki, The Bush Administration's Invasion of Iraq: A Case of Ontological Insecurity?, *E-International Relations*, 2021, <https://www.e-ir.info/2021/09/07/the-bush-administrations-invasion-of-iraq-a-case-of-ontological-insecurity/>; Eric Van Rythoven, "The perils of realist advocacy and the promise of securitization theory: Revisiting the tragedy of the Iraq War debate", *European Journal of International Relations*, 2015, XXII/3, pp. 487-511. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066115598635>.

5 See more detail for ontological security literature. Meredydd Rix *Putting the Ontological Back into Ontological Security* Canova: Graduate Institute Publications, 2021, <https://books.openedition.org/iheid/8227#anchor-fulltext>; Chris Rosedale, "Enclosing Critique: The Limits of Ontological Security", *International Political Sociology* IX/4 2015, pp. 369-386; Alanna Krolikowski, "State Personhood in Ontological Security Theories of International Relations and Chinese Nationalism: a Sceptical View", *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* II/1, 2008, pp. 109-133; Ayşe Zarakol, "States and Ontological Security: A Historical Rethinking", *Cooperation and Conflict* LII/1, 2017, pp. 48-68; ML deRaismes Combes, "Encountering the Stranger: Ontological Security and the Boston Marathon Bombing" *Cooperation and Conflict* LII/1, 2017, pp. 126-143; Alanna Krolikowski, "State Personhood in Ontological Security Theories of International Relations and Chinese Nationalism: a sceptical view", *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* II/1, 2008, pp. 109-133.

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and politics. The relationship between constructivism and identity is primarily based on the work of Nicholas Onuf<sup>6</sup> and Alexander Wendt.<sup>7</sup> Constructivist theory, which became popular especially with Alexander Wendt, paved the way for the identity-foreign policy relationship to be established on a more theoretical basis. Wendt argues that identities and international social structures are constructed through mutual interactions and intersubjective meanings, and that these affect the interests and foreign policies of states. Constructivism, unlike mainstream theories that adopt a one-sided linear perspective, approaches identity from a reflexive perspective and focuses on the realities produced by social structure and intersubjective interactions. Rather than identity being a fixed and given phenomenon, it looks at it in the context of relations and interactions within the structure and agent.<sup>8</sup> The identity of states also affects the normative structures between states, namely regimes and security communities (i.e. environmental identity/international structure).<sup>9</sup> According to Campbell<sup>10</sup> who is considered both a post-structuralist and a critical constructivist, foreign policy is a security software and the determining factor in the construction of foreign policy is the identities of states. Identity is already a concept related to difference and requires the other. However, this identity is not given and is constructed in a discursive way within an intersubjective process in the post-modern approach.<sup>11</sup>

Ontological theory also focus on identity construction, they are predominantly concerned with the acquisition of identity in the process of socialization rather than with roles and status positions. However, "Individual and collective identities are created not simply in the difference between self and other but in those moments of ambiguity where one is other to oneself, and in recognition of the other as like"<sup>12</sup>. For Kinnvall, to assure the self of how

- 6 Nicholas Onuf, "Constructivism: A User's Manual," International Relations in a Constructed World, Vendulka Kubalkova, Nicholas Onuf and Paul Kowert (ed.), New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1998 pp. 58-78; Nicholas Onuf, World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations, London: Routledge, 2013.
- 7 Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is what States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics," International Organization, XLVI/2. Spring 1992, pp. 391-425; Alexander Wendt, "Constructing International Politics," International Security, XX/1 Summer 1995, pp. 71-81; Alexander Wendt, "The Agent-Structure Problem in International Relations Theory," International Organization, XLI/3 Summer 1987, pp. 335-370.
- 8 Bill McSweeney, *Security, Identity and Interests: A Sociology of International Relations*, Cambridge: Cambridge Uni. Press.1999, p.126; Bill McSweeney, "Identity and Security: Buzan and the Copenhagen School," Review of International Studies XXII/1 1996, pp. 81-93.
- 9 Ronald L. Jepperson, Alexander Wendt and Peter J. Katzenstein, "Norms, Identity, and Culture in National Security," Peter J. Katzenstein ed. The Culture of National Security, New York: Columbia University Press. 1997, pp. 33-78; Christian Reus-Smit, "Constructivism" Scott Burchill and Andrew Linklater et. al ed. Theories of International Relations, Third edition, New York: Palgrave, 2005, pp. 188-212.
- 10 David Campbell, *Writing security: United States foreign policy and the politics of identity*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1988.
- 11 Also see Thomas Diez, "Postmodern approaches," Siegfried Schieder and Manuela Spindler, ed., Theories of international relations, New York, NY.: Routledge, 2014, pp. 287-303.
- 12 Catarina Kinnvall, "Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the

it is essentially different from the other, the other needs to be systematically debased, because without such debasement of the other, “whom I reject and with whom I identify, I lose my boundaries, I no longer have a container, the memory of experiences when I had been abandoned overwhelm me, I lose my composure. I feel “lost,” “indistinct,” “hazy.”<sup>13</sup>

In this context, routines provide the individual with the capacity to be an agent, that is, to take action. The actor acquiring a predictable environment and a certain identity with a certain sequence of actions also acquires and develops the feature of being an agent within this continuity. As Mitzen emphasizes, routines also play a role in strengthening the actor’s ability to perform this action. Routines play a role as one of the basic principles of ontological security because they provide the individual with the premise of being an agent.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, a disruption in routines reduces the actor’s capacity to take action.<sup>15</sup> Croft and Williams provide an example of routines and irrational attitudes through a person who maintained a relationship despite being emotionally damaged. They associate the situation of not being able to distance oneself due to attachment, despite the relationship being dysfunctional and exhausting, with Mitzen’s irrational conflictual relationships of states. They explain this attachment by transforming it from individuals to states. They also embody the relationship and effect of routine on identity.<sup>16</sup>

The characteristic of determinacy strengthening the actor’s commitment to routines and reinforcement of his/her identity is effective in attaching to routines.<sup>17</sup> The repetition of actions makes the actor accept who s/he is and strengthens the actor’s sense of self.<sup>18</sup> Social codes and social identity characteristics are among the values that individuals adopt self-reflexively, forming the basis for a consistent sense of identity and self. Therefore, social routines are also based on these values and identity principles.

The capacity to manage routines is also crucial in terms of the actor’s agency. Adherence to routines becomes effective in providing continuity

Search for Ontological Security”, *Political Psychology* XXV/5, 2004, p. 753.

- 13 Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to ourselves*. New York: Columbia University Press. 1991, p. 187.
- 14 For more detail on routine in ontological security see. Catarina Kinnvall, and Jennifer Mitzen, “An Introduction to the Special Issue: Ontological Securities in World Politics”, *Cooperation and Conflict* LII/1, 2016, pp. 3-11; Nicolai Gelwitzki and Charlie W. Price, Liquid Fear, Agency and the (Un)conscious in Securitisation Processes: The Case of the UK’s Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic, *Millennium*, LIII/1, 2024, pp. 31-58; Brent J. Steele, “Welcome Home! Routines, ontological insecurity and the politics of US military reunion videos”, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 2019 XXXII/3, pp. 322-343.
- 15 Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics...”, p. 349.
- 16 Stuart Croft and Nick Vaughan-William, “Fit for Purpose? Fitting Ontological Security Studies ‘into’ the Discipline of International Relations: Towards a Vernacular Turn”, *Cooperation and Conflict*, LII/1 2017, p. 17.
- 17 Tayyar Ari and Mehmet Ali Ak, “Ontological Security Theory and the Security of Self,” in Tayyar Ari (ed.) *Critical Theories in International Relations*, 1st Edition, London, New York: Lexington, 2023, p. 176-77.
- 18 Nina C. Krikhel-choi, *Rethinking Ontological Security Theory*, Stockholm University, 2021, p. 12.

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and maintaining a consistent sense of identity. In other words, managing routines within the context of developments and revising them by making various changes when necessary may be essential to preserve ontological security. Giddens explains this as gaining new experiences that do not exclude routines. The actor can develop the routines he/she has.<sup>19</sup> Ontological security is therefore related to the concern about whether these routines will continue.<sup>20</sup> Routines therefore define the daily life of agents (individuals, states...). Routines can be considered both rigid and fragile coping mechanisms, because they generate trust and stem from the agent's ideas about his/her own identity.<sup>21</sup> The maintenance of habits and routines is a very important bulwark against threatening anxieties.<sup>22</sup> Ontological insecurity occurs when developments undermine existing self-identities and social relations. This can happen through traumatic events and the disruption of routines that leads to a break with what is knowable, consistent, and understandable to the self.<sup>23</sup>

Habits and routines also provide an ontological security strategy in another way, by fixing individual and collective identities and providing a framework of action that counters basic concerns about life.<sup>24</sup> According to Mitzen "Routines help us to bring our threat environment under cognitive control. Routines therefore solve the chaos problem, allowing the actor to maintain a sense of self."<sup>25</sup>

According to Rumelili and Adisözmez<sup>26</sup> ontological security is the feeling of trust that people have regarding "the continuity of the social and physical environments to which they are mutually connected with their own self-identities." This trust enables people to act within a given framework and makes their agency possible. Routines that provide biographical continuity to the actor and make it feel ontologically safe do not always mean the continuation of a positive structure. What is called routine may not only have a positive atmosphere, especially in relations with 'others.' Sometimes, a relationship based on conflict or disagreement is also a routine. What is important here is that there is continuity and that this routine has a determining effect on the identity definition and self-perception of the parties. "Because even dangerous routines provide ontological security, rational security-seekers could become

19 Giddens, "Modernity and Self-Identity...", p. 41.

20 Brent J. Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-identity and the IR State*, New York, London: Routledge, 2008, p. 3.

21 Brent J. Steele, "Ontological Security and the Power of Self-identity: British Neutrality and the American Civil War", *Review of International Studies* XXXI/3, 2005, p. 526.

22 Giddens, "Modernity and Self-Identity...", p. 39.

23 Elke Krahmann, "The Market for Ontological Security", *European Security*, XXVII/3 2018, p. 358; Christine Agius, "Drawing the Discourses of Ontological Security: Immigration and Identity in the Danish and Swedish Cartoon Crises", *Cooperation and Conflict*, 2016, LII/1, p. 117.

24 Giddens, "Modernity and Self-Identity...", p. 98.

25 Jennifer Mitzen, "Anchoring Europe's Civilizing Identity: Habits, Capabilities, and Ontological Security", *Journal of European Public Policy*, III/2, 2006a, p. 273.

26 Bahar Rumelili and Umut Can Adisözmez, "Uluslararası İlişkilerde Kimlik-Güvenlik İlişkisine Dair Yeni bir Paradigma: Ontolojik Güvenlik Teorisi", *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, XXVII/66, 2020, p. 25.



attached to conflict.”<sup>27</sup> Ontological security can sometimes find the routine that this insecurity feeds positive for ontological security. According to Mitzen, the routine produced through it, even if there is uncertainty in the end, can be necessary for ontological security. “Because routines that perpetuate physical insecurity can provide ontological security, states can become attached to physically dangerous relationships and be unable, or unwilling, to learn their way out.”<sup>28</sup>

In this sense, it is possible to talk about the concepts of cooperation routine or conflict routine.<sup>29</sup> Mitzen explains this through ‘attachment to conflict.’ States may sometimes experience security dilemmas. In other words, an inverse relationship may arise between ontological security and physical security. In such cases, continuation of the conflict may be preferred to preserve ontological security. This can be described as conflict routine or attachment to conflict.<sup>30</sup> Another influential factor in maintaining this situation is that the conflict lets the parties know who they are. Conflict provides an ontological basis for defining identity.<sup>31</sup> Existing with its opposite, that is, using white to define black, defining insecurity to explain security, is also valid for actors. Current conflicts provide actors with an environment to exist in opposition to the other, that is, to protect their self, which leads to attachment to conflicts or the conflictual order because the resolution of the conflict or crisis affects the self-narratives, identity, routines, and habits that the actors acquire through them.<sup>32</sup>

Situations in which actors prefer conflict to cooperation due to the predictability of the current situation are called conflict routines. The factor that causes the conflict routine is that the conflict situation creates relative certainty rather than uncertainty. Conflict, as a situation within the routine, is a preferred or continued process because it provides predictability.

This view is also valid for individuals and social groups, which are other units of analysis of ontological security. Physical security may be compromised

27 Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics...,” p. 341.

28 Mitzen, p. 354.

29 For more crisis and routine studies see. Julien Jeandesboz, and Poly Pallister-Wilkins, *Crisis, Routine, Consolidation: The Politics of the Mediterranean Migration Crisis*. Mediterranean Politics, 2016, XXI/2, pp. 316–320. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2016.1145825>; Brent J. Steele, “Order and justice in ontological security studies” *Cooperation and Conflict*, 2024, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/00108367241288080>; Amir Lupovici, “Ontological security, cyber technology, and states’ responses”, *European Journal of International Relations*, 2023, XXIX/1, pp. 153-178. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13540661221130958>; Minseon Ku and Brien Finch, “Routines die hard: Ontological security and audience agency in securitization” *Review of International Studies* Published online 2024, pp. 1-26. doi:10.1017/S0260210524000834.

30 Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics...,” pp. 342-343.

31 Mitzen, p. 361.

32 Bahar Rumelili, *Conflict Resolution and Ontological Security*, London: Routledge, 2015, p. 2; Jelena Subotic, “Narrative, Ontological Security, and Foreign Policy Change”, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 2015, pp. 1-18; Catarina Kinnvall et al. “Introduction to 2018 Special Issue of European Security: “Ontological (in)security in the European Union”, *European Security*, XXVII/3 2018, pp. 249-265. Alexandra Homolar and Ronny Scholz “The Power of Trump-speak: Populist Crisis Narratives and Ontological Security”, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, XXXII/3, 2019, pp. 344-364.

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to ensure ontological security. In this case, processes may occur where the parties do not cooperate and prefer conflict. If they match their identities with conflict equations, an area of ontological security is also created. Ontological security would become a strategy for institutionalizing and managing social relations.<sup>33</sup>

As in the conflict routine, a crisis routine can be mentioned about the developments in any state. It is also possible that disagreements between segments of society will become routine. The conflict routine states pursue in the international arena can also manifest itself in conflicts between various groups within the country.

Regarding the state, it can be said that those who want the current situation to continue are decision-makers, while in social groups, those who strengthen identity structures are leaders and senior individuals.<sup>34</sup> This may lead to a commitment to this dangerous process for Mitzen, as mentioned above because routines that maintain physical insecurity can provide ontological security. In addition to being called commitment, this situation can also be explained within the scope of habituation.

As discussed,<sup>35</sup> since routinized relationships keep identities in balance, actors are attached to the self-concept created by routines, even if their content is dangerous and creates physical insecurity.<sup>36</sup>

When the Iraq example is examined, it can be claimed that the Sunni, Shiite, Kurdish, and Turkmen segments that make up the Iraqi society cling to the dangerous routine that occurs in the state of domestic instability and chaos. And it is claimed that even if physical insecurities are experienced in this environment, they are connected to a self where their routines are supported regarding ontological security.

It is possible to explain the situation by describing it as a 'cognitive cocoon,' as Giddens stated. Giddens states that the 'protective cocoon' is established through a relationship of trust. He also mentions that the ontologically insecure individual may lack a coherent sense of biographical continuity.<sup>37</sup> In

33 Jeff Huysmans, "Security! What Do You Mean? From Concept to Thick Signifier", *European Journal of International Relations* IV/2, 1998, p. 242.

34 For more security of identity studies see. Amir Lupovici, "Ontological Dissonance, Clashing Identities, and Israel's Unilateral Steps Towards the Palestinians", *Review of International Studies* 38, 2012, pp. 809–833; Christopher S. Browning and Pertti Joenniemi, "Ontological Security, Self-Articulation and the Securitization of Identity" *Cooperation and Conflict*, 2016, 1-17; Carmina Yu Untalan, "Decentering the Self, Seeing Like the Other: Toward a Postcolonial Approach to Ontological Security". *International Political Sociology*, 2019, pp. 1-17; Stuart Croft, "Constructing Ontological Insecurity: The Insecuritization of Britain's Muslims", *Contemporary Security Policy* XXXIII/2, 2012, pp. 219-235; Ty Solomon, "I wasn't Angry, Because I couldn't Believe it was Happening: Affect and Discourse in Responses to 9/11", *Review of International Studies* XXXVIII/4, 2012, pp. 907-928;

35 According to Mitzen's example, a woman who was subjected to violence by her husband but refused to leave him. The safe space provided by the identity of 'wife' and the anxiety that would arise from breaking away from it led the woman to this attitude. See more: Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics...", p. 347.

36 Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics...", p. 347.

37 Giddens, "Modernity and Self-Identity...", p. 53.



the case of Iraq, another factor why individuals with different identities feel ontologically safe is that the groups have biographical continuity. And it is possible to talk about the ontological security of these groups due to the continuity of the biographical narrative and a close adherence to it, that is, 'getting used to routines.'

Disagreements between groups with different narratives and identity codes trigger the routine of conflict between the parties while at the same time feeding them. In other words, while some basic motives make a Shiite a Shiite, in addition to these, being a Shiite can also be explained by not being a Sunni. Therefore, it can be argued that the crises experienced in modern Iraqi history created a sense of habituation in social groups. This explains the parties' perspective on the current order and how they approach the system to ensure their ontological security.

Crises can also be used as a descriptive phenomenon in societies with instability, war or conflict. However, the order brought by crisis is more important. The reactions of society or actors can produce results such as instrumentalizing crisis or using it as an opportunity. This means that crisis is routinized or creates a space within the routine. It is observed that Iraq's key actors also ensure the continuity of the chaotic environment or crisis routine. Or, in certain periods, some struggles of symbolic importance come to the fore.

Besides the role of tribes in the functioning of daily life or commercial life during periods of intense Shia-Sunni conflicts,<sup>38</sup> social groups with a strong attachment to their identities within themselves have been using the atmosphere of crisis in the country to reinforce their security and make political and financial gains.

There are some factors that ensure the continuity of the existing routine in Iraq. It can be stated that the routinization of the crisis is also due to the existence of these factors. These factors include armed conflicts in various periods, the various consequences of displacement due to the destruction caused by DAESH after 2014,<sup>39</sup> the existing ethnic-sectarian structure and the deepening of the divide between various groups.<sup>40</sup> In this situation, Iraq's unstable structure and various crises within the country are becoming routine. The armed and political dimension of sectarian conflicts has affected the perceptions of Iraq's constituents towards each other and created a permanent

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38 The following words of a businesswoman who was in the region for investment purposes during the period in question make the situation more understandable: "In order to ensure our security during the Shia-Sunni conflicts, we had to establish material relations with the tribes of the sect that was active in the region. The tribes told us they could protect us from conflicts if we supported them financially. As a businesswoman and a country manager, I am a member of two tribes. Especially between 2007 and 2014, if you knew which tribe you were going to, you had no problems with security or payment." (Name withheld for security and ethical sensitivity, 30/09/2023, Ankara).

39 Ali Ayad Thamer, "Iraq's Displacement Crisis", *Carnegie Endowment*, 2024, <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/2024/10/iraqs-displacement-crisis?lang=en>

40 International Crisis Group, "Iraq: Evading the Gathering Storm", 2019, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iraq/070-iraq-evading-gathering-storm>.

crisis situation, especially in the political system. The routinizing elements of this crisis have been political exclusion, regional rivalries and a cycle of instability.<sup>41</sup> Iraqi actors' responses to these crises have been to place greater emphasis on local militias for security, normalization of emergency measures, and distrust of official state institutions. This suggests that actors have adapted to the routinization of crises by reacting with habitualism.<sup>42</sup> There is also a consequence of the increasing influence of social actors on society. The fact that instability and crisis routinization are met with a habitual reaction plays an important role in the continuation of a system in which the influence of local leaders and tribal leaders is more dominant and is at the forefront in terms of administration and security.<sup>43</sup>

Based on this, the following categorization emerges when an effect-response analysis is made:

**Table 1.** Crisis and Habitual Practices in Iraq.<sup>44</sup>

Social actors	Crisis Contexts	Developed Habit
State security forces	Security-insecurity	Trust in extraordinary powers
Militias/Shia groups	Security	Routine mobilization for security
Private military companies	Security	Strong legal control
Protesters	Stability/Instability	Protest demonstrations
Local leaders	Justice system/security/politics	Strong authority
Political elites-parties	Politics-sectarian dispersion	Sense of exclusion, perception of ontological insecurity in different ethnic and sectarian groups
People	Security, stability, justice	Distrust in the state and governance

- 41 Chantal Berman and Killian Clarke "Patterns of Mobilization and Repression in Iraq's Tishreen Uprising", *Pomeps*, <https://pomeps.org/patterns-of-mobilization-and-repression-in-iraqs-tishreen-uprising>; Brigitte Rohwerder, *Contemporary conflict analysis of Iraq* (Rapid Literature Review). Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham, 2014.
- 42 Mae Anna Chokr, Ali Al-Ahmad and Abbas Aroua, *Social Cohesion in Iraq: Leveraging Religious, Political, and Tribal Authorities for Conflict Transformation*, Cordoba Peace Institute (CPI), 2024; Rohwerder, *Contemporary conflict analysis...*
- 43 Chokr and Aroua, *Social Cohesion in Iraq*; Rohwerder, *Contemporary Conflict Analysis...*
- 44 Sultan Abdullah Albokashy, Hasani Mohd Ali and Shahrul Mizan Bin Ismail, Probing the Private Actors' Practices and Its Impact on Iraqi Sovereignty from an International Law Lens after the US Invasion in 2003, *Migration Letters*, XX/7, 791–811. <https://doi.org/10.59670/ml.v20iS7.4437>; Mae Anna Chokr, Ali Al-Ahmad and Abbas Aroua, *Social Cohesion in Iraq* Rohwerder, *Contemporary Conflict Analysis...*

At this point, the role and the ontological (in)security of the Shiites, who have an influential position in the country and administration after 2003, in this atmosphere will be analyzed in the next chapter.

### **Crisis, Chaos and Habit: Analytical and conceptual focus**

The perception of ontological (in)security in Iraq relates to the anxiety of identity groups as they have seized political authority, increased their dominance, and discriminated against others. As seen in the basic security perception of the Shiite society, other groups are also pursuing activities to ensure they are represented and get their rights and not marginalized. In this context, the concepts of crisis and habit help explain the ontological security uncertainty in the country.

Events that disrupt routines and threaten ontological security can be called crisis. Its relationship with ontological security can also be considered within the scope of the concern about disrupting order and drifting into chaos. However, routines help us bring our threat environment under cognitive control. Routines therefore solve the problem of chaos and enable the actor to maintain a sense of self.<sup>45</sup> While disruption of routine and uncertainty about achieving balance can cause anxiety, continuity in crisis can also create anxiety. In crisis, the individual has concerns about whether his existence will continue. Disorder and instability threaten ontological security that prioritizes routine. However, a system in which crisis becomes routine can also occur.

The place of anxiety in ontological security is hidden in the uncertainty about being secure in terms of self or existence. Concern, as an internal state, covers a general period. It also differs from fear in that it is not directed at anything specific.<sup>46</sup> The place of anxiety in ontological security is hidden in the uncertainty about being secure in terms of self or existence. Anxiety, as an internal state, covers a general period. It also differs from fear in that it is not directed at anything specific.<sup>47</sup> For this reason, the theory of ontological security can, in a sense, be called the theory of anxiety.<sup>48</sup>

As Giddens mentions, there may also be a consciousness of chaos beneath the routines.<sup>49</sup> In this case, Mitzen talks about individuals' capacity to keep uncertainty under control. In other words, actors must be capable of

45 Mitzen, "Anchoring Europe's Civilizing Identity..." p. 273.

46 Giddens, "Modernity and Self-Identity..." p. 43-44; "The existentialist conceptions consider anxiety as an integral part of the human condition, and distinguish it from fear, which is projected externally toward specific threats and concrete objects." Bahar Rumelili, "Integrating Anxiety into International Relations Theory: Hobbes, Existentialism, and Ontological Security" *International Theory* 12, 2020, pp. 258.

47 Fear is related to a real object, while anxiety may not be a real object. In the case of fear, the person can confront the object and physically struggle with it. This is not possible in anxiety. While anxiety produces helplessness, you do not have to surrender to fear. Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000, p. 36.

48 Catarina Kinnvall, and Jennifer Mitzen. "Anxiety, Fear, and Ontological Security in World Politics: Thinking with and Beyond Giddens," *International Theory*, 12, 2020, pp. 241-42.

49 *Ibid.*

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predictably revising their environments to preserve their agency.<sup>50</sup> However, when evaluated within the scope of routine, we can talk about crisis and conflict routines. The large-scale crises in Iraq, events affecting different identity groups, and developments that disrupt routine and cause uncertainty can also be used to explain the conceptualization of crisis routine.

Iraq went through exactly this process, especially after 2003. What happened in the past also affects the present. It can be said that factors such as political, economic, and social instability that occurred after the US occupation, security problems, and physical insecurity that increased with the increase in terrorist violence created a crisis routine in the country. Successive crises may cause anxiety in social segments. It can be argued that a routine is preserved in terms of preserving the order created by this environment or ensuring ontological security in the face of physical insecurity. In this sense, a two-dimensional crisis routine emerges.

An important issue at this point is the narratives and identity characteristics that society adheres to in this crisis environment. The questions of how the biographical narratives are used, how the counter-narratives are formed, how these processes are managed, and how ontological security is maintained in this atmosphere are important.

In Iraq, the impact of conflict dynamics on ontological security is important. Kinnvall argues that the construction of ontological identity occurs when the different worlds that individuals encounter due to globalization cause them to question the existing routine. Therefore, because they see differences as a threat, nationalist discourses and ontological identity construction are formed.<sup>51</sup> It can be stated that the anxiety of different segments of Iraqi society is shaped around the aim of maintaining their own existence within the existing instability based on the narratives they create and their loyalty to identity. As mentioned in the previous section, the concern of the Shiite society in the country is the re-establishment of a government based on Sunni dominance as before. To prevent this, it is desired to continue the routine of protecting the system based on Shiite dominance. This can be considered as a basis for explaining the domestic policy of the current administration.

Regarding the state, decision-making mechanisms stand out as the unit that wants to preserve this continuity. Regarding social groups, it can be said that leaders and senior members play a role in strengthening their identity structures. As a result, Mitzen's words show a commitment to dangerous routines. Units that can provide and maintain a consistent identity within themselves can also manage the current conflict and crisis environment. This allows us to follow the path of managing routines or using the existing system to our advantage, which we explain with the concept of habit.

Looking at the example of Iraq, as this study claims, some crises or cha-

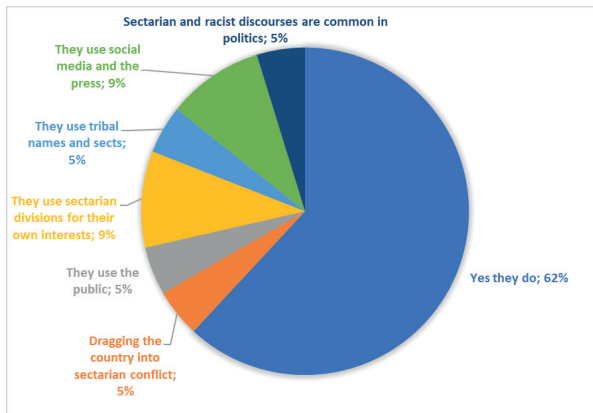
50 Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics...", p. 346.

51 Kinnvall, "Globalization and Religious Nationalism". p. 742.

os atmosphere in the country provides predictability. For instance, the political wing of the Shiite community has made moves to capitalize on this chaotic situation to build a base of power in Iraq. Parties such as the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq and the Dawa party have tried to gain support by using social concerns, threat perceptions, and sectarianism. Their rhetoric focused on preventing the emergence of a new Sunni dominance.<sup>52</sup> Another example is in 2004 when the election campaigns of the Shiite list focused on protecting the Shiite sect and preventing the Baath Party from returning to power.<sup>53</sup>

However, in the interviews, all participants stated that they think that politicians take advantage of the system based on sectarian discrimination. The answers to the question “Do you think politicians benefit from the system, which tools do you think they use?” are visualized in the table below.

**Graphic 1.** The answers to the question “Do you think politicians benefit from the system, which tools do you think they use?”



Other answers to the question are as follows:

“Ethnic-sectarian problems are purely political. It is a political problem, not a social one. To a large extent, a state of conflict or disagreement is being portrayed to a greater extent than it actually exists, largely due to the manipulation of political parties and high-level groups. The media is one of the most important tools in this regard. Normally there is no problem between ethnic and sectarian groups to the extent that it is portrayed in the media or expressed on a political basis. Politics is the factor that pushes relations between sects to the level of conflict. Political parties benefit from the discriminatory, conflictual system; they benefit from this order, and the existence of ethnic problems suits them. For this reason, they are using trig-

<sup>52</sup> Harith Hasan Al-Qarawee, الأزمات الطائفية في العراق: إرث من الإقصاء (al'azmat altaayifat fi aleiraqi: 'iirth min al'iqlsa'), 23/04/2014, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2014/04/iraqs-sectarian-crisis-a-legacy-of-exclusion?lang=ar&center=middle-east>.

<sup>53</sup> “شعارات انتخابات العراق منذ 2004.. ماذا تغير؟” (shiearat aintikhabat aleiraq mundh 2004.. madha taghayru?) 05/04/2004, <https://www.alarabiya.net/arab-and-world/iraq/2018/04/05/شعارات-انتخابات-العراق-منذ-2004-ماذا-تغير>

gering methods to address this atmosphere. They turn existing differences into problems, and they want to perpetuate the systematics based on separation.”<sup>54</sup>

“There are those who declare the Shiites as infidels in areas inhabited entirely by Sunnis, and there are those who insult the Sunnis in areas inhabited entirely by Shiites.”<sup>55</sup>

Not only Shia-Sunni marginalization but also slogans and discourses aimed at triggering Kurdish-Turkmen antagonism are examples of the impact of politicians on community relations.

The slogan “Kirkuk is the Jerusalem of the Kurds” was used to provoke between 2005-2010 but no longer and doesn’t spread.<sup>56</sup> Key discourses focus on protecting group identity, defending against external threats, and securing community rights.<sup>57</sup>

“Politicians, tribal leaders, and societal figures may exploit ethnic-sectarian divisions to consolidate power and mobilize support. They may use divisive narratives and discourses to manipulate public opinion and advance their agendas, exacerbating tensions and undermining national unity.”<sup>58</sup>

It can be said that politicians’ use of sectarian divisions as a trigger has led to a crisis routine. Thus, the existing routine of disorder also creates an atmosphere in which different groups ensure their ontological security. Therefore, groups feel safe within themselves and there is a fear of losing this current state. This dangerous habit also prevents the formation or adoption of an Iraqi identity. This current structure can be called ‘habituation through routines’ in Iraq. Routines maintain identity, the values that make the actor who s/he is. Therefore, actors become attached to these routines. To explain all of this with a formulation, if some coding needs to be done, we can refer to the crisis routine as r, the threat perception of groups as t, identity definitions or identity formations as i1 and finally habitualization as h. The crisis routine in Iraq affects the identification and threat perceptions of social groups in the country and at the same time provides predictability, resulting in ‘r+t+i=h’. The formula ‘h≠i2’ emerges because the atmosphere of habit and feeling safe within groups prevents the adoption of the Iraqi identity (i2). The political system also plays a role as a dependent variable.

In the study it is argued that Shiite-Sunni conflicts create a habit within the scope of identity in both groups, leading to a more profound attachment to identity. Particularly, the sectarian conflicts and the terrorist attacks are still fresh in the social memory. Many people from different sects and identities were killed, and each blamed the other for the cause, which affected the perspective of the parties toward each other.

54 Interview with Watheq Al-Sadoon, 25/07/2023, Ankara.

55 Interview with Reshad Salihi, 16/09/2023, Ankara.

56 Interview with Selçuk Bacalan, 15/02/2024, Ankara.

57 Interview with Mehdi Sadoon, 13/08/2024, online.

58 Interview with Dileen Sardar, 28/02/2024, online.



At the same time, the trauma caused by the pre-2003 period in terms of Shiite identity is a triggering factor in terms of preserving the conditions of today's Iraq and the continuity of the current order. It is very seen in the policies of the ruling Shiite elites. In other words, the fundamental insecurity problem of Shiites in the past was reflected in the attitude after 2003. It can be concluded that the Shiite practices in politics, state levels, and social order are justified as a reflection of the Sunni practices pre-2003 era. At the same time, it can be thought that the harsh policies during the Maliki period, the Sunni segment becoming more passive, and the Shiite influence in many areas, from security to the fight against terrorism, from education to politics, manifested themselves as the expression of the Shiite perception of ontological (in)security.

### Ontological (In)security of Shiite Identity

Iraq, having the centers for Shiism such as Najaf, Karbala, and Samarra, which are considered sacred, has a privileged and special position for Shiites, who constitute the majority. On the other hand, Iraqi society is very heterogeneous in ethnic and sectarian terms. Approximately 30 % of the population is Sunnis, 60-65 % Shiite, less than 10 % Yazidis, and Christians, and also there are different ethnic identities consisting of Arabs, Kurds, and Turkmen.<sup>59</sup> At this point, the question of how Shiites define themselves and express their identity comes to the fore. However, the answer to this question varies depending on various characteristics of the person, such as whether they are religious or liberal.<sup>60</sup>

There is also a document that can be taken as a reference for Shiites to define themselves. The following statements about Shiites are included in the Declaration of Iraqi Shiites, which brought together many people from different walks of life in 1992.<sup>61</sup>

[...] the Shia in Iraq are not an ethnic group nor a race nor nation, but rather, can comprise any social combination that believes that its Shia fealty has led it to suffer from persistent sectarian disadvantage over the centuries.

This statement in the declaration claims that the reason why Shiites are "oppressed" is sectarianism. It underscored the perception among the Shiite society of being isolated from social and political life and disassociated from the system until 2003.

As Fuller and Francke noted, there were 6 Shiites in the 13-member

59 The CIA World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/iraq/#people-and-society>.

60 For example, a devout Shiite defines himself as Shiite, then Iraqi, then Arab. The religious Shiite, who is also interested in tribal issues, defines himself as Shiite, then Arab, then Iraqi. Liberal or secular Shiite defines himself as Iraqi, then Shiite, then Arab. Shiite Turkmen define themselves first as Shiite, then as Turkmen, and then as Iraqi (Interview with Watheq al-Sadoon, 28/07/2023, Ankara) and also, each nationality and sect define itself in a special way. Shiites define themselves as the largest sect in Iraq (Interview with Mohanad Faris, 30/05/2024, (online).

61 "Declaration of Shia of Iraq", July 2002, <https://al-bab.com/documents-section/declaration-shia-iraq#sthash.yAZEN1ko.dpbs>.

Ba'ath Regional Command in 1963, but by 1970, there were no Shiite members. Again, in 1963, there were 6 Shiite members in the 18-member Revolutionary Command Council. Although it is seen that the influence of Shiites decreased, especially during the reign of Abdelkarim Qassim, the fact that they faced restrictions after 1969 negatively affected the political and social influence of Shiites. During this period, there were also restrictions on Shiite cultural and religious life, such as the confiscation of foundations, the closure of theological schools, and the banning of religious ceremonies.<sup>62</sup>

According to Akoğlu, the ideological division, sectarian differences, and Baathist policies deepened the rift between the two groups. In addition to the assassination of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, various arrests and executions took place during this period. There has also been an unprecedented exile movement. It is known that nearly 15 thousand Shiites of Iranian origin were deported in this process.<sup>63</sup>

Studies<sup>64</sup> claiming that Shiites see themselves as marginalized and oppressed show that Shiites perceive Sunnis as the other. In this case, it can be said that the fact that Sunnis were in power during the periods when Shiites felt under pressure and the perception of insecurity caused by the policies of Sunni governments were effective.

This otherness is seen in the fact that Shiite identity has become more visible than Sunni identity over time and that sectarian conflicts are felt in society, especially in political life. For Al-Qarawee, the rise of Shiite political parties in Iraqi politics, the increase in symbols that make Shiite identity visible, and tensions/conflicts in relations between the parties have emerged as effective factors in the positioning of Shiite identity as the other against Sunni identity.<sup>65</sup>

Keiko Sakai stated, as in the table below, that in the governments of the three different periods, the representation of the Shiites was half that of the Sunnis. In addition, even the representation of Kurds is also higher than that of Shiites.<sup>66</sup>

*Gps*

- 62 Graham Fuller and Rend Rahim Francke, *The Arab Shia: The Forgotten Muslims*, St. Martin Press, 1999, p. 97.
- 63 Muharrem Akoğlu, "Irak'ta Şii Varlığı", *Mezhep Araştırmaları*, VI/2, 2013, p. 400.
- 64 Kashif Mumtaz, "Iraqi Shias After Saddam Hussein: A Study in Political Behaviour", *Strategic Studies*, 2003, XXIII/4, pp. 78–92. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45242511>; Kelsey L. Modica, "A Path to Peace: Reconciling the Sunni-Shi'a Conflict in Iraq A Path to Peace: Reconciling the Sunni-Shi'a Conflict in Iraq", *Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects*. 841, 2015, [https://surface.syr.edu/honors\\_capstone/841](https://surface.syr.edu/honors_capstone/841); Oula Kadhum, *The Transnational Politics of Iraq's Shia Diaspora*, Carnegie Endowment, 2018, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2018/03/the-transnational-politics-of-iraqs-shia-diaspora?lang=en&center=middle-east>.
- 65 Harith Hasan Al-Qarawee, "Sectarian Identities, Narratives and Political Conflict in Baghdad", *The Levantine Review* IV/2, 2015, p. 184.
- 66 Keiko Sakai, "Tribalization as a Tool of State Control in Iraq: Observations on the Army, the Cabinets and the National Assembly" in Faleh A. Jabar and Hosham Dawod (ed), *Tribes and Power: Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Middle East*, London Saqi Books, 2002.

**Table 2.** Sectarian Ethnic Distribution in the First Three Governments of Saddam Hussein<sup>67\*</sup>

Governments	Sunni Arab	Shia Arab	Kurd
<b>First Government Period (1979-1982)</b>	46,2%	17,9%	20,5%
<b>Second Government Period (1982-1986)</b>	52,6%	21,1%	18,4%
<b>Third Government Period (1984-1990)</b>	53,7%	19,5%	14,6%

**Source:** Keiko Sakai, “Tribalization as a Tool of State Control in Iraq: Observations on the Army, the Cabinets and the National Assembly” Faleh A. Jabar and Hosham Dawod ed, *Tribes and Power: Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Middle East*, London Saqi Books, 2002.

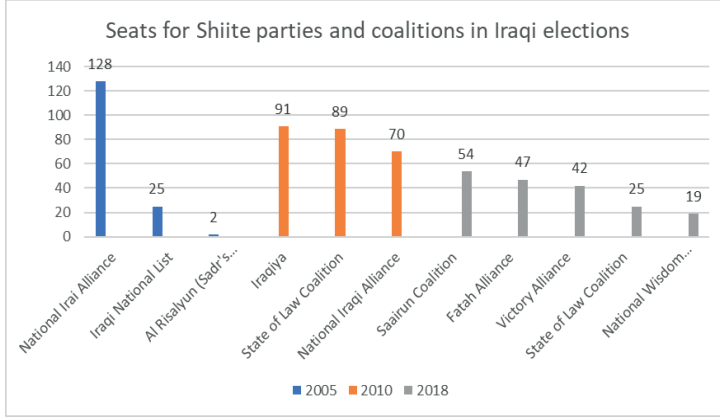
The uprisings against Saddam Hussein in many provinces in the south of Iraq after his defeat in the Gulf War in 1991 could be taken as symbolic evidence. For Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, in this process, the Baath Party’s discourses targeting the social identity of the protesters had the effect of increasing the feelings of antagonism among these groups. One of these discourses was the slogan, “There will be no Shia after today” (لا شيعة بعد اليوم). It could be thought that such statements might have strengthened loyalty to Shiite identity and reinforced opposition to the regime. As Saddam Hussein increased repression, mutual escalation grew.<sup>68</sup>

However, in the new system after 2003, a process emerged in which Shiites were in a more active position. The Interim Governing Council (IGC) is an important example of the structures established based on ethnic and sectarian divisions. Established on July 13, 2003, to carry out responsibilities such as the appointment of diplomats and the drafting of the constitution, the 25-member Governing Council Members was composed of the following members: 13 Shiites, 5 Sunnis, 5 Kurds, 1 Turkmen, and 1 Assyrian. Moreover, the distribution of the members of the Presidential Council was important, and the Shiite primacy and ethnic-sectarian divide came to the fore. It was decided that there be 5 Shiite, 2 Sunni, and 2 Kurdish representatives in the Presidential Council.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>67</sup> \* The table was created by the authors based on the information/data obtained from the source cited.

<sup>68</sup> Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, *Iraq since 1958-from Revolution to Dictatorship*, I. B. Tauris, London and New York, 2001, p. 289.

<sup>69</sup> Tayyar Arı, *Geçmişten Günümüze Ortadoğu, Siyaset, Savaş ve Diplomasi*. 6<sup>th</sup> Edition MKM Yayınları, Bursa: 2012, p. 472.

**Table 3.** Seats of Shiite Parties and Coalitions in Iraqi Elections

**Source:** This table was created by the authors by bringing together different data from various sources.

There has been a confrontation both religiously and politically between the sides. The Shia elite, who were exiled and felt oppressed, saw themselves as the rightful rulers and were instrumental in purging the country of Baathists and disbanding the army after 2003. The process before 2003 and the perception of this period reveal the psychology of the Shiite policies followed after 2003.<sup>70</sup> In particular, Nuri Maliki's term as prime minister is a reflection of the oppressive policies that the Shiites felt before 2003, from the perspective of the Sunnis.<sup>71</sup>

This showed that the Shiite identity was based on usurpation and oppression (mostazafan)<sup>72</sup> that emerged after the martyrdom of Hussein in Karbala and the Sunni identity perception as the other continued. The concept of mostazafan, which is one of the basic components of Shiite identity,

70 Oula Kadhum, "The Transnational Politics of Iraq's Shia Diaspora".

71 Renad Mansour, "The Sunni Predicament in Iraq", Carnegie Endowment, 2016, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2016/03/the-sunni-predicament-in-iraq?lang=en&center=middle-east>; Alex Bennett, "Maliki: Is Iraq PM's Repression of Sunnis Driving Iraq's Violence?", *MIC*, 2013, <https://www.mic.com/articles/43171/maliki-is-iraq-pm-s-repression-of-sunnis-driving-iraq-s-violence>; Fanar Haddad, "Shia-Centric State Building and Sunni Rejection in Post-2003 Iraq", *Carnegie Endowment*, 2016, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2016/01/shia-centric-state-building-and-sunni-rejection-in-post-2003-iraq?lang=en>.

72 For detailed information about the studies explaining the position of Shiites in Iraq with the concept of oppression (mostazafan), see. Thanassis Cambanis, "Iraq's Sectarian Relapse: Lessons of the 'Shia House'", *TCF*, 2023, <https://tcf.org/content/report/iraqs-sectarian-relapse-lessons-of-the-shia-house/>; Andrew Cockburn, "Iraq's Oppressed Majority", *Smithsonian Magazine*, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/iraqs-oppressed-majority-95250996/>; Ranj Alaaldin and Sumaya Attia, "Shiite militias in Iraq: Why Context Matters", *Brookings*, 2017, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/shiite-militias-in-iraq-why-context-matters/>; Robert G. Rabil, "The Making of Saddam's Executioners: A Manual of Oppression by Procedures", *Middle East Review of International Affairs* VII/1, 2003, pp. 38-50.

stands out in the discourse of Ayatollah Khomeini. During the 1979 Revolution, Khomeini used this emphasis to express the “oppressors and oppressed” struggle and gained a wide base of support. Khomeini conducted sectarian politics through key discourses such as velayat-e faqih and the oppressor-oppressed struggle.<sup>73</sup> These key discourses, which the Shiite community has generally accepted, were also the source of Shiites’ self-identification or coding as the other.

### Main Narratives and Routines of Shiite Society

Since Shiite identity is based on religious reference, the basic narratives are also based on religious discourses, including political experience, societal marginalization, standing against injustice, and cultural elements. Codes such as alienation, injustice, and oppression have become established in Shiite society. This has led to the adoption of narratives of discrimination and persecution.

The search for rights and justice, which has a religious reference, has also gained a political base when combined with the position of Shiites in Iraqi society. Especially in the pre-2003 period, the basic demands of the Shiites also determined their routines and narratives. These demands were issues of equal rights, justice, and representation. The Iraqi Shiite Declaration of 1992 forms an important basis for narratives. This document also shows the Shiite political vision in post-Saddam Hussein Iraq.<sup>74</sup>

It is possible to state that Shiite narratives are also shaped by cultural life and traditions. Although Shiism has a religious content, it is possible to distinguish between secular Shiism and religious Shiism. These impacts guiding the society and determining the narratives due to the leaders being secular or not. For example, in 2013, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani drew attention to a more secular structure against the idea of velayat-e faqih<sup>75</sup> and spoke about a civil state. He adopted a supportive position for separate religious and state institutions.<sup>76</sup> His statement in 2019 asserting that the source of authority is the people is also important as a narrative aimed at shaping society in this direction.<sup>77</sup>

Actors’ attitudes towards each other and their own identity definitions

73 Lokman Cömert, “Analyzing the Interaction between Islam and Ideology in the Political Thought of Hassan al-Banna and Ayatollah Khomeini”, *Turkish Journal of Shiite Studies*, VI/1, 2024, p. 83.

74 Al-Qarawee, “Sectarian Identities...” p. 184.

75 Velayat-e faqih: According to this understanding, the highest religious authority is also the head of state. In other words, political and religious authority is vested in a single person. The idea of Velayat-e Faqih, basic political theory of Shiism, is a parameter that affects and determines the political, religious and social perspective of the Shiite community. See for more: Faleh A. Jabar, *The Shi’ite Movement in Iraq*, Saqi Books, 2003.

76 Ali Mamouri “Secular Shiism on Rise in Shiite Crescent”, 2019, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2019/12/iran-iraq-lebanon-protests-secularism.html>.

77 “Alsiystani: Ealaa Majlis Alnuwaab Aladhi Ainbathaqt Minh Alhukumat an Yueid Khiratih Bihadha Alshaan”, 29/11/2019, <https://shafaq.com/ar/سياسة/السيستاني-على-مجلس-النواب-الذي-انبتقت-منه-الحكومة-ان-يعيد-خيار-اته-بهذا-الشان>.

are related to their perceptions of the other party. The behaviors they exhibit are also perceived as a reflection of these views. The Shiite community in Iraq also adopts a behavioral orientation within the framework of their perspectives toward other groups, perception of threats, and own identity elements. The slogans used during the uprising against Saddam Hussein in 1991 can be considered as an example of this. The slogans used by the Baath party against the protesters during the aforementioned uprising affected the Shiite perspective and attitude.<sup>78</sup>

Another example that explains the threat perception of the Shiite community is the Iraqi Shiites Declaration mentioned above. The document is also a good example of the perceived threat perception. The following statements in the document show what it was to be a Shiite in Iraq in the 1990s:<sup>79</sup>

[...] the label of 'Shia' has been sufficient cause to remove the ordinary Shia from any consideration of positions of power and authority irrespective of his qualities and competencies and despite his political affiliations. To be a Shia in Iraq is to be condemned to a lifetime of powerlessness,<sup>80</sup> fear, anxiety, and discrimination.

However, some securitizations also occurred due to various events. The first of these is the Shiite-Sunni conflicts. Sectarian tensions, an important factor in Iraqi dynamics, have a long historical trajectory. These tensions, which can be traced back to the Ottoman-Safavid struggle and the Iran-Iraq war, have also manifested themselves in political conflicts in Iraq in the 2000s.

Shah Ismail, the first leader of the Safavid state, adopted Shiism as the state religion,<sup>81</sup> and his political and territorial struggle with the Ottoman Empire, the great power of the time, also impacted sectarian politics.<sup>82</sup> The four conflicts between 1514 and 1554 were based on religious rather than political grounds.<sup>83</sup>

In the 1600s, an Ottoman-Safavid struggle over Iraqi territories such as Baghdad, Mosul, and Kirkuk.<sup>84</sup> Another historical development in which

78 Maria Luisa Fantappie, "Men of Dawa: How the Personalities of Oneparty Shaped Iraq's New Politics", 26/06/2023, <https://tcf.org/content/report/men-of-dawa-how-the-personalities-of-one-party-shaped-iraqs-new-politics/#easy-footnote-bottom-13>.

79 "Declaration of Shia of Iraq..."

80 See for powerlessness. Jojanneke van der Toorn, Matthew Feinberg, John T. Jost, Aaron C. Kay, Tom R. Tyler, Robb Willer and Caroline Wilmoth, "A Sense of Powerlessness Fosters System Justification: Implications for the Legitimation of Authority, Hierarchy, and Government," *Political Psychology*, XXXVI/1, 2015, pp. 93-110.

81 For more detail See, William L. Cleveland, *A History of Modern Middle East*. San Francisco: Westview Press, 1994, pp. 52-138; Ghulam Sarwar, *History of Shas Ismail Safawi*, Alipauh, 1939, p. 88.

82 Sabri Ateş and Vural Genç, "Ottoman-Safavid Relations: A Religious or Political Rivalry", *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History*, 20/11/2024, <https://oxfordre.com/asianhistory/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.001.0001/acrefore-9780190277727-e-769#>.

83 Şehabettin Tekindağ, "Yeni Kaynak ve Vesikaların Işığı Altında Yavuz: Sultan Selim'in İran Seferi", *Tarih Dergisi*, XVII/22, p. 55.

84 Hala Mundhir Fattah, *The Politics of Regional Trade in Iraq, Arabia, and the Gulf*:



sectarian ideologies were highly visible was the Iran-Iraq War. The Shia-Sunni divide and the difference in narrative influenced the process and outcome of the war and was instrumentalized especially by the then-Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein. The 1980-88 war had an impact on Iran's more effective use of Shiism and the evolution of Sunni-Shiite rivalry. Therefore, both sides utilized sectarian strategies to gain support and enhance their power. The Iranian Revolution<sup>85</sup> in 1979 and the policies of Saddam Hussein, who came to power in Iraq in the same year, were effective in the emergence of this conflict.<sup>86</sup>

Saddam Hussein, who made Arab and Persian identities the focal point during the war period, moved the antagonism between the two countries from sectarian to ethnic dimension.<sup>87</sup> Thus, he tried to prevent Iraqi Shiites from being influenced by Iran. As a result, it can be said that the Shiite-Sunni and Persian-Arab fragility gained sensitivity during the Saddam Hussein era and formed the basis of the tensions in the following years.<sup>88</sup>

The Shiite-Sunni conflicts of 2006-2008 in Iraq were an indication

1745-1900, New York: Sunny Press, 1997, pp. 31-34; Tayyar Arı, *Geçmişten Günümüze Orta Doğu*, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition, Bursa MKM Yayınları, 2012, pp. 403-405.

- 85 See for more detail. Norris S. Hatterington, "Industrialisation and Revolution in Iran: Forced Progress or Unmet Expectation?" *The Middle East Journal*, XXXVI/3 Summer 1982, p. 362-63; John W. Limbert, *Iran at War with History*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Pres, 1987, p.103; Nasser Momayezi, "Economic Correlates of Political Violence: The Case of Iran", *The Middle East Journal*, XL/1 Winter 1986, p. 71; Richard Cottam, "Revolutionary Iran", *Current History*, LXXVIII/453 January 1980, pp. 12-13; Mohsen M. Milani, "The Ascendancy of Shi'i Fundamentalism", *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, XIII/1-2 Fall/Winter 1989, pp. 6-7; Bahman Baktiari, "The Leftist Challenge: The Mojahidin-e Khalq and the Tudeh Party", *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, XIII/1-2 Fall/Winter 1989, p. 33; Nazor Alaolmolki, "The New Iranian Left", *The Middle East Journal*, XL/2 Spring 1987; Mongol Bayat, "The Iranian Revolution of 1978-79: Fundamentalist or Modern?" *The Middle East Journal*, XXXVII/1 Winter 1983, p. 38.

- 86 Andrew T. Parasiliti, "Iraq's Military Containment of Iran", *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, XIII/1-2 Fall/Winter 1989, p. 129; Graham E. Fuller, *The Center the Universe: The Geopolitics of Iran*. San Francisco: Westview Pres, 1991, pp. 34-56; Nita M. Renfrew, "Who Started the War", *Foreign Policy*, No.66 Spring 1987, p. 302; William J. Olson, "Iraqi Policy and the Impact of the Iran-Iraq War", Robert O. Friedman, ed., *The Middle East After the Israel Invasion of Lebanon*, New York, N.Y: Syracuse University Press, 1986, p. 182.

- 87 Adeed Dawisha, "Identity and Political Survival in Saddam's Iraq", *Middle East Journal*, LIII/4, 1999, p. 560.

- 88 See for more detail. Fuad Matar, *Saddam Hussein: A Biographical Account of His Leadership Style and Crisis Management*, London: Highlight Productin, 1990; Efraim Karsh and Inari Rautsi, *Saddam Hussein: A Political Biography*, New York, N.Y: The Free Pres, 1991; Simon Henderson, *Instant Empire: Saddam Hussein's Ambition for Iraq*, San Francisco: Mercury House, Incorporated, 1991; Ofra Bengio, *Saddam's Word: Political Discourse in Iraq*, New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Pres, 1998); Said K. Aburish, *Saddam Hussein: The Politics of Revenge*, Edinburgh: Clays Ltd, 2000; Geoff Simons, *Iraq: From Sumer to Saddam*. 2nd ed. London: Macmillan Pres, 1994, pp. 271-329; Adel Darwish and Gregory Alexander, *Unholy Babylon: The Secret History of Saddam's War* London: Victor Golancz Ltd, 1991, pp. 197-203; Phebe Marr, "Iraq: Its Revolutionary Experience under the Ba'th", Peter J. Chelkowski and Robert J. Pranger. Ideology and Power in the Middle East, Durham: Duke University Press, 1988, p. 196.

of how difficult the life of Shiites and Sunnis living together had become.<sup>89</sup> Azamiyah is the only Sunni region among Shiites, and Imam Azam's tomb is located here. Kadhimiya is a Shiite region that is considered sacred for Shiites and whose surroundings are entirely Sunni. The threat of ISIS in 2014 also affected the Shiites' perception of the enemy. Although ISIS does not have a sectarian affiliation, it is perceived as an enemy by because it is a Salafi jihadist organization and targets the Shiite society. During the interviews held with various groups in Iraq, it was learned that the perspective towards gun-owning Sunnis was negative during the civil war period, and the perception of threat was kept at the highest level.<sup>90</sup>

In a study based on interviews with people who were displaced during this period, comments were made that especially Sunni Arabs felt like foreigners and that the Sunni population was seen as terrorists. It is also included that Sunni Arabs define themselves as Muslim Arabs because they cannot access basic rights in terms of services. The authors note that the activities of Shiite militias prevent Sunni Arabs from freely expressing their identity.<sup>91</sup> All of these show that there were developments that significantly changed the Sunni community's perception of security, especially during and after the high threat of ISIS. Similarly, the Shiite community's perception of threat was also seriously affected and their perspectives towards Sunnis were shaped accordingly.

Maliki's tenure as prime minister (2006-2014) is also worth examining as a period that reveals the Shiites' past threat perceptions, identity affiliations, and political and military concerns.<sup>92</sup> Maliki consolidated his power at the government level and gained control over the security units. In addition, political consolidation had a strengthening effect on his authority.<sup>93</sup> All of these have increased the continuity and impact of the policies it pursues. By gathering people from his views and relatives around him and consolidating the power he achieved, Maliki attracted reaction from the Shiite opposition and other identity groups. The Maliki government also targeted Sunni leaders, accused them of terrorism, carried out mass arrests of Sunni citizens, and pursued discriminatory policies. This affected the perceptions of both communities.<sup>94</sup>

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89 وصول العراق إلى حافات الحرب الأهلية. 2006.. eam 2006.. wusul aleiraq 'iila hafaat al-harb al'ahlia), 29/12/2006, <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/2006/12/29/عام-2006-وصول-العراق-إلى-حافات-الحرب>

90 Interview with Reshad Salihi, 16/09/2023, Ankara.

91 Nadia Siddiqui, Roger Guiu, and Aaso Ameen Shwan, "Among Brothers and Strangers: Identities in Displacement in Iraq", *International Migration*, LVII/2, 2019, p. 86.

92 وصول العراق إلى حافات الحرب الأهلية. 2006.. eam 2006.. wusul aleiraq 'iila hafaat al-harb al'ahlia), 29/12/2006, <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/2006/12/29/عام-2006-وصول-العراق-إلى-حافات-الحرب>

93 Harith Hasan Al-Qarawee, إرث من الإقصاء: الأزمة الطائفية في العراق: (al'azmat altaayifiat fi aleiraqi: 'iirth min al'iisaa'), 23/04/2014, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2014/04/iraqs-sectarian-crisis-a-legacy-of-exclusion?lang=ar&center=middle-east>.

94 Interview with Reshad Salihi, 16/09/2023, Ankara.

Another example of elite influence is Sistani, with his role over the Shiites. Sistani called for help to Sunni tribes in the fight against ISIS in 2014. This attitude of Sistani underlined the need to focus on coming together for a common goal, not on the sectarian differences between the Shiite and Sunni societies.<sup>95</sup>

## Conclusion

This study focuses on the concept of routine, one of the basic components of ontological security. The existence of any routine, whether positive or negative, points to order. This routine can be within the framework of healthy relationships and trust, or it can be seen on the basis of crisis, conflict and chaos. In this context, the study draws attention to the concept of crisis routine and emphasizes that various crises create a routine and that these routines provide a relative order.

Secondly, it draws attention to the phenomenon of habituation brought about by the crisis routine. In this regard, Iraq was chosen as a country that is not very preferred for the case study within the framework of ontological security. Thus, a different contribution to the empirical level of the theory is presented. In analyzing Iraq, the Shiite segment is used as an example to limit the scope.

It is argued that the crises occurring in Iraq constitute a routine and the society has developed habitual practices against this routine. Various routines and habitual attitudes are maintained regarding politics, security, and social order. These attitudes are seen as distrust in the state and elections, perception of ontological insecurity in different ethnic and sectarian groups, protest demonstrations and strong legal control. In addition, various interviews revealed that there is a perception that politicians use sectarian divisions as a triggering tool to maintain the existing order.

As a result, it is inferred that Iraq's constituent elements have developed a coherent self and, in this context, they have maintained their ontological security internally. Based on these inferences, a formulation defining ontological insecurity in Iraq has also been made. The crisis routine in Iraq influences the identity and threat perceptions of social groups in the country and also provides predictability.

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95 "Iraq's Sistani Calls on Baghdad to Help Sunni Tribes After ISIS Killings", 31/10/2014, <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2014/10/31/Iraq-s-top-Shiite-calls-on-Baghdad-to-help-Sunni-tribes-after-killings>.

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*Gos*