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**Culture Smugglers**

January 2006, Berlin - a report written on request for the Institute of Network Cultures, about the travelling series of conferences and exhibitions titled Middle East News on Culture and Politics, and The Iraqi Equation both realised by Catherine David and surrounding Arabic and Persian artists, plus Western academics of various backgrounds. An attempt to create a forum for exchange and discussion.

By Cecile Landman

**Culture Smugglers in a surreality**

Economist Loretta Napoleoni researched the life of al-Zarqawi. In a speech in Berlin she unveiled a major power struggle now at stake in the jihadist movement, and proposes an approach to challenge the jihadist movement: "Behind the mask of moderate approach to the political situation in Iraq, but also in Afghanistan, there is a major power struggle between two forces inside the jihadist movement." On one side the old leadership of Osama bin Laden, actual radical Salafists and particularly al-Maqdisi, the mentor of al-Zarqawi and Abu Qatada. On the other hand the new generation of jihadists whose leader is al-Zarqawi. Napoleoni: "This power struggle is very much the key to understand what is really happening in the world, in the surreal reality we're now living. [...] Two hours after the last tape was released and before the CIA had confirmed that it was Bin Laden's voice, Dick Cheney declared that there's no way to negotiate with terrorists and that 'we are going to destroy them'. Dick Cheney and al Zarqawi talk about total war. But what if America would respond in a different way to Osama bin Laden and said: "Okay, we'll consider your offer, but prove us that you can pacify Iraq for ten days. Give us ten days without suicidal attacks. Give us ten days of peace in Iraq, and then, we'll talk to you." That will completely split the jihadist movement. Such an approach would really bring all the contradictions out. Because then we will know who is really in control; if it is Osama bin Laden, sitting in the tribal belt, or al Zarqawi, fighting on the ground."

How difficult it was in Berlin to find a balance between Middle East News on Politics and Culture became clear in the debate after the speeches of economist Napoleoni and Fred Halliday (professor for international relations at the London School of Economics) with discussion partner Omar Amiralay, documentary film director from Syria. Amiralay spoke French so maybe it had something to do with the different languages at one discussion table. Amiralay: "I am an observer of the images of the Arab world, the interior world. I won't speak like Napoleoni and Halliday do in this conference. But I can answer to questions about the place of politics, of the culture, and what is happening in the Arab world today, the role that the intelligentsia plays in the Arab world."

Napoleoni: "You have to see into many phenomenon's from many different angles in an interdisciplinary conference like this. The pronunciation of cultural problems into art is very much interlinked with what happens within societies. The symbolisms of art can give us a quick image of what is happening and may stay in our mind longer than any long lecture."

Halliday: "We're intertwined since thousands of years so we'll have to know each other. But here (at the conference in Berlin) we are a minority because, while we are trying to deepen knowledge of the Middle East and of the virulations between the East and the West, they want to simplify, on both sides. And they're intellectually lazy. We have this huge issue of Turkey coming into the European Union, but how many western intellectuals have learned Turkish, for example?" Halliday's answer to overcome the barriers of culture is to work; read history, learn economics and languages, read the novels, see the films.

Halliday: "You may see more by studying of human behavior that is not economical, not political, and not military. It is not just about interdisciplinarity. Napoleoni talks about economics, Amiralay talks about films, my talking about politics of culture. By eating Iranian food, or Lebanese cooking, you learn something about the society. Listen to the music and dance. The jokes. Sometimes in London we end up with an Iraqi and have such a good evening because of the political jokes."

Amiralay: "I find myself to my surprise all the time caught in discussions like these. I understand you as well. Zarqawi nearly doesn't exist in the Arab media. Maybe he is not at all a superstar for us; he is merely a banal figure. I understand why all the questions, but I believe you have to listen better to us. To discard the manipulations can only be done passing through the interior, but what happens daily is always a stereotype of the Arab world. Zarqawi who came from a poor suburb. Violence is everywhere in the Arab world, by the regimes, in the prisons from which al Zarqawi rose to his extends in Iraq. Etcetera, it's above all a reducing us to the TV journals. People who travel these worlds in the inside, know probably better what happens."

The program describes Amiralay as known for his strong political approach. After the discussion he said he should have talked about the art of his work and the specialties and particularities of actual Syria. Amiralay lived long in France, but returned to Damascus. Thirty-three years ago he believed in the Ba'ath doctrine, his first film was about the damming of the Euphrates. "Regretting his blind faith, he returned in 2003 to make a new film about the then flooded areas and replacement village of El Machi." (from the program)

**'The Iraqi Equation - Contemporary Arab Presentations'**

It was freezing at 15 degrees, and even the trees made funny crackly, squeaky sounds when the Berlin part of the The Iraqi Equation and Middle East News on Culture and Politics took off with a variety of lectures, discussions, films, poems, images from archives, and people from Algeria, Iraq, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, and their stretched Diasporas. It is part of the longer running project of Contemporary Arab Representations by Catherine David.

Inside KW (KunstWerke) you first stumble upon a circle installation of screens –by Samir- at the Iraqi Equation exhibition in the Berlin KW. Standing in the midst of those you find yourself at a cross point of extracts from the silent Hollywood film The Thief of Baghdad (1924), private video footage of a middle-class Iraqi family, 'Ageless Iraq', a report from British Pathé (1954), and edited and unedited reports and footage from 2003.

In the opposite corner five monitors broadcast al-Fayhaa, an independent satellite TV station from the UAE, programming on Iraqi society. The second is al-Forat network, a TV station based in Baghdad with a variety of news, sports, and cultural and religious broadcasts. Al-Arabiya is a cable and satellite TV station founded in Dubai in 2003, and regarded as channel of the Iraqi opposition, and an alternative for al-Jazeera. The first private owned satellite channel is Al-Sharqiya which produces original Iraqi reality TV shows. Al-Iraqiya was founded with the US invasion to Iraq in 2003 and is financed by the United

States Department of Defense.

Downstairs you'll walk right into, or better onto a Baghdad coffee shop, where men smoke water pipes and boys serve tea. The huge painting of Faisal Laibi Sahi is reproduced on the wall. In front of it a small bookstore on wheels, like an ice-cream car, with a selection of books by Iraqi writers.

On monitors in front of the painting are as well some monitors on which continuous interviews and speeches by Iraqi artists and poets on Iraqi culture and arts: "Oh my language, where is laughter."

By Nedim Kufi is Daftar, a representation of a huge notebook in different writing styles, languages and images over two walls of the KW.

The Idea of a public exchange of these experiences and inspirations via cyberspace, the magazine on-line, is going against all known previous routes of Arabic journalism mixing with art.

To see all the presented documentaries and films will cost about 40 hours. Big wooden boxes were built in KW; they serve as small cinema rooms and are intended as a sort of replica of the cellars under the Baghdad houses which in summertime function as sheltering places from the heat, and temperatures rising to 50 degrees. In the boxes video diaries of Salam Pax are shown, Sinan Antoon's 'About Baghdad' filmed in the summer of 2003. Maysoun Pachachi, Tariq Hashim, Hana al Bayaty are just some of the other filmmakers. Stories of the Iraqi Jews, who went by the thousands to Israel, are told in the documentary 'Forget about Baghdad' by Samir who comes from a well known Shia family from the south of Iraq, and for that reason he uses only his first name. The Iraqi Equation shows photos from archive © The Arab Image Foundation'.

Make a jump to stories actually told by people in Baghdad now and it's ever so clear that the imagery has radically changed. The Iraqi Roulette, a blogger in Baghdad writes that 'torture' under Saddam Hussein was something that kids rarely understood: "The best imagination I could come up with was an image from a pirate film I saw, where the Captain tied a mutineer sailor to a pole and bared his back and whipped him. I remember asking what the Captain was doing. I was about six. 'He is torturing him', I was told. So back then for me torture became synonym to whipping." [...] Yet, Yet, Yet. All those years of imagination do not compare with one image from Abu Ghraib and the streets of Basrah, proving that an image is better than a thousand words. Children now are seeing and talking about these images as a matter of a fact, although not fully understanding what is going on."

#### **How do modern world and international relations affect culture?**

'Modern world' violently invaded Iraq with modernest equipment of the aggressive kind, and the actual image is that of a country in a rough and fast backlash to dark ages. Mindsets rather seem to narrow, after a first glad, chaotic opening up. The world loses interest or looks away in despair, notwithstanding the amounts of money and efforts that are put in The News from Iraq, and news from The War on Terror. Numbers of dead in Iraq have become not too reliable daily sums, but the articles become smaller and don't show what is happening between the Iraqis, in the neighborhoods, villages and countryside of Iraq.

The stories of the Iraqi interior as intended by Amiralay remain roughly untold.

Some European countries have recently decided that Iraqis may be forced to return to Iraq because it is safe enough. So why it is that journalists (experienced war-reporters) still don't go out to tell stories of the common people in Iraq? With the images that do come out of Iraq, the stories in the Iraqi blogs, or with the mainstream news as it is being reported, what do we really, what can we know about the human disaster that is taking place?

Fred Halliday's speech in the old Hebbel am Ufer theater in Kreuzberg, or HAU, witnessed of a universal cuisine with tickling local flavors: "The theme of culture, main theme of this seminar in Berlin, has come into great prominence in discussions of relations between the west of Europe and the Middle East." Main question according to Halliday is not "whether culture affects international relations or the modern world, but how the modern world and international relations affect culture."

Halliday took three broad propositions "that seem recurrent", to subsequently crush them all three: "The first is the proposition that culture has become a force, the independent variable in explaining relations between the Middle-East and Europe, in explaining terrorism, migration, Iraq, etc. Secondly that this is something new, something that defines the contemporary world, since the end of the cold war, when leading ideologies collapsed, or the post-modern world as you wish, the world of identity, the quest of migration. Thirdly and explicitly is the assumption that this is a particular one, 'how does the west relate to Islam'?"

"If we are talking about religion, about culture in a broad sense, of language, customs, of relations and international relations between peoples, this is a universal problem in the world, not just between the east and the west. Think of relations between China and Japan, or Russia and Western Europe, or between the British and the Germans, or between Europeans and Americans, or The Americans and the Latin Americans, and I could go on. The whole issue of migration is bringing this to our attention.

"Muslims around the world feel solidarity with for example Palestine, or Bosnia, or Kashmir, or Chechnya, or with immigrants in Western Europe who are maltreated. As they see it this is a cultural factor, a cultural solidarity. But it's not the only one. Chinese also feel sympathy to their Chinese backgrounds. English speaking people feel some sympathy with each other. But I doubt if culture is an independent or even major independent factor."

Yet Halliday doesn't see anything new: "The great imperial projects of France, Britain, Portugal, Spain, Italy, Belgium -even Germany during the Ottoman empire, before the first WW- can also be called cultural projects of winning peoples of the world over to their particular language and food; and in the case of England into peculiar forms of sport like cricket.

"Religion certainly played a role in the 17th century in Europe and the way countries have clashed in the past. It has played a role in relations between many people all around the world in the last two to three hundred years. As well have questions of language.

"The broad questions of the modern world, about sovereignty, development, independence, democracy, forms of government, relations between men and women, and these issues that are common to all countries are often repressed in the idiom of their language, of their religions, and of their national conditions. The international has reconfigured, and is redefining the cultural, more than the opposite way around. Partly because the cultures themselves are very wearied in allowing different interpretations, and partly because what is much more interesting is not the question whether culture affects international relations, or, the modern world, but how the modern world and international relations affect culture."

#### **Modern Culture and the great mistake of the Religious focus**

Halliday, who grew up in Ireland, came up with some examples about how modern culture and the religious focus mingle:

"Ayatolla Khomeiny, the leader of the Irani revolution used Koranic vocabulary to denounce the west, to denounce the sjah, and to mobilize the mass popular following of his revolution. But the interpretations he gave to the terms of the quran or of the Shiite tradition were those of modern culture. They were those of a leader who was fighting imperialism and corrupted needs of the economic resources of the country.

"A more painful and immediate example is Osama bin Laden. But what does he exactly say? Bin Laden states three or four things which are common by now to contemporary Third World radicalism. He's saying: "Our territory is occupied by foreigners. Like Palestine, or now in Iraq. And these foreigners should be driven out." Secondly he says that their needs are corrupting Islam and the people, and this should be overcome. Thirdly he is saying that the national resources of the Muslim and Arab peoples have been stolen and robbed by western monopolies and oil companies and that the Arabs should take control of

their own national resources. Fourthly he is saying that in order to achieve these resources and goals, and defend them in the interest of the Arabs and the Muslims, he wants a strong central state, which he calls a Caliphate."

The most obvious criticism of western policy with regard to Israel or Palestine is double standards. You allow independence here, but not for the Palestinians; for Bosnia, or Croatia, but not for Kashmir and for Chechnya. This charge of the double standards requests impartiality, even if it's not universally acquired. Other complaints in the Middle East are the same as everywhere else. In Saudi Arabia a young army officer looked after Halliday, "I had known him for about twenty minutes when he said to me: "Professor. There's one thing you gotta know. All our rulers are thieves!" A completely universal statement. You could be in China, in Peru, the Congo or in Russia. There is nothing Arabic, or Bedouin, or Muslim or whatever about this statement. It relates to a universal value.

#### **Iran images of war and religious plays**

Bahman Jalali sat together with Navid Kermani and Bahman Kiarostami on the HAU stage where he spoke in Farsi. His story could very well do with an intimate sphere, to hear his soft voice talk for hours about Iran, and about when he photographed the complete destroyed city of Khorramshar at the start of the Iraq-Iran war. "Nobody thought it was going to endure for eight years." Jalali's pictures above the three men show rotting corpses of soldiers in the sand, their legs or what is left from them in strange positions. Tanks stand here and there. Cars stand vertically up with their noses in the sand, confusingly reminding of Easter Island. War is chaos. A coccoocs clock against a white wall in a house with no people left. Bullet holes everywhere. A hospital room with white, clean and tidy looking beds, with just some rubble over them. No people. There's a big hole in the roof. Emptiness. The pictures speak of heavy silence after the fighting's. "There's a lot of cancer because of the type of bombs. There's practically no research into this." When Bahman Jalali took these pictures he was of the same age as filmmaker Bahman Kiarostami now.

Bahman Kiarostami from Tehran showed Shabihkhani, a film about Imam Hussein and the pilgrimages. "Many Iranians walk to Kerbala, for their pilgrimage. They did so as well in the past. The difficulties were with the Ba'ath regime. Not with the people." All is played on a very white background without corners. The images with which the film begins unexpectedly make think of the early Monty Pythons, with the flying cartoon figures as a regularity. Theaterplayers playing the death of the Imam for a life job are being filmed against the very white background that every now and then is being cleaned throughout the film. The actors sometimes giggle about how they have to dress, or how they are asked to play their roles. Different than how they are used to play.

Navid Kermani: "Iraq would be the first Arab Shia state. But Iran is surrounded by the Americans, in Afghanistan, in Iraq so Iran really must take care of what happens."

#### **Al-Zarqawi, product of two enemies.**

##### **A speech**

Loretta Napoleoni, economist and expert on terrorist financing researched the life of al-Zarqawi, the most important terrorist of the jihadis movement. It started when she was approached by a film producer: "You interviewed the Red Brigades in the 1990's and several other left- and rightwing, particularly Italian groups, so you'll understand how this new generation of jihadis is taking shape." Napoleoni told him: "But I am an expert on the Marxist movements." He replied there are a lot of similarities.

"So what are the similarities between the Marxist movements of the 70's and the butchers in Iraq who beheaded Nicholas Berg?"

"Napoleoni only uses primary and original Arab sources, interviews and websites and is helped by a translator. Napoleoni: "I didn't use Western media on purpose, because I didn't want to be influenced by the propaganda. Of course I discovered that in the Arab media there's a lot of propaganda too. We reconstructed al-Zarqawi's life piece by piece, and by doing that we actually retraced the evolution of this jihadis movement. The picture that emerged is a bizarre, surreal picture, because al-Zarqawi is the product of two enemies.

He is the product of al-Qaidism, the new anti-imperialist ideology produced from the ashes of al-Qaida, and the completely destroyed transnational armed organization by the fall of the Taliban regime and the disintegration of its leadership. And the other enemy is the United States and the West.

Zarqawi was born in Zarqa, a city north of Amman in 1966. It used to be an industrial city, but through the decades it became poorer. Industrialization never really took off in Jordan. Until today Zarqa is surrounded by a belt of refugee camps; it became absorbed by a massive amount of refugees from the Palestinian Diaspora. Al-Zarqawi, born in a Bedouin family, grew up with the amazing stories about the Bedouins and his ancestors in the desert, but he did not even spend time in the desert.

Growing up in the slums of the Massoud suburb he used to play on a cemetery nearby the house. Very close to his mother and extremely close to his father he went through his childhood loved by his family. Although his schoolteachers said he was quite unruly and rebellious. His father died when he was 14, 15 years old, which created a major trauma in the adolescent al-Zarqawi. The family plunged into total misery; at times they were so poor they didn't even have enough to eat. He dropped out of school and became a bully. He joined a local gang and started petty crime. Arrested for sexual assault he ended up in jail for a relatively short time. In his first prison-experience he met with the concept of the mujahideen.

Coming from the proletariat of Zarqa he has very little culture, and almost no education. He didn't go to the local mosque; and didn't even know that there was an antiglobal jihad taking place in Afghanistan. But in prison he became fascinated by the idea of the mujahideen and dreamt of becoming an Arab warrior on a beautiful white horse in Afghanistan. He had this romantic idea of the mujahideen, who convinced him to go to Afghanistan once he was released from prison. He was recruited by a local recruiter from the Arab-Afghan bureau in Zarqa, and through the mosque which he started to frequent after his release from prison. Then he believes, changes his name, calls himself al-Ghareeb, which means the stranger. He arrived in Afghanistan in the spring of 1999. The Soviet army had already left in February, so he ended up there without knowing anybody, without any connections, and he didn't fight, because the anti-Soviet jihad was finished. He ended up working as a clerk at the Arab-Afghan bureau in Peshawar.

His boss told me that Zarqawi made photocopies, brought the coffee, and called him uncle Abdullah and was extremely respectful. He was not at all what we are being told by the Americans. His boss told he was not able to recognize him when he saw Zarqawi's picture for the first time after the famous picture of Colin Powell. Nobody really knows how this guy did look like. If you see the pictures from his twenties in Afghanistan, and all the different pictures produced recently, they all look different. Osama bin Laden is still the same. So Zarqawi's physical looks are adding to the mythology of this individual.

From 1989 to 1993 when al-Zarqawi actually stayed in Afghanistan, a major power struggle inside the Arab-Afghan Bureau took place between the founder of al-Qaida, Sheik al Saam and al-Zwahiri. In fact Sheik al-Saam was assassinated and Osama bin Laden took over al-Qaida and transformed it. This all takes place while al Zarqawi is there, but he has no idea. But he became very close befriended to al-Maqqdisi, a radical Salafist and very well known intellectual too, who was much in the loop of the Arab-Afghan Bureau and the mujahideen, although he never fought. Al-Zarqawi was fascinated by al-Maqqdisi because he introduced the doctrine of radical Salafism to him. It seemed the answer to all his problems and actually gave a meaning to his life. This is guy, always a misfit, until he comes across radical Salafists wanting to destroy the entire Arab environment in order to purify it from the contamination of the West.

In other words, he has a mission in life. He knows what he has to do. He has to go back home to destroy the society which gave him so much pain and grief, and rebuild the new society, the al-Twaheed, which is this government directly from god,

the society ruled by the Sharia. In a certain sense also, politically speaking to the radical -Turkish- Caliphate. Together with al-Maqqdisi in 1993 they go back to Jordan and they try to organize a radical Salafist cell, with the purpose to overthrow the Jordanian government. But after six months they were arrested, before the cell had even been formed.

Found guilty of conspiracy they were condemned to 15 years in jail. During the trial al-Zarqawi played a very secondary role to al-Maqqdisi. At that time in 1993 al-Maqqdisi was one of the superstars of radical Salafism. They had a webpage that received thousands and thousands of visitors every single day and especially during the trial. He was extremely popular in Saudi Arabia, where the site was read by many many people. Al-Zarqawi however was a nobody, an absolute nobody. It was at the end of this period in jail that his amazing transformation took place.

Arab jails are not very nice places. People are routinely tortured. And the torture sometimes is absolutely horrid. A man like al-Zarqawi rose above this torture. He actually blossomed through the harshness of prison. I interviewed various people who were in prison with him, and they said that it was incredible, the transformation of this individual. He arrived as a very insignificant individual. But through this prison he became a leader. He became the leader of a group of radical Salafists inside the prison. Even physically he went through a major metamorphosis.

He built up his body. He used to be thin and slim, the typical Bedouin body, and then he became a muscle builder. People told me he used to exercise constantly with anything he could find, like buckets of rocks. He was preparing his mind and his body for his new role to become the leader. He was extremely confrontational with the prison guards. At the same time he was compassionate towards his followers, so people felt he would protect them, which is why they started following his orders.

In 1999 he was released from prison thanks to an amnesty for the coronation of King Abdallah of Jordan. He decided to go to Chechnya. Towards the end of the nineties there was a huge debate inside and amongst the followers of al Qaida.

In 1998 Osama bin Laden had produced a document in which he declared that the strategy to follow was to attack America. The idea was to destroy America and then take care of the Arab regimes. But first America because of the fact that the corrupted oligarchy regimes which had ruled the Muslim world since the end of WWII were in power thanks to the banking; the military, political and economic banking of the US. Not everybody agreed with this strategy. Kataab who was fighting in Chechnya disagreed with the approach. He focused his fight inside Chechnya and was not interested at all in America; he was too busy with Russia. All Al-Zarqawi wanted to do was to destroy the regime in Jordan, and replace it with al Twaheed, this ideal society. So he tried to reach Chechnya, going from Jordan to Pakistan, but then he was arrested in Pakistan because his visa had expired.

The Pakistani authorities offered him two choices: 'Either you cross over to Afghanistan, or you return to Jordan. He decided to cross over to Afghanistan, but when he got there he had no money and only a very small group of people, that followed him from Jordan, with some other people mostly Pakistanis, Palestinians and Syrians. He started to search for money in order to set up a camp where they could start training. At this time, early 2000, he finally meets Osama bin Laden.

The meeting is interesting because it is between two people coming from two different parts of the Muslim world. One is a proletariat from Zarqa, without means, who managed to develop his leadership qualities in prison. The other one is a super privileged Saudi, who actually never went through any harshness at all. And he is the most well known leader of al Qaida. And he is also known as an international authority, when it comes down to the jihadist movement. Osama bin Laden offered al Zarqawi to become part of al Qaida. He offered him and his followers to join his fight. Al Zarqawi, who was completely broke and had no place to go, refused.

This is guy doesn't follow the orders of anybody. There is only one example and that is the prophet. There is nothing else. He disagreed with Osama bin Laden's idea, to fight the Americans. At that time, inside al Qaida, and inside the Taliban regime, there was a major infighting. The moderate forces and the Taliban did not agree either with bin Laden's idea to attack America. They were afraid that America would retaliate. At the same time the hardliners also were in disagreement with Osama bin Laden.

Osama bin Laden is in a weak position and al Zarqawi is clever enough to exploit this to get some money from the Taliban and set up a very small camp in Heart at the border between Afghanistan and Iran. So from spring 2000, and the fall of the regime at the end of 2001, that is where al Zarqawi is. The camp consists of Palestinians, Syrians and Jordanians. The purpose of the camp was to forge suicide bombers. Al Zarqawi understood the meaning and the importance of suicide missions. His idea was to prepare these people for suicide missions and that these people would go back to their country and carry out suicide attacks.

What happened after 9/11? The Americans invaded Afghanistan. The al Qaida leadership was completely destroyed. Al Zawahiri and Osama bin Laden escaped over the border, to Pakistan, and are still in hiding in the trouble belt.

Al Zarqawi did not follow the same route, he went west. He crossed over Iraq thanks to the connections he had developed inside Iraq with the Sunni groups, radical Salafists. He was running a camp at the border from where he managed to reach Iraqi Kurdistan. He had connections there through people from Jordan who he had met in prison who had not gone to Afghanistan in 1999, but to Iraqi Kurdistan where they marched with some jihadi groups, in particular Answar al Islam. He had connections there. He knew, as everybody else knew, inside al Qaida and outside al Qaida and also in the West, that the next move of the United States in the war on terror would be to invade Iraq.

Around the end of the year 2001 he gets to Iraqi Kurdistan. At this point the Kurdish secret service alerts the Americans that the al Qaida man in Iraq is al Zarqawi. The Americans had never heard the name of al Zarqawi. So the Americans approached the Jordanian authorities and said, "Who is this al Zarqawi?" And the Jordanians were in trouble to find who had masterminded a super terrorist attack, a series of attacks that was thought to go to take place with the Millennium celebration. Above that were the assassination of an Israeli citizen and the assassination of Lawrence Fawley, an American diplomat. They decided to blame al Zarqawi. And all of a sudden al Zarqawi becomes one of the important guys of al Qaida."

"Now why did the Kurds and the Jordanians lie to the Americans?"

"The Kurds had invested interest in the alliance with America, to help them to get rid of the jihadists, who were present in that region and were proliferating, they wanted the Americans to intervene as soon as possible. The Jordanian authorities were very embarrassed by the fact that they had not found the mastermind of the assassination and the attacks.

And finally the Americans who because there were no weapons of mass destruction and not even a program of weapons of mass destruction, they needed to find a way to link Saddam Hussein to international terrorism in order to justify their preemptive strike in Iraq to the world. That link was al Zarqawi.

On February 5th, of 2003 Colin Powell went to the security council of the United Nations, and among the false information that he produced, there was al Zarqawi. And in that moment Colin Powell actually created the myth of al Zarqawi.

People in the West who were watching the speech believed that al Zarqawi was the al Qaida man in Iraq. The next most important leader after Osama bin Laden. So did many people in the Muslim world believe al Zarqawi to be the man Colin Powell told he was. It facilitated the rise to stardom of al Zarqawi. People wanted to be part of his network, be radical, young people wanted to participate. At the same time money started flowing in while Osama bin Laden was completely blocked in the tribal belt.

Surreal in this story is that in that moment also al Qaida was able to regenerate itself from a nearly destroyed transnational armed organization with a pyramidal structure, there was a new operation with a new leader, ready to fight the Americans in Iraq. We actually created it. There are two factors to confirm that. Al Zarqawi does not enter the Iraqi insurgency until August 2003. After the end of the official war. But also after Muqtada al Sadr took up arms against coalition forces.

He had to wait until the country had degenerated into a chaotic situation in order to start fighting, because he was weak on the ground. He did not have the people, he did not have the infrastructure, and he did not have the network to fight the Americans directly. The other factor pointing in this direction is that from August 2003 until November 2004 when bin Laden recognizes him as the emir, the prince, the leader of al Qaida in Iraq, al Zarqawi is constantly sending letters, messages to Osama bin Laden, seeking that recognition. He needed the relation with the religious Sunni leadership. Al Zarqawi is a foreigner, he is a proletariat, and he is not a religious authority. He did not have the power to rally the Sunni population around himself. He needed that backing.

While this was taking place, in the West we actually inflated his myth beyond believe. All of a sudden al Zarqawi was the guy who had masterminded the Casablanca attack, who was in charge of the Madrid attacks; and he was involved in the Istanbul attack. His notoriety grew explosively and thanks to this kind of stardom he could convince bin Laden to back him. The backing came after the second battle of Falluja. The destruction of Falluja.

Zarqawi was never in Falluja. His men were inside Falluja, but he was kept outside protected by his men. Even bin Laden did not know that. bin Laden believed, he had praised al Zarqawi ... in Falluja.

One very clever thing of al Zarqawi, although I tend to believe that the idea came of people who were advising him because al Zarqawi is not a political animal, he does not have that depth of political analysis. His greatest intuition was to attack the coalition forces simultaneously, in August 2003. You'll remember the attack on the UN delegation. To fight simultaneously on two fronts, using exactly the same terrorist techniques. Suicide missions.

There are many stories whereby Sunni and Shia leaders during the early stages of the insurgency were supporting and admiring each other. The Sunni insurgence would be united with the Shia insurgency. Zarqawi declared he wanted to go inside Falluja during the first battle. A track record of alliance between the Sunni and the Shia existed in Iraq, in the 1930's they fought together for the secular national front, against the Brits. Al Zarqawi understood that if that unity was formed, he would be cut out from the fight.

I read a letter which he wrote to Osama bin Laden, in the spring of 2004. He specified it with an amazing interesting analysis of the political situation in Iraq. He purposely drove a wedge between the Sunni and the Shia to prevent a united front.

Basically what we are seeing happening in Iraq today is an attempt of the Americans to open up to the Sunni in order to talk to the Sunni resistance, of what the Americans by now have admitted is not at all under the control of al Zarqawi, in order to reach an agreement and get rid of al Zarqawi and the jihadis.

This is the US strategy. What the US and the West don't understand, is that at the moment inside al Qaida a major power struggle is happening. This brings me to the parallel of the Marxist groups of the 1970's and the jihadis of today.

The similarities: both anti imperialist movements, both fighting against the national governments, we are talking predominantly in the West, but also the United States imperial power of the US. The leadership was a sort of charismatic, iconic leadership power, which exercises this power over people scattered around the world. Sendero Luminoso was inspired by Mao, but the members of neither Sendero nor Mao ever thought of changing the regime in Peru through Sendero Luminoso. Yet, the Maoist doctrine inspired Sendero Luminoso to do what they did. They were a terrorist organization. The same thing we can say about the suicide bombers of the 7th of July 2005 in London. They were clearly inspired by what is happening in Iraq, but they were not organized by al Zarqawi. These kind of parallels bring people to think that because al Zarqawi is a proletariat jihadi and somebody who comes from the working class, with an extremely poor background, there is a sort of democratization taking place inside the jihadist movement, which of course, until al Zarqawi rose to stardom was led by a group of super privileged individuals.

This is not actually what is happening, but people do believe it. I interviewed people, members of jihadist groups, who actually do believe that things are changing. That they're finally getting rid of these oligarchic elites everywhere inside al Qaida. But it is not true, because we, the West, have put al Zarqawi where he is. We created his myth. If it wasn't for Colin Powell al Zarqawi would never have become to what he is today. And today we would not witness a power struggle between the old leadership, which is of course Osama bin Laden and al Zawahiri, and al Zarqawi and the new generation.

These kind of analysis may help us also to develop a different policy, in order to solve the problem in Iraq, but also to get rid of the jihadist movement. We know that al Zarqawi being a radical Salafist is completely focused on the destructive phase of the Salafists. He has never even spoken about what kind of regime he wants to achieve, and wants to succeed. He is focused on destroying the environment. He is not thinking about ten, or twenty years.

This is not the kind of message that we are getting from bin Laden. Yesterday bin Laden offered a truth to America in Iraq. But bin Laden is not in Iraq. He is not fighting in Iraq. So, is it really possible that Osama bin Laden can deliver that? The American answer, just two hours after that tape was released, even before the CIA confirmed that it was the voice of Bin Laden, Dick Cheney already declared that there is no way we can negotiate with terrorists, we are going to destroy them. So Dick Cheney and al Zarqawi talk about total war. Only about destruction and not about negotiation."

What if America would respond in a different way to bin Laden and said "Okay, we'll consider your offer, but prove to us that you can pacify Iraq for then days. Ten days without suicidal attacks. Give us ten days of peace in Iraq, and then we'll talk to you." That will split the jihadist movement completely and would bring all the contradictions out. Then we'll know who is really in control. Bin Laden, sitting in the tribal belt, or al Zarqawi, fighting on the ground.

To conclude, I do not think that the Americans are very keen on finding peaceful alternatives to solve the present problem. I think they are perfectly happy at the moment, with this radicalization, and with this tension, and with this war on terror, which keeps going on."

The KW Institute for Contemporary Art and HAU, a three-theatre ensemble in a former drabby part of Kreuzberg, were the hosting locations for the conference and exhibition.

KW - [http://www.kw-berlin.de/english/news\\_frameset.htm](http://www.kw-berlin.de/english/news_frameset.htm)

HAU - [http://www.hebbel-theater.de/en/kuenstler/kuenstler\\_5608.html?hau=2](http://www.hebbel-theater.de/en/kuenstler/kuenstler_5608.html?hau=2)

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