

Iraq in Common?

Huda Jawad on the development of a new and alternative network for young British Iraqis

Ever since I can remember, Iraq has been ringing in my ears, in my dreams and nightmares. I guess I am not unique. I bet every young Iraqi who was fortunate to escape the political brutality peculiar to this country has gone through this second-hand education about Iraq, what it stood for and what it meant to our parents and grandparents. This love of a place that I left when I was two and have no memory of has shaped my sense of self, my values and even my career. I guess Iraq is my spiritual Jerusalem.

So when my home country, Britain, decided to go to war against Iraq, it was a time of very mixed feelings and anxiety. I was worried about friends

and family in Baghdad and other parts of Iraq, I was angry about the hypocritical change of mind that various Western countries took against Saddam the tyrant and the speed and hunger for war on the part of the US administration; but despite participating in anti-war marches I was tantalised by the possibility of an end to the most bloody regime Iraq has ever seen and the possibility of visiting 'home'. But I have yet to go back and with the current state of unrest, it's unlikely that I will for some time.

Horrified by the utter breakdown of security and the deterioration of all most all aspects of life and the escalating 'inter-ethnic' violence, I could no longer afford to stand on the sidelines wringing my hands

and feeling helpless. This and the experiences outlined above are my personal motivations for co-founding Iraq in Common with my colleague Stephen Shashoua, Project Director of the Three Faiths Forum. In meeting and working together, Stephen and I found that despite our obvious differences and the varied experiences that we have had in relation to life and Iraq, we maintained a love for Iraq, its people and its heritage. We also found that we shared similar complex feelings about how we relate to Iraq, being proud of its heritage and the fact that most of the religions of the world had a link to Iraq; in terms of the Abrahamic faiths, it is said that Mesopotamia is

A bustling Baghdad market in full swing

central to all the Messengers and Prophets, from Adam and Abraham to Islam.

Stephen and I wanted to remind ourselves and other Iraqis of the rich multi faith and multi-ethnic legacy of Iraq. Of Iraq's former leading position within the Arab, Middle Eastern and international world in literature, sciences, arts, gender rights and educational progress. We felt that lessons from Iraq's past could inform our future co-existence as Iraqis both in and outside Iraq. We wished for an alternative and free space where youn Iraqis from the Diaspora can come together to explore their Iraqi-ness, their history and shared commonality away from a politically charged atmosphere where they may feel the pressure to mirror the devastating and unfortunate ethnic and religious divisions taking places in Iraq today.

So, "Iraq in Common" - a network of young professionals of Iraqi origin to work for a pluralistic, peaceful Iraq - was launched at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on May 31, 2006.

It is both Stephen and my sincere wish that Iraq in Common can bring together young professionals of all faiths committed to solidifying friendships and supporting the steadfast efforts of the Iraqi people to develop a pluralistic society of peace and good-will. We hope that "Iraq in Common"

For more details about Iraq in Common contact Stephen Shashoua, 3ff@sternberg-foundation.org.uk or Huda Jawad, huda.jawad@forwardthinking.org



Iraq in Common's inaugural meeting

"The interplay between different communities in Iraq and their social interaction has informed and shaped the lives of different communities in a very personal way. A sense of Iraqi-ness was felt that was cohesive rather than divisive."

Sami Zubaida, Emeritus Professor at Birkbeck and keynote speaker.

will serve to highlight and reinforce the strong and harmonious relationships which are achievable in Iraq. Through seminars, cultural and social events so that young Iraqis are enabled to re-discover their cultural heritage and learn from their history to empower them to forge a peaceful and prosperous future.



Something in common?