Iraqi Women in Diaspora: Resettlement, Religion, and Remembrance in the Iraqi Diaspora in Toronto and Detroit, 1980 to present

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation explores how Iraqi migrant women living in Toronto and Detroit negotiate identity within existing networks of ethnic Iraqi communities settled in North America. The focus is on how ethno-religious identity is imagined and performed in diaspora as new generations of migrant Iraqi women reinvent their relationship with the host countries of Canada and the U.S., and with the homeland. As part of the global diaspora of Iraqis, women of different ages and ethnicities reinvent identity from within the official multiculturalisms of Canada and the U.S. By engaging with themes of historical memory, generation, diasporic citizenship, and religiosity, I explore how Iraqi women remember, retell, and reinvent the past through their narratives.

At the core of this research is a unique archive of more than a hundred oral histories conducted with Iraqi women in Amman, Detroit and Toronto. Drawing upon this archive, I explore how Iraqi women recreate official ‘myths’ of nationalism and the nation, but also, and importantly, shape subjective narratives that reveal their lived experiences of trauma, loss and oppression. I argue that these dual and dueling narratives must be understood within the historical context of oppression in the homeland, and also as the product of the repressive patriarchal framework that silences the feminine, essentially writing Iraqi women and their experiences out of Iraqi history. The narratives of women from various class, ethnic and religious backgrounds reveal their experiences of life during the authoritarian
Ba’th regime, as well as how and why they came to settle in North America. The
dissertation highlights the importance of empowering these voices, and listening to them
alongside the official and imposed national commemoration of Iraq’s past.

The dissertation engages with religion as a central and organizing category in the
lives of Iraqi women. Drawing from the works of western and Third World feminists, it
explores the role of religiosity in the lives of multi-generational Iraqi women. In particular,
I examine ideas of ‘honour’ and modesty, and the performance of religion amongst young
women growing up in North America.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I dedicate this dissertation to the Iraqi women who welcomed me into their homes, fed me, confided in me, cried with me, and opened up their hearts, souls and minds to tell their life histories. This work is a testament to the strength of Iraqi women in the face of struggle and adversity. I began the research with a view to establishing professional connections in the community, but have completed the project with many dear friends. The research has also brought me closer to my own estranged family. After so many years apart, my own process of reconnecting fractured lives has made me sensitive to the psychological challenges transnational migrants face as they are separated and reconnected over time and space.

To committee members Mark McGowan and Russell Kazal, thank you for your careful reading and editing of the thesis chapters. I am forever grateful for your sage advice and support at various points along the way. And to my supervisor Franca Iacovetta: special thanks for the critical comments and careful consideration of various ideas raised in the dissertation.

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Chapter One
Introduction

As I sat back and surveyed the remnants of the feast prepared especially for my introduction to a recent female migrant to Toronto, I could not help but reflect on the importance of food in restoring cohesion to the fractured community of Iraqis in the act of breaking bread. Present at the meal (prepared exclusively by the male executives of the Assyrian-Canadian Federation), were myself (a British-Iraqi researcher), and the interviewee (a Sunni refugee woman from Mosul). The men insisted on clearing the plates as the interviewee and I sat back and began to discuss my thesis research and interests in Iraqi diasporic women. Recorder in place, I began the interview as the men shuffled to the next room and lingered, pretending not to listen to our conversation. Emboldened by the camaraderie I felt as we shared the meal, I began to ask the interviewee about how the different ethno-religious groups fit into Iraqi nationalism. Looking over at the bowl of bamieh\(^1\) at the end of the table, she replied,

Iraq is like this dish. If you put many things together it is not plain and it keeps getting more delicious. In Iraq you have different labels, yes, but these all belong to the same dish. Without one of these ingredients, the dish will not taste good anymore. All of the parts of the dish are different but they are all important. After the war, the people were not together as an Iraqi community, some people their mind is changed. When they leave Iraq now they are trying to get their own rights for Kurds and Chaldeans. If Iraqi people start to thing of themselves as Iraqi again it will be better. Iraqis have to stop thinking of themselves selfishly by ethnic group, because really we are all part of the same dish, and we are all Iraqi.\(^2\)

Considering the central role of food in Iraqi culture, this metaphor is particularly helpful in illustrating the diversity and inter-connectedness of ethno-religious groups in Iraq.

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\(^1\) Bamieh is a Middle Eastern lamb and okra stew.

\(^2\) Interview with author, Toronto, January 23\(^{rd}\), 2010.
This description of Iraq’s ethno-religious diversity is also a pointed discourse on the complex articulation of ‘Iraqi’ identity, and how the meaning of this term shifts over time according to the political and social situations of ethnic and religious Iraqis both in the homeland and in diaspora. Drawing upon the ideal of a communal and collective memory of Iraqi past, Sunni women (like the interviewee) stressed the importance of maintaining a cohesive national identity, despite the fact that minority groups have not always been afforded basic human rights in Iraq. The interviewee’s positive illustration of how ethnic groups contribute to making a richer ‘Iraqi’ nation does not, however, resonate in the interviews of Kurdish, Chaldean and Shi’i women who faced trauma and exile at the hands of the repressive Saddam Husayn’s autocratic regime (1979-2003). The description of changing mindsets in the aftermath of the U.S. invasion of 2003 represents the fractures along religious, political and ethnic lines that tear at Iraq’s social fabric, and threaten the promise for future stability. But these divisions are not a product of the recent invasion, rather they are the culmination of divisions, prejudices and oppressions that pre-date the Ba’th regime and have in many ways become accepted, if misunderstood, parts of collective historical memory. In diaspora, dispossessed ethno-religious Iraqi groups become increasingly vocal as they rally behind their communities, and attempt to carve out a place within the ‘multiculturalisms’ of the host countries into which they resettle. These are no longer parts of a cohesive dish; they are the disparate and scattered ingredients of a global diaspora, unable and often unwilling to coexist as one community.

With a view to exploring how women’s national and ethno-religious identities, as well as socio-religious hierarchies, are contested and re-conceived in the diaspora, the dissertation examines how Toronto and Detroit have become primary sites of resettlement for Iraqis over the past three decades, attracting successive waves of migrants seeking
refuge within existing networks of family and friends. As Iraqi women negotiate a place
within these existing networks, the politics of generation are heightened as they struggle to
reconstruct family and identity amidst the pressures from networks in the homeland,
Western ideals of family and womanhood, and codes of conduct imposed from within their
ethnic and religious communities. Engaging the work of Canadian and American migration
and feminist scholars, my research facilitates a new dialogue that bridges discourses of
multiculturalism and diasporic peoples in both Canada and the U.S., engendering a
transnational approach to the study of ethno-religious Iraqi communities.

At the center of my research is a discussion of how Iraqis construct identity, and how
the category of ‘Iraqi’ is a complex, misused and often misunderstood term. Iraq’s history
of oppression and persecution of ethnic and religious groups has informed the ways in
which these communities migrate, settle and interact outside the homeland. This is
particularly important to understand in the context of Iraqi migrations to Canada and the
U.S. because the population statistics are difficult to determine with any degree of
accuracy.³ The historian’s task of tracing migrant populations over time in the context of

³ Population statistics for Iraqi communities in Canada and the U.S. are complicated by the ways in which
immigrants of Iraqi descent are categorized. The “Arab Population: Census 2000 Brief,” provided the first
report on population statistics for Arab Americans conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau. In 1997, the Office
of Management and Budget revised the federal standards for the classification of race and ethnicity noting a
lack of consensus regarding the definition of the ‘Arab’ ethnic category, and expressing the need for further
study to improve data on this population group. In question 10 of the census, recipients were asked “what is
the person’s ancestry or ethnicity?” Ancestry, defined as the national origin according to the census, could
also be supplemented by a second category, including “other”. As I discuss in chapter four of this dissertation,
the Chaldean Federation of America asked community members to refrain from listing their ethnicity as ‘Iraqi’
and instead identify themselves as ‘Chaldean’ under the ‘Other’ category. Since the U.S. decennial census
does not provide information on numbers according to religious affiliation, these Chaldeans who make up a
substantial portion of Iraqis in the U.S. are not included in the total population statistics for Iraqis as an ethnic
group. According to the best estimates of the 2000 U.S. Census, the number of Americans of Iraqi descent
(including permanent residents) rose from 23,212 in 1990 to 37,714 in 2000 (an increase of 63 per cent
overall). These numbers do not include Chaldean-Iraqis, whose numbers in Michigan alone are estimated to
be well over 100,000 by 2005 (see footnote 3). In addition, Kurds are not provided a separate ethnic category,
and their numbers become included in ‘Arab’ or ‘Other’ categories. By 2000, Iraqis in the U.S. were
concentrated in three states: Illinois, Michigan and California, and are estimated to make up 3.2% of the total
Arab-American population. (Excluding those listed as ‘Arab/Arabic’ and ‘Other Arab’ in the Census.)
Iraqi immigration to North America is challenging, owing to the ways in which immigrants are officially recorded as well as the ways in which Iraqis themselves have chosen to identify in diaspora. In both the American and Canadian federal Census, ethno-nationality characterizes the ways in which immigrants are grouped, and religious affiliation is often

more detailed study of Michigan state using U.S. Census data in addition to community studies, suggests that 10 per cent of Michigan’s Arab-American population is currently made up of Iraqis and 17 per cent is comprised of Assyrian/Chaldean (of which most are likely of Iraqi heritage). According to the Arab American Institute, one third of Michigan’s Arab American population is foreign born, and many of these are new Iraqi refugees who have arrived since the Gulf War of 1991 and the U.S. invasion of 2003.

In Canada, similar problems exist in the ways in which ethnic groups are organized by national origin. Estimates suggest that from 1945 to 1975, approximately 200 Iraqis arrived in Canada. The most substantial emigration began after 1979 when Saddam Husayn became President of Iraq. From 1975 to 1992, Census Canada recorded 6,472 Iraqis living in Canada, reflecting approximately 3.5 per cent of the Arab immigrant population of Canada. The greatest concentration of Iraqis, and of Arabs in general, has been in Ontario. Toronto and vicinity (Mississauga, Hamilton and Markham) received almost 55% of all Arab immigrants to Ontario, including 76% of all Ontario-bound immigrants from the Levant during this period. By 1991, Census Canada recorded 4,790 Iraqis living in Canada, of which 3,525 were of Iraqi ancestry and 1,265 were listed as partial Iraqi ancestry. Community sources, however, suggest that by the mid-1990s, owing to the large numbers of Shi’is and Kurds migrating to Canada to escape persecution, population numbers may have been upward of 25,000 people.

According to UNHCR statistics, 183,000 Iraqi refugees were settled in industrialized/First World countries between 1990 and 2001, of which 31,550 settled in the U.S. and 12,220 settled in Canada. These numbers help to explain the discrepancies in the numbers of estimated Iraqis in Canada in particular. However, these statistics do not completely satisfy these differences. Some sources suggest that Iraqis fleeing persecution during the 1990s may have concealed their national identity, or that they may have identified with other groups such as the Chaldeans, Assyrians or Kurds, thus altering the numbers of Iraqis listed by Census Canada. In addition, between the years 1997 and 2001, 3,040 asylum applications were granted for the U.S., and an additional 1,030 were granted for Canada. By 2007, the numbers of Iraqi asylum seekers had risen to 6,000 in the U.S. and 4,000 in Canada. Despite the increase in asylums granted, there has been significant controversy in the U.S. especially, as well as in Europe and Canada concerning the small numbers of Iraqis that have been admitted in the aftermath of the current war. By 2008, it was estimated that there were over 4 million Iraqis displaced worldwide, and 2.3 million of these were internally displaced people, forced from their homes during the most recent war, some of which were repatriated following the U.S. invasion. There are also large numbers of Iraqis that have been forced to return to Iraq due to their financial situation, but unable to return to their original homes, and are also part of this internally displaced group. The U.S. is estimated to have employed over 100,000 Iraqis from 2003 to 2009, and only a fraction of these have been granted asylum in the U.S. following the persecution and torture they experienced as a direct result of their work with U.S. troops and contractors. These numbers are compiled from a range of sources, including: Employment and Immigration Canada Reports, 1981-1992; Census Canada, 1991; Statistics Canada, 1991; G. Patricia de la Cruz and Angela Brittingham, “The Arab Population: 2000, Census 2000 Brief,” U.S. Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration, U.S. Census Bureau, File 4, 2000; “Statistics on Displaced Iraqis Around the World: Global Overview,” UNHCR (April 2007); “Iraqi Refugee and Asylum-Seeker Statistics,” UNHCR (March 2003); Farid E. Ohan and Ibrahim Hayani, The Arabs in Ontario: A Misunderstood Community, (Toronto: Near East Cultural and Educational Foundation of Canada, 1993); Joseph Sassoon, The Iraqi Refugees: The New Crisis in the Middle East, (London: I.B. Taurus, 2009); “2005-2009 American Community Survey Rolling 5-Year Average,” U.S. Census Bureau; http://www.migrationinformation.org/usfocus/display.cfm?ID=113; http://www.multiculturalcanada.ca/ecp/content/iraqis.html; http://aai.3cdn.net/961a14b93140d532a5_yym6iyilb.pdf.
categorized as ‘other’, causing the total group population numbers to be somewhat misleading, especially in the case of Iraqi-Americans.

In overcoming these difficulties, the dissertation traces important distinctions within the Iraqi communities in Toronto and Detroit according to the different waves of ethnic migrations. In both Canada and the U.S., the first groups of Iraqis to migrate during the period 1945 to 1979 were Iraqi Christians. The category of ‘Christian Iraqi’ is alone complex, and includes significant divisions, since Assyrians, Syriacs, Chaldeans and Armenians have a long and controversial history of identity politics and claims to indigeneity in ancient Mesopotamia, predating more recent sectarian divides. My discussion of the earliest Iraqi migrants to settle in North America focuses on the Chaldean community in Detroit and addresses ways in which identity is negotiated among second and third generation American-born Chaldean women who are caught between traditional and Western modes of acceptable female behaviour and womanhood. Migrations of Iraqi Shi’is and Kurds following the Gulf War and failed political uprisings (1990-1991) have formed networks of Arab Muslim Iraqis in both Detroit and Toronto. Suffering persecution at the hands of the Sunni Ba’th party, many of these political refugees fled to avoid compulsory military service during the period of conflict with Iran (1980-1988).

4 This community is unique amongst Middle Eastern Christian groups since most of its members can trace their family history back to the village of Telkaif (Telkeppa) in the Northern province of Mosul, located near the ancient Assyrian ruins of Nineveh. From a community of only twenty-three people in 1923, Michigan’s Chaldean population has grown to well over 100,000 by 2005, concentrated mainly in the Detroit metropolitan area. The most accurate population statistics for Chaldeans in Michigan can be found in the works of sociologist Mary Cey Sengstock, who has worked with community organizations over the past thirty years and produced a solid foundation of work on this community. Mary Cey Sengstock, “Iraqi-Christians in Detroit: An Analysis of an Ethnic Occupation,” in Arabic-Speaking Communities in American Cities, edited by Barbara Aswad, (New York: Center for Migration Studies and Association of Arab-American University Graduates, 1974), 21-38; Mary Cey Sengstock, Chaldean Americans: Changing Conceptions of Ethnic Identity, 2nd ed., (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1999; Mary Cey Sengstock, Chaldeans in Michigan, (Michigan State University Press, 2005).

addition, Iraqis leaving during the 1990s were fleeing the worsening economic conditions resulting from the crippling international sanctions imposed by the U.S. The third and most recent wave of Iraqi immigrants to North America are predominantly highly educated Sunni Muslims, who left Iraq after 2003 due to the breakdown of security and basic necessities since the U.S. invasion. The thesis will thus explore Chaldean, Kurdish, and Sunni and Shi’a Muslims who have settled in North America as a result of three different immigration waves.

In examining how these different groups of ethno-religious Iraqis remember, retell and re-invent identity in diaspora, the chapters address the historical dimensions of ethnic and religious difference through women’s memories of the past. They explore as well the ways in which communities organize and continue to participate in homeland politics, and how new generations of young Iraqi women negotiate femininity, sexuality and religious tradition as hyphenated Americans and Canadians. The thesis offers a contribution to the significant bodies of work on Arab and Muslim communities in the U.S., and to a lesser degree in Canada, which lack comprehensive studies of Iraqis in North America. What might be considered ‘invisible immigrants,’ Iraqis in many cases evade detection by the broader Canadian and American population who are unaware of the growing communities of Iraqis forming in urban (and increasingly suburban) regions of Southern Ontario and Michigan. Previous studies on Iraqi groups have to some extent isolated individual ethno-religious communities, as is the case of the older community of Chaldeans in Detroit. This dissertation provides an important and much needed study of ethno-religious migrations of Iraqis, how these groups interact (or fail to) with each other, and how difference (ethnic and

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religious) continues to inform identity, acculturation, and the ways in which they negotiate their ongoing relationship with the homeland as diasporic citizens.

The focus of the dissertation is on Iraqi women who have been written out of the historical record and continue to struggle for access to equal rights in Iraq’s legal and political systems. In diaspora, these female migrants are empowered by the new freedom of speech to address the past, re-invent their position in the community, and redefine their relationship to ‘traditional values’ including religious observance, female modesty and family reputation. The destabilizing of nationalism within global migrations of capital and people forces us to look beyond national ties in an effort to understand the “spaces of dynamic encounter,” mapped in the liminal state between nations, languages, and cultures.

The ‘politics of dislocation’ cause these women to become trapped between masculine ideals of nationalism and nation-states, and mainstream feminist ideals, that Orientalize and re-colonialize their identities. Diasporic religious women are in many ways caught between

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oppressive systems of patriarchy (Arab and Western) and imperialisms that victimize them, silencing their subjectivities and marginalizing them from the historical record. This dissertation strives to make Iraqi women active participants in the communal remembering of Iraq’s past and also agents in the re-fashioning of their diasporic identity, asserting their importance in locating Iraqi immigrant communities within Canadian and American multicultural societies.

In an effort to liberate these voices and understand how Iraqi women reconstruct identity in diaspora and continue to engage in redefining collective identities, the dissertation draws upon transnational feminist theories that bridge the gap between feminisms and oppressive nationalisms. Karen Caplan and Inderpal Grewal’s articulations of transnationality within the context of nation, sexuality, and class, urge feminists examining diasporic women to look beyond gender in studies of postcolonial identities. The transnational feminist approach adopted here similarly scrutinizes how gender intersects with nationalism/national origin, race, class and ethnicity in order to understand how “multiple, overlapping and discrete” forms of oppression are internalized and later performed in migrant women’s engagement with host countries and the communities into which they are integrated.9 Ultimately, transnational feminist studies like this one seek to redefine the concept of home beyond the masculine definitions offered by studies of diaspora and nation-states, and look toward the multiple and dynamic concepts of home and belonging that characterize the fluid identities of transnational migrant women.10

Diasporas are deeply gendered, thus women’s expressions of displacement and exile from their homes cannot be equated to that of men. Recording the oral histories of women helps us engage women’s authentic voices and access women’s subjectivities. Feminist research methods have corrected the power imbalance that tends to favour male-biased analyses, thereby giving equal weight to women’s experiences and their interpretations of those experiences.\textsuperscript{11} However, for too long feminist studies of women’s lives and subjectivities have privileged a Western, liberal, and secular construction of womanhood.\textsuperscript{12} As Chandra Mohanty, Lila Abu-Lughod and others have argued, a feminist methodology employed to understand women on their terms has been tinged with imperial overtones, casting religious third world women as victims in need of saving.\textsuperscript{13} As a female researcher interviewing Third World refugee women, both individually and in groups, my access to them enables me to help correct the imbalance of authority and power embedded in Western feminist scholarship. In order to do so, it is necessary to construct an alternative space within the interview, where Iraqi women can articulate new understandings of their subjectivities and experiences.\textsuperscript{14}

As an historian of mixed-Iraqi heritage, I have worked from within Iraqi communities in North America and the Middle East to carry out my project, drawing on personal and professional contacts in an effort to record the lived experiences and memories of Iraqi women from diverse ethnic, religious and class backgrounds. When I started interviewing women in Toronto, I relied heavily on contacts accessed through family and friends. These

connections were an essential stepping-stone into the community, enabling me to establish a foundation for the dissertation research. Accessing the female voice is a difficult task, and this is often (though certainly not exclusively) true of groups migrating from the ‘Third World’ where women are more isolated upon settlement in North America.\footnote{See also, Vijay Agnew, “A Diasporic Bounty: Cultural History and Heritage,” in Diaspora, Memory, and Identity: A Search for Home, ed., Vijay Agnew, (Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 171-187; Pamela Sugiman, “Memories of Internment: Narrating Japanese-Canadian Women’s Life Stories,” in Diaspora, Memory, and Identity: A Search for Home, ed., Vijay Agnew, (Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 48-81; Isabel Kaprielian-Churchill, “Odars and ‘Others’: Intermarriage and the Retention of Armenian Ethnic Identity,” in Sisters or Strangers?: Immigrant, Ethnic, and Racialized Women in Canadian History, eds., Marlene Epp, Franca Iacovetta and Frances Swyripa, (Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 341-365; Shahnaz Khan, Zina, Transnational Feminism, and the Moral Regulation of Pakistani Women, (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press, 2006).} These personal connections can be limiting, however, since the sample of interviewees is skewed in favour of relationships formed within specific subgroups (religious, ethnic or class) of women. This was indeed the case when I began my research in 2007, accessing women through personal contacts. After conducting an initial round of interviews with family friends and contacts, I was able to diversify my participant group with the assistance of immigration councilors and aid workers at governmental and non-profit organizations such as the National Center for Human Rights (Amman), the Arab Community Center for Social Services (Detroit), the Arab Community Center of Toronto, and the Iraqi-Canadian Society of Ontario. From 2008 to 2011, I conducted interviews with 102 women in individual and group settings, in homes, businesses and coffee shops in Amman, Toronto and Detroit. In addition, interviews with 22 male and female counselors and community workers affiliated with key organizations that assist in the resettlement and integration of Iraqi migrants were also conducted in these locations. This unique archive of oral histories constitutes the core of the primary research, and provides the basis from which the dissertation engages themes of historical memory, identity, generations and diasporic citizenship.
This is not to say that archival sources are not important to the research. Indeed, as a trained immigration historian, I began my research in the archives. But after more than a year and a half of struggling with limited resource collections and the increasingly paralyzing censorship of documents pertaining to Arabs and Muslims, I was left with a small but nonetheless important body of supplemental archival material. For Iraqis in Canada, I was able to draw upon immigration records and statistics relating to the recruitment and selection of refugee groups from Iraq in government collections at Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa. These collections provided useful background information about the ways in which ethnic and religious Iraqis were admitted to Canada at different periods, mostly in response to mitigating circumstances in the homeland and as a result of the campaigning of community members already settled in Canada. Since the National Archives and Records Administration records in Chicago did not identify Iraqis according to ethnicity, this eliminated the possibility of conducting quantitative and comparative analyses on ethno-religious immigration flows to Michigan with those groups admitted to Southern Ontario. The Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan housed valuable material documenting the economic and social service assistance provided to Iraqis in multiple locations in metropolitan Detroit, in addition to personal collections archived by prominent community activists. Used in conjunction, government and personal collections provided an important (if somewhat patchy) record of migration flows from Iraq, settlement patterns, and community organizing in the Detroit region. Ultimately, both Canadian and American statistical data and analysis of Iraqi migrants and settlement

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16 RG 76 and RG 25, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.
17 Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services fonds, 98121 Bd 2, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; Aliya Hassen papers, 1910-1991’, 9820 Aa 2, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
patterns failed to distinguish between Arabs, Muslims and Iraqis. It is precisely this essentializing of collective identities and the collapsing of divisions within Iraqi communities that the thesis addresses - an area little understood by federal policy makers or the media. Although these archival and government records are an important foundation for this study, they in no way illuminate the experiences of Iraqi migrant women, nor do they address ethno-religious difference which has shaped Iraqi settlement and the emergence of distinct communities in North America.

Drawing from this diverse source base, the dissertation engages with four interrelated and overlapping fields of research: histories of diasporic and transnational migrants in North America, Arab and Muslim diasporas, Third World feminisms, and oral history and memory studies. Adopting a multi-disciplinary approach while maintaining a historical framework, the thesis examines Iraqi women and their communities from 1980 to present in Toronto and Detroit within the wider context of the global movement of migrants from Iraq and the Middle East to the West. A relatively new migrant group in North America, Iraqis are not yet a well-studied group within the broader and extensive literature on ethnic and religious immigrant communities in Canada and the U.S. Building upon these important ethnic and racial studies of immigrants in North America, the dissertation draws broadly from the fields of cultural and geographical anthropology, feminist studies, and sociology in order to situate Iraqi women within an historical framework of migration and settlement in North America as well as modern diasporic migrations from the Middle East. Approaching this study through the lens of history highlights the legacy of colonialism in Iraq and the manipulation of history during the Ba'th regime. It also reveals how these forces have compelled different waves of Iraqis to seek refuge in Canada and the U.S., and how ethno-
religious communities take form. Ultimately it also allows us to scrutinize how women remember and retell their past.

North American Migration, Diasporic and Transnational Histories

My long and circuitous route to this multi-disciplinary study of Iraqi women began with an early graduate education in North American migration, ethnic, and transnational labour studies. These works have helped inform many of my assumptions and inquiries into migrant networks, immigrant communities, and gendered interactions. My research is clearly situated within social history and feminist studies of migration, but I also integrate tools and ideas from diaspora and transnational studies, memory and oral history studies, and the complex theoretical mappings of Third World and postcolonial feminisms.

The field of migration studies has influenced the study of national histories over the past four decades, and has in turn been shaped by the new and developing fields of transnationalism and diaspora studies. In its infancy, the study of immigration in U.S. and Canadian history was dominated by the study of the national. Early work on immigrants, such as that of Oscar Handlin, explored immigrant lives within the national context of the host country.\(^\text{18}\) Responses to Handlin’s seminal work challenged this one-dimensional approach to the study of migrants, by expanding their focus to include links back to the homeland and to global networks of migrants.\(^\text{19}\)


During the sixties, the rise of the ‘immigrant paradigm’ in American and Canadian migration literature “challenged scholars to rethink linkages between national history and the histories of sub-national ethnic groups and to write the histories of particular ethnic groups.”\(^{20}\) Frank Thistlewaite and others began to study the process of migration, including return migration, with a focus on how these trans-migrants retained their cultural ways in America.\(^{21}\) The focus in migration studies shifted away from a discussion of immigrants and emigrants, to one of migrants and the complexities of linkages back and forth across national borders.\(^{22}\) The ‘immigrant paradigm’ gave rise to a growing volume of community studies focused on ethnic and racial groups, which traced links to and from the homeland. These early studies were mostly labour histories of European emigrant networks that explored the ways in which employment and labour drove migrants to become immigrants, and subsequently to settle and form communities in North America.

The “new” American immigration historians introduced ethnic and community studies into the national historical discourse. Challenging Handlin’s seminal work, which laid out an assimilationist model for immigrants, Rudolph Vecoli and others stressed the central importance of ethnic persistence and the multiple ways of ‘being American’. In challenging the accepted hypotheses that immigrants eventually became “American”, these “new” immigration historians used oral history to create new archives that spoke to multi-ethnic identities and histories, and they trained a new generation of ethnic historians to draw


upon “alternate” archives in the study of ethnic communities.\textsuperscript{23} Scholarship on the “new ethnicity” influenced studies of ethnicity and immigration in Canadian history, as advocates of this new approach to immigration history “outlined an inherently multicultural Canada.”\textsuperscript{24} Reflecting the influence of Vecoli, to varying degrees, the ethnic and working-class histories that followed served to highlight the importance of ethnic subjects to American and Canadian history.\textsuperscript{25} Feminist scholars of migration sought to correct the early focus on men and their migration experiences.\textsuperscript{26} They explored the gendered experiences of migration, settlement


and community activism in women-centered social histories of migrant women. Franca Iacovetta, Donna Gabbacia and others have given rise to an increasingly interdisciplinary field of study, drawing upon social, labour, feminist, and transnational histories in their mapping of migrant women’s lives. These transnational projects have further diversified the national histories of Canada and the U.S., tracing the gendered experiences of men and women and their interactions with and within nation-states.

The focus on diaporic links and transnational networks of migrants has had a significant and lasting impact on the field of immigration history. The terms ‘diaspora’ and ‘transnational’ are constantly being redefined as new scholarship on migrant groups challenges previous assumptions about nations and nationalisms, diasporic citizenship.

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30 With the rise of nation-states in the early nineteenth century, the term ‘diaspora’ became coterminous with the exile, suffering, and displacement of the Jews from Babylon. This first use of ‘diaspora’ (galut), dates back to a third century BCE translation of the Bible into Greek by a Jewish scholar. The Greek definition of ‘diaspora’ was a derivation of sperio (to sow) and the preposition dia (over), thus connoting migration and colonization, Denise Helly, “Diaspora: History of an Idea,” The ‘Muslim’ Diaspora and Research on Gender:
and the framing of the ‘Other’.  

William Safran and others have argued that the fluid position of ethnic diasporas in relation to host countries and homelands has a significant impact on the construction of diasporic identity. The definition of ‘diaspora’ that I use to discuss ethnic Iraqis in the dissertation is based on the basic premise of multiple communities of dispersed peoples linked across national borders. This definition allows us to focus on the constructive potential of ‘diaspora’ as “mediating cultures” rather than necessarily implying forced dispersal, exile, and loss. Although the exile motif is an important theme in Iraqi female narratives and the ways in which they imagine their place in relation to Iraq. Diasporic identities can therefore be defined according to the multiple ways in which migrants integrate and resist the practices of the host countries into which they settle. The definition helps me frame the discussion of different ethnic Iraqi communities within the historical context of their forced dispersals from the homeland.

My research promotes the idea that transnational movement is tied into the discourse of globalization and global migration, shaping new diasporic identities premised upon old nationalisms. I explore the politics of imagination in terms of how national rhetoric is used to construct diasporic imagination within ‘imagined geographies.’ By examining

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34 Ibid., 314; Al-Ali, Iraqi Women, 17.
35 Ibid., 308.
how allegiances to “old world centers, translate(s) into emergent new world nationalisms,” 38

I assess how these national ideologies and nationalisms are incorporated into the ways in which Iraqi women understand and adopt Canadian and American citizenship.

Ethnicity is central to my inquiry, since Iraqi migrations have been shaped by ethnic and religious persecutions and flows of migrants from the homeland. In recent years, ethnicity has been redefined within the field of diaspora studies. 39 In the case of Middle Eastern diasporas, the durability of ethnicities in certain socio-economic and political processes is heightened. Sami Zubaida demonstrates how ethnic homogeneity is not a cause but rather a result of a long history of centralized governments creating a ‘national unity’, achieved by “the political processes which facilitated centralization.” 40 Belonging to a nation or ethnic group, depends upon ideas of blood and belonging. 41 These characterizations of ethnic groups tend to categorize ‘new nationalisms’ as the reproducers of ethnic hatred and promote a ‘civic nationalism’ that is a more constructive end to reconciling rights and reconstructing community. 42 I draw upon this discourse of ‘new nationalism,’ using it to define ethno-nationalism and ethno-religious identity as it relates to migrants who formerly lived under the oppressive Ba’th regime in Iraq.

The trend towards mapping links between migrant communities and their countries of origin has become central to the field of immigration, diaspora and transnational

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The types of connections between migrants and their home countries have undergone a transformation as they expand to the farthest regions of the global economy, but as Nadje Al-Ali argues, they are also linked more closely by access to new technologies of communication, travel, and information. It is the ways in which transnational fields and activities are gendered that remains to be studied in detail. The different positions of women compared to men within prevailing gendered relations and ideals in the homeland and in the host country shape the ways in which transnational women engage with war, migration, violence and political mobilization.

With a view towards exploring gender, class and religion in the diasporic imaginations of women in Canada, interdisciplinary scholars such as Vijay Agnew are raising new challenges to earlier discourses on diaspora. Agnew explores how the reproduction of cultural phenomenon in diaspora informs the “racialized, sexualized, gendered and oppositional subjectivities, and shape[s] the cosmopolitan intellectual commitment of scholars.” Since the memory and identity of diasporic groups depend upon the “political unreality of one’s present home,” this can be surpassed only by the “ontological unreality of one’s place of origin.” Since this location, (imagined or real) promises “neither transcendence nor return,” diasporic individuals, like ethno-religious Iraqis, live in a permanent limbo between the metaphorical and physical ‘home’.

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46 Agnew, “Introduction,” 4,
within these anthropological and sociological theories of diaspora and transnationalism, this dissertation explores the ways in which memory and identity are gendered in diaspora, and the many and complex ways Iraqi women remain connected to the homeland.

New research on gender analysis and critical race has sought a more inclusive and multidisciplinary approach to the study of national histories. Studies of South Asian, Caribbean and other racialized women have influenced the ways in which historians trace the links between gender, race, nation, and citizenship, shedding light onto the differences in women’s experiences and their place within official multiculturalisms. These feminist and social histories have informed my work, but one limitation in this scholarship is the lack of engagement with religion or religiosity in the lives of migrant women of colour. Although religion is certainly not the primary lens through with social, and especially labour historians, have explored the lives of migrant women, there is a small but important body of work exploring women’s religious orders, feminine religiosity and the role of religion in the lives of migrant women. However, in presenting my work at academic conferences in Canada, I have encountered some resistance within the field of feminist

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migration towards engaging with religion as a central category of analysis. At the root of this resistance and sense of discomfort is the problem of fitting religious women of colour into theoretical models and methodologies designed for the study of European, or at the very least, non-Muslim women. Consequently, I borrow from the field of postcolonial and Third World feminisms, as well as Muslim and Arab diasporic studies, in order to establish a framework within which religious women can be addressed on their own terms.

*Arab, Middle Eastern and Muslim Diasporas*

Diaspora studies are increasingly concerned with differences of gender, class and religion, redefining ‘hybrid’ forms of identity. How displacement affects gender relations and family dynamics within diasporic groups is central to discussions of diasporic groups and transnational connections. Studies of Muslim diasporas address how the changing gender roles and lived experiences of men and women intersect with political and national allegiances as well as transnational monetary and labour networks. The study of Muslims in North America is founded in ethnic and anthropological studies of Middle Eastern diasporic groups, and of ‘Arabs’ and Arab communities settled in North America. The

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50 Ibid., 15.
uprisings associated with the ‘Arab Dawn’ in the Middle East has brought additional scrutiny to Muslim communities in diaspora. The dissertation engages with contemporary studies of Middle Eastern and Muslim diaspora, exploring Iraqis as part of these broader migrations of Arabs (Muslim and non-Muslim), and examining the extent to which Iraqi Muslims engage with a global religious community (*Umma*).

For some scholars, the concept of ‘Muslim Diaspora’ reinforces the homogenization of Muslims in the West, further exacerbating the trend amongst Western academics to overlook the diversity and difference within these communities. Haideh Moghissi challenges studies of homogenous ‘Islamic’ diasporas because they overlook the construction of geographically and socially distinct localities of ‘Muslim’ populations in Western metropoles. Defining diaspora as “an agent of social and cultural change as well as a political reaction to new realities,” Moghissi uses the term ‘Muslim diaspora’ to show how cultural or racial exclusion in the host country often leads to a politicized identity rather than vice-versa.

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56 Moghissi, *Introduction to Muslim Diaspora*, xvi.
religion, the second and third-generation in Canada, Britain and the United States take on a politicized Muslim identity.\textsuperscript{57}

Given the diversity within the global diaspora of Muslims, how then can we talk about them as one group? In the collection \textit{Diaspora by Design}, Haideh Moghissi, Saeed Rahnema and Mark J. Goodman argue that the “multiplicity and heterogeneity of migrants from Islamic cultures reflects immensely complex history and diversity of the Middle East and the vast Muslim world itself,” adding rhetorically, “what does a secular Ugandan man of Indian Muslim ancestry have in common with a practicing Shi’a women from Iraq or Pakistan…”\textsuperscript{58} Diverse communities of Muslims who often share a common geographical origin or ethnicity are not linked by nostalgic connections to the land of origin. Rather, as Moghissi and others argue, it is group-consciousness that brings them together in protest of their marginal location in the larger society in which they reside. Muslims in the West have become another example of a population against which ‘ethnic absolutism’ is applied – with destructive effects as we have seen in the growing violence and racial hatred against ‘Arabs’ and Muslims in North America since 9/11. Since ‘race’ can be ‘ethnicized’ and vice-versa, the interchangeability of these factors allows hostile host societies to construct homogenous and static ideas of ‘Islam’.\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., xvii. There are, of course, vast differences within groups that form what might be considered a ‘Muslim’ diaspora. Muslims are a highly diverse group, differentiated by religious sect, gender, generation, class, ethnicity and cultural practices. Their multiple identities are complex, woven into the fabric of the collective identities of nations into which they are born. One of the most important and misleading assumptions made about this group is that they are united by religious beliefs. Not only are there many schools of thought within each broad sect of Sunni and Shi’a, there is also a sizable population of non-religious or secular Muslims who identify with this community on the basis of culture or ethnicity rather than religion. The importance of these differences in addition to the ways in which they coalesce to form around a central Muslim community in Canada is addressed further in: Ahmad Yousif, \textit{Muslims in Canada: A Question of Identity}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed., (Ottawa: Legas, 2008).

\textsuperscript{58} Haideh Moghissi, Saeed Rahnema, and Mark J. Goodman, eds., \textit{Diaspora by Design: Muslims in Canada and Beyond}, (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 10-11.

Stuart Hall proposes that migrant experiences in diaspora are defined by the recognition of diversity within these communities, and not in spite of their differences. Since diasporic experiences are typically characterized by “sociocultural marginality, racialization, and denial of access to political and economic power,” the ‘ethnicity’ of groups that are ‘visible’ in the host country as a result of skin colour, religion, language, accent, etc., is absolute. This ‘ethnic absolutism’ maximizes cultural, social, and historical differences and assumes an unbridgeable, imaginary gap between specific groups that no amount of counter-evidence can bridge. In this sense, the homogenization of Muslim and Arab groups by policy makers and social service organizations has enabled them to become easy targets of racism. Interdisciplinary studies of critical race feminist theory challenge these racial prejudices, urging scholars to explore the powerful cultural practices that structurally exclude racialized minorities.

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61 Moghissi et al., *Diaspora by Design*, 6.
62 Fanon describes this kind of racism that links a black person to his ancestors’ experiences of slavery. In this sense, Muslims are homogenized by Western society as being an ethnic absolute, negating the diversity within this group, Franz Fanon, “The Fact of Blackness,” in *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans., Charles Lam Markmann, (New York: Grove Press, 1967); Gilroy, “The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity,” 51-52.
With significant exceptions, women from “different” cultural backgrounds have yet to become a truly active presence in the larger sociopolitical and literary landscapes of North American society. Shahnaz Khan suggests that in order to understand Muslim women’s participation in North American society, we should look to multiculturalisms’ rich and complex ideological and policy implications as “the backdrop against which Muslim women’s negotiations takes place.” She adds that “in moving away from assimilationist paradigms…multicultural policies continue to be a positive step in the validation of ‘difference.’”

But by focusing on difference, aren’t we simply reinforcing the marginalization of ‘Other’ culture and the outsider status of Arab and Muslim immigrants in North American society? Ali Rattansi argues that although multiculturalism frames a place within which diversity can prosper and communities can foster an identity, difference is often defined as the superfluous elements of cultural identity. Multiculturalism assumes that ethnic communities are homogenous and static, unchanging over time. Muslim women are thus stereotyped in one of two ways – they are either actively promoting religion or they are the victims of patriarchal religious ideologies.

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One danger of grouping Muslims as a ‘religious diaspora’ is that it draws all Muslim men and women into the *Umma* or religious community, perpetuating these homogenizing efforts. Some migrants are drawn towards this idea of a larger Muslim community, often intensifying their religious identity in diaspora. In the case of young Iraqi women, this religious identity is performed through the act of wearing the *hijab*. As Shahnaz Khan argues, the ‘proper’ behaviour of women is delineated according to those who meet the regulations of the collective, and those who fall outside this community. Symbolic and chaste women are at “the core of an identity politics”, and become the focus of extremists who attempt to assert social and sexual control over their bodies. Imposing a ‘Muslim’ community on female migrants in the West forces women into manufactured categories: Arab, Muslim, Third World women, ‘ethnic’, etc. Such categories, however, do matter. Thus the dissertation explores the different ways in which women’s identify within these and other categories, and counters the ‘ethnic absolute’ of Muslim women. It also explores the shifts in identity among different generations of women.

*Third World Feminisms: Towards a Gendered Perspective*

Feminist academics have played an important role in defining the ‘Third World’ both as geographic location and as a site of ‘particular socio-historical conjectures’. Since the 1990s, there has emerged a distinct feminist approach to the lives of ‘Other’ women. Who is considered part of the ‘Third World’, and why, and how women’s political struggles are necessarily ‘feminist’ are central questions in the emerging literature that speaks back to a Western feminist scholarship that victimizes women of colour. Chandra Talpade Mohanty,

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70 Ibid., 20.
who has been foundational in shaping this new approach to Third World women, suggests that the very meaning of the term ‘feminism’ is in constant contestation.\(^7\) By applying the term ‘Third World’ to an ‘imagined community’ of women facing oppositional counter-hegemonic struggles, Mohanty argues that we can find similar experiences that shape the lives of otherwise ‘different women.’\(^7\)

The growing body of work on women from the developing world engages feminist questions and places women’s experiences within a transnational context. Even as their histories and social locations differ, Mohanty argues that these ‘imagined communities’ of women are “woven together by the political threads of opposition to forms of domination that are not only pervasive but also systemic.”\(^7\) This is not to say that there is a form of “universal sisterood” that unites these women on the basis of gender, race or nationality, since these women and their communities are divided by many different factors, including nationality and class.\(^7\) Feminists in this field continue to struggle with ideological differences underlying definitions of ‘woman,’ ‘female’ and ‘feminist’. Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis argue that we must challenge our assumptions of patriarchy, since not all women are subjugated in the same way or to the same extent, even within the same society at any specific point in time.\(^7\) In employing a gendered and feminist perspective to examine Third World women, one cannot simply attribute their experiences to the affects of

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\(^7\) Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 11-16.

\(^7\) Mohanty, “Introduction,” 4.

\(^7\) Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Feminist Encounters: Location the Politics of Experience,” *Copyright 1* (Fall 1987), 30-44.

\(^7\) Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation*, 7.
biological sexual difference. Nor can we view them as passive recipients or non-participants in the determination of gender relations.\(^76\)

Ann Russo and others argue for the complex relationality that foregrounds the relationship between race and gender. For example, ideologies of womanhood are inherently linked to race and class as well as to sex. Or, as Dorothy Smith argues in the context of British-Indian relations, “systems of racial, class and gender domination do not have identical effects on women in third world contexts.”\(^77\) I draw upon these ideas, integrating also Mohanty’s argument that ‘woman’ as a universally coherent group must be deconstructed before we can begin to understand the ways in which race, religion, nation and patriarchy intersect across class lines and complicate women’s gendered experiences throughout history.\(^78\) As transnational feminists demonstrate, ‘women’ and ‘gender’ do not represent a shared experience across space and time. Instead, they recognize that the categories of gender, sexuality, class, race, ethnicity, and nationality are always constructed, reproduced and resisted through intersections with one another, and importantly - transnationally.\(^79\) Certainly, Iraqi women experience nation in very different ways because of their diverse class, religious, ethnic and geographic locations and backgrounds. Outside the homeland, their transnational lives re-shape their relationship to Iraq and to the receiving society, re-framing a new understanding of citizenship and belonging.

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\(^76\) Ibid., 8.
\(^78\) Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes,” 52-59.
Critical race feminists, including Sherene Razack, Sunera Thobani and others across North America, have “linked imperial and colonial racisms to the conceits of modern liberal states, which purport to be race neutral, colour-blind, and even post-racial, while also masking, reproducing, and even reinforcing historical inequities.”\(^{80}\) In the case of migrant women, as Himani Bannerji argues, the “dispossession of the body” in the popular media frequently serves to portray women of colour and Indigenous women as non-intellectual, emotional, mindless nurturers. Trinh T. Minh-ha also points out the fetishization of difference evident in the portrayal of these women: “we are the voice of difference they long to hear.”\(^{81}\) Critiquing these “unitary categories of gender, race, or class,” Bannerji and others call for an integrative analysis informed by feminist Marxist theory that race, class, and gender “operate simultaneously in the oppression of racialized women.”\(^{82}\) These concepts and analyses form the backdrop for this study of Iraqi women in North America.

The current situation in the Middle East has intensified popular and scholarly feminist debates about Muslim women’s rights, and whether they need ‘saving’ from their subjugation by Muslim men.\(^{83}\) New developments in gendered religious conservatism affect the autonomy, rights, mobility, health and livelihoods of women living in these volatile regions. They also affect the ways in which Western media and scholarship approaches and portrays these women in North America. As religious militias in Iraq hide behind a façade

\(^{80}\) Sherene Razack, Malinda Smith, and Sunera Thobani, “Introduction,” States of Race, 2; see also, Razack, Casting Out; Thobani, Exalted Subjects; Patricia J. Williams, Seeing a Color-Blind Future: The Paradox of Race, (New York: Farar, Straus and Giroux, 1998).

\(^{81}\) Minh-ha, Woman, Native, Other, quoted in Razack, Smith, and Thobani, “Introduction,” States of Race, 3.


of ‘honour’, they carry out violent public acts against women, re-inscribing patriarchal ideologies by policing their bodies and creating a climate of fear for women. In diaspora, Iraqi migrant women remain closely linked to family and friends in Iraq, and as I discuss in the final chapter, are affected by these conservative trends and the ongoing violence in the homeland.

Leila Ahmed and other ‘alternate feminists’ have sought to move away from ‘authentic’ Islam as an indigenous tradition and towards an inclusive approach to Muslim women in the Arab world. By adopting different frameworks within which Muslim women can be studied, Ahmed and others argue that we can free these women from the trappings of Western feminism as well as the colonial discourse in which they are victimized subjects of the state. In Canada, Shahnaz Khan has explored the performance of a hybrid identity in the narratives of Muslim migrant women. Drawing upon women’s words, Khan’s work emphasizes the fluid relationship between religion and culture, challenging fixed and static notions of Islam and Muslim women. As ‘hybridized’ subjects, women express new ways of identifying which complicate our entrenched ideas about Islam, and expand definitions of critical race/postcolonial feminisms.

Framing my research within these post-colonial and alternate feminist theories, I explore how Iraqi women express identity as Third World women in North America, and how their experiences as ‘Other’ shape the process of remembering. As I discuss in more

86 Shahnaz Khan, Aversion and Desire, xi.
87 Ibid., xx.
detail in chapter three, my own position as both an insider and an outsider in the Iraqi community shapes my understanding of both types of feminisms. Educated in the UK and in Canada, my feminist training has formed within the purview of Western ideas of ‘woman’, ‘gender’ and ‘feminism’. However, my involvement in the Iraqi community and my identity as part of an Iraqi family has very much shaped my approach to the research and especially the oral interviews with migrant women. Understanding how to effectively and sensitively conduct interviews that bridge the divide between cultures has been essential to the success of this project. I benefitted greatly from the example of other interdisciplinary feminist scholars, most importantly Nadje Al-Ali, whose work on Iraqi diasporic women has informed how I negotiate these boundaries. So, too, was learning to engage with women on their own terms, and as part of their respective communities.

Drawing upon alternate feminist ideas, my research attempts to contribute to opening up a new discourse on Arab and Muslims women in North America, one in which the veil is featured as central component through which to discuss culture and class, imperialism and nationalism and importantly, women as agents.

88 I am indebted to Nadje Al-Ali’s work on Iraqi women, and in particular her book *Iraqi Women: Untold Stories from 1948 to Present*. Although I read the book after I had started the process of interviewing women in Amman and Toronto, her personal reflections on accessing women through family and professional networks provided guidance at a time when I was starting to doubt my methods and confidence in the project. This book, as well as her many other important works on Iraqi women, have helped me immeasurably in my efforts to frame this project and interpret the interview material, as well as to locate my own voice within the research. It is my hope that I have taken up her call to build upon the foundation her work has established, and shed further light on how different ethnic and religious Iraqi women experience life in diaspora.

Central to the dissertation research is the growing body of work on oral history and memory studies and in particularly those that explore how historical memory and lived experiences shape individual and collective identities in diaspora. As Parin Dossa notes, “unless women’s stories advance patriarchal and imperialist interests, they are not heard, and these stories do not make their way into the national and the international corridors of power.”

This highlights the importance of conducting oral histories with Iraqi women in diaspora, since these narratives show us how identity is influenced by imperialist and hegemonic narratives of the nation. Following the advice of others who have sought to capture women’s words, the dissertation seeks to understand global movements of migrants and how their lives intersect with one another.

Alessandro Portelli reminds us that “oral sources are oral sources” and even the most literal translation is an interpretation of the actual recording. It is not just what is said officially and unofficially, but also what remains unsaid; what we might consider to be the unspoken transcript of the interview that provides the key to unlocking meaning in recorded narratives. Chapter three discusses how dual narratives are formed in interviews with Iraqi women, the hybridity of Iraqi diasporic women reinforces a ‘third space’ as a site for understanding.

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of resistance and negotiation. Radhakrishnan’s concept of hybridity as being at once physical, psychological, geographic and cultural is particularly poignant for me as a hybrid First-Third World researcher who belongs on the margins of the Iraqi community. The ‘third space’ thus becomes a means of exploring identity and memory, eliminating or at least reducing the “simultaneous alienation that occurs at the nexus of desire and aversion.”

Julie Cruikshank points out that in the process of listening to women’s narratives, we must pay attention to the ways in which storied lives are translated across boundaries, both physical and imagined. The analysis of narratives must account for the displacement of peoples across borders but also the transnational links that connect them back to the homeland. As Michael Benson so aptly notes, “our lives carry the imprint of what happens in our particular social world,” and this is the case for Iraqi women of varying ethnic and religious backgrounds. This intertwining of diaspora and memory in the works of feminist oral historians is best described through Mikhail Bakhtin’s quilting metaphor. Illustrating how theories are intertwined in a ‘diologic imagination,’ Bakhtin suggests that theories never stand alone, but rather are woven into each other, an idea similar to that of ‘transculturation’.

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94 Radhakrishnan, Diasporic Mediations.
95 Khan, Aversion and Desire, 3.
Anh Hua argues that, “because cultural memory is political, and because different stories and representations struggle for a place in history, memory is crucial to understanding a culture since it reveals collective desires, needs, self-definitions and power struggles.”99 As individuals and groups remember, they negotiate “the dynamic negotiations between past and present, the individual and the collective, the public and private, recalling and forgetting, power and powerlessness, history and myth, trauma and nostalgia, consciousness and unconsciousness, fears and desires.”100 The fragmented personal and collective experiences are all drawn together in the act of remembering. The counter-narratives of Iraqi women express individual memories and ideas that contradict these norms, illuminating the inter-subjectivities within their official and unofficial narratives. Recording these memories documents an alternate history, a means of remembering that informs new understandings of Iraq’s past, the place of women in the future of Iraq, and the role of women in diasporic Iraqi communities.

Memory studies complicate oral histories as sites of struggle, and help us understand how counter-memories are created. In diaspora and feminist studies, memory serves as the vehicle for transmitting history and traditions, as well as trauma and identity. Historians of transatlantic slavery, the Holocaust, and genocide draw upon memory to rebuild histories of abuses, trauma and mourning. In diaspora, exile and immigrant narratives frequently exhibit elements of these traumatic pasts, threaded together with attempts to rewrite home and belonging.101 As we ask who wants to remember and who’s past is preserved, it is also

important to consider the pluralistic model of memory since individual memory and cultural memory are highly selective and malleable. Given “the multiplicity of social identities and different memories,” suggests Peter Burke “a pluralistic model of memory is productive to understand the different ‘memory communities,’ the different uses of memory for different social groups.”

The idea of a multilayered memory community has helped oral historians think about how to distinguish between official and unofficial memories, and how unofficial memories of the past are in essence acts of resistance and protest. Feminists have drawn upon memory studies as a means of accessing silenced narratives. Hirsch and Smith argue that, “gender difference and the interrelation between gender, race, and class need to be considered in any understanding of memory, recollection, trauma, witness, and testimony.” In what some have called ‘counter-memorializing,’ a subjective memory can be introduced back into the collective remembrance. This is true not only when we read ‘against the grain’ but also in recognizing women’s knowledge production and the multiple meanings of silences. The feminist attempt to find ‘the testimonies of the disenfranchised’


103 Hirsch and Smith, “Feminism and Cultural Memory: An Introduction,” 11.
has led to the creation of rich archives of visual, performance, and oral histories that present oppositional memories to masculine dominant narratives.\textsuperscript{105}

In Iraqi women’s dual (and dueling) narratives, the degree to which the collective and hegemonic national narrative is internalized is qualified by the expression of a distinctly feminine counter narrative. The performance of the accepted narrative draws upon the gendered cultural norms expected of these women – in effect, women are obedient subjects of the nation-state.\textsuperscript{106} But in the ‘third space’, informal counter-narratives were shared and negotiated as women shaped individual memories of the past and also of their experiences as immigrants in new host countries. Engaging both the official and unofficial narratives helps us as oral historians to understand how private memories and individual identities are constructed within public collective memories of the national past and communal remembrances of trauma and persecution.

\textit{Thematic Chapter Breakdown}

The dissertation chapters explore thematic aspects of Iraqi diasporic women’s migration experiences, including the ways in which they remember and retell the past, and how they identify as part of ethno-religious communities in North America. Although this study examines Iraqi women and their community involvement in Toronto and Detroit from 1980 to the present, the dissertation chapters deal with the broader historical trends that have precipitated their migration from Iraq, establishing the foundations for existing


networks into which they integrate in North America. Amman is also included in discussions of migration and settlement because of its important role in facilitating refugees leaving Iraq since the Iran-Iraq war, and increasingly since 2003, as a primary site of migration. The period of migration from 1980 onwards has had the most significant impact on the formation of ethno-religious communities of Iraqis in North America, and globally as Christians, Kurds and Arab Muslims (Sunni and Shi’a) have fled persecution and civil unrest in the homeland. In light of the current upheavals across this region in Egypt, Lebanon, Libya, and Syria, these new and growing diasporic movements are fundamentally changing the formation of communities within these homelands (due to massive internal migrations), and in pre-existing sites of migration in North America, Europe, and the Near and Far East.

In order to understand the internal dynamics that have shaped historical memory in Iraq over the past three decades, chapter two explores the ways in which ethno-religious divides themselves are a product of historical differences manipulated by the Ba’th regime in its attempts to establish a new national identity for displaced Iraqis. Looking back over the last century of Iraqi history, it examines the ways in which a collective memory has been constructed through the ascension of a Sunni political elite and their influence over the development of a modern education curriculum. As tools of the ongoing project to rewrite Iraqi history in favour of a Sunni Arab past, women had an important role as the reproducers of the nation (biologically) and as the bearers of the national past through oral traditions.107 In their oral narratives, Iraqi women claim indigeneity in Iraq’s past through their identity as part of fractured ethno-religious communities in diaspora. This chapter

107 See also, Claudia Koontz, Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family and Nazi Politics, (London: Cape, 1986).
explores how these ethno-religious groups came to be part of the modern creation of Iraq as a nation, and how the historical memory of ethno-religious groups are situated within national and collective memory. Furthermore, it highlights how the manipulation of national memory has contributed to the heightened tensions both in Iraq and in diaspora, thereby complicating the idea of ‘Iraqi’ identity.

The oral histories of Iraqi women reveal their subjective experiences of trauma, loss and migration, and also how gender inequalities complicate the process of remembering and retelling the past. Chapter three charts the ways in which female narratives create a space in which women respond to the hegemonic and masculine national narrative of Iraqi past and create counter-narratives as testaments to their individual lived past, shaped by ethno-religious communal memories. Iraqi women negotiate between the imposed collective memory, a remnant of the Ba’th ‘Project for the Re-writing of History’, and their own lived experiences of trauma, loss, war and years of sanctions. Interviews with over a hundred Iraqi migrant women illustrate the repetition of two distinct narratives, one that speaks to the public remembrance of a collective national past, and the other a private remembrance informed by women’s responses to trauma, displacement and the demands of ethno-religious communities in diaspora.

It is as part of ethno-religious community organizations that many Iraqi women in established networks in Toronto and Detroit explore their new role in promoting ‘good citizenship’ to new migrants from the homeland. Chapter four examines how Iraqi women, as part of existing communities of ethno-religious Iraqis in North America, play complex roles within community organizations as administrators, counselors, mentors and executive members. As the chapter details, these women play an integral part in ethnic and

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government-funded organizations, providing familial support on an individual and intimate basis as well as professional and retraining counseling for refugees. In examining the extent to which ‘Iraqi’ collective identity exists, the chapter explores how ethnic divides are promoted as part of the political agendas of ethnic groups in diaspora. Detroit’s Chaldean community provides an illustrative case of how ethnic organizations maintain, and to some extent even enforce, ethnic divides within migrant communities outside the homeland. These ethnic organizations also help to bridge new and old understandings of citizenship, balancing dual citizenship and embracing a hyphenated identity. Through the act of voting as citizens of the homeland in diaspora, Iraqi expatriates maintain their connection to homeland politics and reinforce their identity as part of the nation-state. At the core of this chapter is a discussion of how ‘divided citizens’ such as diasporic Iraqi migrants are caught between the ethnic agendas of community activism and notions of ‘good citizenship’ in Canada and the U.S., and how this undermines or reinforces the goals of official and unofficial multicultural policies.

Finally, chapter five of the dissertation examines how the influence of homeland politics, Western feminist ideals, and internal policing from within migrant communities shapes expressions of femininity, female identity, and female modesty across generations of women in Toronto and Detroit. Reputation, modesty and virginity all feature prominently in the anxious reflections of Iraqi women in diaspora, and especially in the case of recent female refugees. In their struggle to negotiate between the continued links to the homeland, and the new cultures into which they integrate, Sunni Arabs in Toronto negotiate between Arab and Western ideals of womanhood and sexuality. In the lives of recent female

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refugees, “the phenomenon of ‘honor and shame’ bears a direct relation to family ties,” in continued links to homeland communities. Exploring the active role that these women play in maintaining reputation and protecting female modesty, this chapter examines how their actions reflect both traditional ideals of female roles in the family and community conveyed from the homeland, as well as the changing relationship of women from different ethno-religious groups to female modesty and the policing of the female body in diaspora. In the case of Chaldean women who are born and raised in America, the ties to tradition and the links to the homeland are far more tenuous and imagined in comparison to recent Sunni refugee women in Toronto. Addressing the public and private performance of religiosity, femininity, and modesty, the final chapter examines how the break with tradition in Detroit’s Chaldean community, and the conservative shift towards adopting the veil for young Sunni women in Toronto, illustrate how diasporic women confront, and in some cases, reconcile differing cultural perceptions of the female body in North America, in the process of (re) inventing new traditions.

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Chapter Two
Competing Narratives: Historical Memory, Ethno-religious Identity and Nationalism

Oral narratives of Iraqi diasporic women reveal that their memories are shaped by a sense of where they belong both as members of certain ethno-religious communities and as part of the imagined nation-state. Common origins and notions of ‘indigeneity’ are central to the current civil conflict regarding questions of belonging, nationalism and ethno-religious identity. At the core of this dissertation is the question of how ethno-religious difference has shaped the settlement and community development of Chaldean, Arab and Kurdish Iraqis in North America. In order to understand how these divisions operate in diaspora, we must first explore how and why these ethno-religious differences have developed over time in Iraq. In this chapter, I examine not only the historical context of ethnic groups in Iraq but, more importantly, address how these differences were manipulated by the Ba’th regime since 1968, and especially during Saddam Husayn’s rule, as it reconstructed ‘Iraqi’ identity through the oppressive force of the state. An examination of the competing narratives and interpretations of Iraq’s past within the histories of ethno-religious groups in Iraq also provides critical context for assessing Iraqi women living outside Iraq.

This chapter explores the absence of a cohesive Iraqi community in Toronto or Detroit. Are these disparate groups the result of historic divisions along ethno-national lines, or part of a new mobilization of ethno-religious groups seeking to claim a stake in the future of Iraq following the overthrow of a repressive and dictatorial regime? The chapter

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explores the possibility of overlapping identities and loyalties to ethno-religious groups, to an imagined ‘Iraqi’ identity, and to diasporic communities in North America seeking a political voice in Iraq’s future.

In his recent influential online essay, historian and political scientist Eric Davis annotated what he considers to be the “10 Conceptual Sins” in Analyzing Middle East Politics. The ‘first deadly sin’, according to Davis, is that analyses of Middle Eastern developments are frequently viewed through a presentist lens. The importance of understanding the historical context of this region is reinforced by the many erroneous assumptions made by Western governments entering conflicts in this region, and by the lack of consideration for the historical consciousness and memory of colonial exploitations and failed incursions.112 Equally important on Davis’s list is the overuse of the ‘ethno-confessional model’ as a narrow lens through which to understand Middle Eastern cultures to the exclusion of numerous other essential factors. This model of analysis distorts the relationships of ethnic and religious sectarian groups over time and reinforces the region as a violent and dangerous place. Furthermore, it presupposes that Iraqis have a “genetic” proclivity towards ethno-confessional conflict.113 This idea condemns any hope of positive development in Iraq’s struggle towards democratic government and distorts studies of the modern nation-state. Others, including Suad Joseph, argue that it is the very nature of sectarianism that Western scholars of this region fail to understand. Sectarianism “is about how ‘differences’ are constructed; because people can believe they are very different when they are not.”114 Therefore, it is not as much about religious or ethnic difference as it is

112 http://new-middle-east.blogspot.ca/2009_01_01_archive.html
113 Ibid.
about who believes these differences and how these beliefs are situated within their ideological worldview. This chapter takes up the call to “destabilize” the standing categories of analysis. Rather than simply assuming a situation of conflict between these groups, it seeks to understand the history of change over time between ethno-religious groups in Iraq, how they have been integrated into the modern nation-state, and what characterizes the cleavages so evident in the modern migrations from Iraq to North America.

The Political Development of Iraq: Ottoman, British, and Revolutionary Forces

It is important here to briefly review the historical trajectory of political development in Iraq, tracing the progression from the Ottomans to British governance, monarchy to authoritarian regime. Ottoman rule in Bayn al-Nahrain (Mesopotamia, later the Kingdom of Iraq) lasted from the sixteenth century until the British occupation in 1917, extending a legacy that influenced the legal, political, cultural, and educational institutions of Iraq. During the period of Ottoman rule, this region was divided into three provinces: Basra, Baghdad and Mosul. Despite the influence of the Ottomans over the institutional framework of the provinces, they were unable to exercise central control over this region until Midhat Pasha, governor of Baghdad (1869-1872), modernized the bureaucratic government. During his governorship, Pasha as part of the ‘Young Ottomans rule’ instituted a new centralized administrative system, reasserting the borders of the Iraqi provinces and appointing for the first time administrators and elected representatives. Land formally held under a system of communal tribal ownership was by the end of the century registered as the personal property of the leading families of various tribal groups. With this
newfound wealth and power, tribal shaykhs now posed a significant threat to Ottoman rule in the provinces, which was further challenged by a series of intermittent rebellions involving dispossessed tribal members from 1849 to 1905. During this period of land tenure transformations, Pasha established the foundations for a secular education system in Iraq, the effects of which are discussed below.

Baghdad increasingly became the centre of administrative power in Iraq, controlling the land tenancy, military strength, and the intelligentsia of Ottoman administration in this region. Towards the end of the century, the ascension to the throne of Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876-1909) suspended the constitution and abruptly ended many of the reforms instituted by the Young Ottomans. The Sultan cultivated ties to prominent tribal leaders in an effort to reassert control over the wealth of the provinces, reaffirming traditional hierarchies and fuelling the rise of the Young Turk movement throughout the empire. Along with this centralized administration came a greater engagement with the politics of the Ottoman state, as the “language and the proper sphere of political activity were becoming more generally recognized, but also more widely contested.” The Young Turk revolution of 1908 led to the creation of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) in Iraq. The CUP helped strengthen the political engagement of the growing numbers in the three provinces with a noticeable increase in club and society affiliations, as well the distribution of newspapers and political publications.


116 The establishment of the military academies and the law college were especially critical, since these offered lower-middle and middling classes social mobility through higher education, and many of these graduates went on to become a new generation of Iraq’s leaders in the period following the First World War. Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, 2nd ed., (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2004), 6-8.


Despite the CUP’s efforts to centralize provincial controls, the three provinces remained in many respects administratively separate entities. Although these regions were interconnected in terms of their administration as well as transportation networks via railway, these measures were largely “insufficient to create internal momentum for the establishment of a separate state.”\(^{119}\) As the British moved in to secure their interests in the region, the Anglo-Ottoman draft convention of 1913 solidified an agreement to construct a rail line linking these territories to the Persian Gulf. When World War I broke out in August 1914, only small sections of the line were complete. British interests in the region, however, were heating up considerably owing to the discovery of oil in Iran close to the border with Ottoman Iraq. British control over the Anglo-Persian Oil Company and the Turkish Petroleum Company followed, renewing the importance of settling the Ottoman-Persian border dispute along the Shatt al-Arab River in order to secure the ready supply of refined oil.\(^{120}\)

When the Ottomans formally joined the war on the German side, this presented an opportunity for the British to expand their strategic and economic interests in Iraq. Basra fell almost immediately to British forces, although it would take until the end of the war to secure the provinces of Baghdad and Mosul. Amid humiliating defeats and massive loss of life, the British struggled to curb the growing resentments and embattled infrastructure. In 1920, the Treaty of Sevres formally parcelled out the ‘Fertile Crescent’ into a number of “mandates”: Syria and modern Lebanon fell under French control, and Iraq, Jordan and

\(^{119}\) Ibid., 29.

Palestine became British mandates.\textsuperscript{121} The diverse population of Iraq soon reacted to the mandate with fierce opposition.\textsuperscript{122} Arnold Wilson’s attempt to extend the ‘Eastern School’ ideology (the British policies of India, in Iraq), led to rebellions in the Kurdish north as a result of broken promises for an autonomous state, and in the Shi’i south in opposition to Britain’s attempts to control the Holy Cities. An interim government was implemented under the leadership of Sayyid Abdul-Rahman al-Gaylani, a respected Sunni notable of Baghdad, in an effort to bring together representatives from the various Iraqi communities.\textsuperscript{123}

Following the Cairo Conference of 1921, King Faysal assumed the throne and brought with him loyal Iraqi generals to form the cornerstone for Arab Sunni dominance in the government. At this conference the “three pillars of the Iraqi state” were established: the British-backed Arab monarchy, a treaty that legitimized British presence in Iraq, and a constitution that instituted democratic principles whilst also allowing for the exclusion of citizens based on class, gender, and religious difference. One year later, a 1922 treaty set the limits of Iraqi sovereignty insofar as the British maintained control over financial, international and security matters.\textsuperscript{124} The passage of the Constitution (1924) and later Electoral Law restructured Iraq’s legal system including its courts, and provided a basis for the electoral system. The Treaty of Sevres also established oil concessions in this region. Fearful of losing the Mosul region, in 1925 Faysal’s government agreed to grant full

\textsuperscript{121} Thabit A. J. Abdullah, \textit{A Short History of Iraq}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed., (London: Longman, 2011), 96.
\textsuperscript{122} By 1914, Iraq had a population of approximately 3 million people. Historians estimate the population was 90 per cent Muslim (55 per cent of which were Shi’i), with significant ethnic and religious divides, including a 15-20 per cent Kurdish population to the north, an important Jewish population in the capital city of Baghdad (approximately 3 per cent of the total population at this time), and minorities of Turkomans, Persians, Assyrians, Christians, Mandaesans and Yazidis. Phebe Marr, \textit{The Modern History of Iraq}, (Boulder, Colorado: Colorado University Press, 1985), 20-27.
\textsuperscript{123} Abdullah, \textit{A Short History of Iraq}, 98.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 97-100.
concessionary rights to the Iraqi Petroleum Company (formerly the Turkish Petroleum Company) for a period of 75 years. In return, the League of Nations awarded Mosul to Iraq under the condition that the Kurds be guaranteed control over their governance and language rights, rights which are unique to the Kurdish people in Iraq.\textsuperscript{125}

Lacking a political or populist base for support in Iraq, King Faysal drew upon several key men to foster a sense of nationhood. Sati’ al-Husri was appointed the director of general education, and Nuri al-Sa’id was elected Prime Minister (in addition to his many other cabinet positions). Under al-Sa’id’s forceful leadership, the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930 was signed, providing for the independence of Iraq and their admission in 1932 into the League of Nations. Amid internal turmoil and sectarian uprising, the Arab Sunni government finally regained internal stability in the Kingdom by entering into a pro-leadership alliance between the monarchy and the Prime Minister.\textsuperscript{126}

It was during the period of instability within the monarchy that many of the religious, ethnic, and political factions vying for a voice in the leadership of the region, solidified their support base. The most important of these was the army corps of officers; their loyalty was essential for political success. When Rashid ‘Ali al-Gaylani, a known Arab nationalist, became Prime Minister in 1941 it was with strong army support under the leadership of Colonel Salah al-Din al-Sabbagh. The ‘Rashid Ali’ movement was ultimately a failure; however, the martyrdom of al-Sabbagh following his execution by British reoccupation forces contributed to the popularity of the army and captured the imagination of men such as Saddam Husayn’s uncle. Following the defeat of Iraqi forces in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, in addition to the effects of the Cold War climate and internal political

\textsuperscript{125} Tripp, \textit{A History of Iraq}, 30-34.
\textsuperscript{126} Batatu, \textit{The Old Social Classes}, 25-40; Marr, \textit{The Modern History of Iraq}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed., 80-85.
disharmony, leftist groups like the Iraqi Communist Party rose to power, capitalizing upon the growing disillusion of the Iraqi people.\textsuperscript{127} By 1958, following the nationalization of the Suez Canal by Nasir of Egypt, and the increasingly unpopular Baghdad Pact signed by al-Said and the crown-prince, the time was ripe for revolution. As revolutionary fervour swept the surrounding regions of Iraq, the stage was set for the overthrow of the monarchy by a secret Free Officers movement led by General ‘Abdul-Karim Qasim.\textsuperscript{128}

A decade of political instability followed before the Ba’th, under strong Tikriti tribal influence, finally took over control of the state in 1968. During this period, state-sponsored violence “decimated the ranks of the Iraqi Communist Party and the leftist intelligentsia,”\textsuperscript{129} and many Iraqis (especially the Pan-Arabists) began to question their initial support for the overthrow of the monarchy, which had paved the way for the subsequent take-over of politics by the ‘Family Party’ regime. Political cleavages and social fragmentation worsened during this decade, especially in the aftermath of Qasim’s failed effort to suppress Kurdish demands for autonomy and his humiliating defeat against the British in the confrontation over Kuwait’s relationship to Iraq.\textsuperscript{130} Although Qasim did not overtly discriminate against ethnic and religious groups, his lack of sensitivity towards the Kurds ultimately led to a power struggle with Mustafa al-Barzani, the leader of the Kurdish Democratic Party. This was the symbolic nail in the coffin for Qasim’s regime. It was also during this period that Iraq became isolated internationally, as the British and U.S. governments feared the growth of the Communist Party and the expansion of Soviet influence, and the neighbouring monarchies of Jordan, the Gulf and Iran feared the

\textsuperscript{127} Efrati, \textit{Women in Iraq}, 13-14.
\textsuperscript{128} Abdullah, \textit{A Short History of Iraq}, 116-117.
\textsuperscript{130} Davis, \textit{Memories of State}, 139.
republican appeal of the revolution. The new government under the ‘Arif brothers in 1963 was completely dominated by the Ba‘th, and the subsequent reorganizations that occurred between 1963 and 1968 further solidified Hasan al-Bakr’s hold over the leadership of the Ba‘th party. Behind the scenes, Saddam Husayn was rising in prominence through the ranks of the Ba‘th security services, and inserting himself into key talks with the Kurds in the North, and in relations with the Soviets.

One of the main transitions from 1968 to 1980 was the nationalizing of Iraq’s oil revenues, setting the stage for economic and demographic expansion over the next decade.\textsuperscript{131} The growth in the southern oil fields and in production in the north ultimately resulted in oil revenues grossing 98 per cent of foreign currency earnings and 90 per cent of the state’s revenues by 1980. The achievements of the Ba‘th over the next decade, funded primarily by the nationalization of oil, included the electrification of 75 per cent of the countryside, access to education for urban and rural children, a decline in infant mortality, and a rise in life expectancy owing to the expansion of free health care, and a dramatic rise in construction in urban regions.\textsuperscript{132} From 1958 to 1983 the population doubled to 14 million, and state employed workers rose dramatically by the mid-1970s, when almost 40 per cent of Iraqi households were dependent on the state for employment.\textsuperscript{133} State suppression of the media and opposition parties created what has become known to many as the ‘Republic of Fear’ within Iraq, which began with the expulsion and execution of all suspected traitors to the party in the early eighties, and escalated throughout this decade,

\textsuperscript{131} Samir al-Khalil, \textit{Republic of Fear: The Politics of Modern Iraq}, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 77-8. The author, Kanan Makiya, published Republic of Fear under the pseudonym ‘Samir al-Khalil’ in an effort to protect the identity of himself and his family in the U.S., and also family continuing to live in Iraq. Subsequent books by the author have been published under his legal name.

\textsuperscript{132} The United Nations even awarded Iraq special recognition for its literacy campaign. Abdullah, \textit{A Short History of Iraq}, 131.

\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 131-132.
especially during the devastating war with Iran and the genocidal Anfal campaign against the Kurds, culminating in the 1991 *Intifada* uprisings.\textsuperscript{134} The uprisings (or “shaking off”) occurred in the Shi’a south and the Kurdish north amidst the Gulf War, following the Iraqi incursion into Kuwait. Encouraged by the U.S. and Iran to overthrow the Ba’th dictatorship, Iraqis rose up against the regime, only to be betrayed by their instigators. In the absence of international support, the uprisings were brutally quashed, as Saddam Husayn reigned in control across the country.

Due to the ongoing internal conflicts and the increasingly repressive policies of the Iraqi government from the 1980s until their overthrow in 2003, millions of Iraqis have been forced to flee their homeland. Waves of Iraqi migrants have arrived in North America in response to ongoing political and economic instabilities as well as persecutions. This began with Chaldean and Jewish immigrants who came in relatively small numbers in the late 1960s and early 1970s, followed by larger numbers of communists fleeing the purges of political dissidents (1978-1980), and later the Kurds and Shi’is migrating as a result of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) and failed 1991 uprisings and subsequent crackdowns on ethnic subversives.\textsuperscript{135} The different conditions of these migrations, and the ways in which these groups were oppressed and persecuted by the Ba’th, has shaped the migrants’ ties to the homeland and how they conceive of belonging to the Iraqi past and present, rooted as they are in the communal remembrance of ethnic and religious histories.

\textsuperscript{134} al-Khalil, *Republic of Fear*, 78-82.
\textsuperscript{135} The increase in immigration from Iraq is most significant in the period after 1979, when Saddam Husayn became president. Although the largest flows of migrants to North America occur after the 1991 uprisings and following the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003.
Historical Memory

Since the creation of the modern state of Iraq in 1921, history and collective memory have been manipulated in an attempt to consolidate state power, shape a new collective identity, and define a coherent ideology of nationalism.¹³⁶ The articulation of historical myths and ‘memories of state’ in the oral narratives of Iraqi women in diaspora suggest the complicated process of defining nationalism/s and collective identity in the present and how these can be reconciled with (and within) multiple and frequently competing narratives of the past. A number of influences have been especially important in shaping these official and imposed myths of state, including: the roots of pan-Arabism in the modern education system, changing notions of pan-Arab nationalism and patriotism, and perhaps most importantly, the post-1968 ‘Project of Re-writing History’ which made explicit the Ba‘th state’s motives to manufacture an ‘Iraqi’ past and a collective national identity in the present. In many ways, these three influences worked in concert to shape individual understandings of the past and the articulation of ethno-religious identity. Successive state and colonial powers attempted to ‘educate’ Iraqi ethnic and religious groups of their history and their place in the nation, the most recent incarnation of which was during Saddam Husayn’s brutal repression of ethnic group rights and histories.

Education is of particular importance to the study of women in Iraq following the 1958 revolution, because of the massive state effort to increase female literacy and to integrate women into all sectors of the economy. By 1980, reports suggested that illiteracy for all Iraqis between the ages of 15 and 45 years had been eliminated. The results released

by the state for female enrollments were particularly impressive for primary education: the percentage of girls enrolled in school jumped from 29% in 1970 to 45% by 1980. By 1980, compulsory education for all children (male and female) aged 6 to 10 years was mandated in both rural and urban regions, which helped to significantly increase the numbers of children who received a primary education. In the economic sector, female labourers who often began working during childhood as unpaid and exploited labour, made up 50% of all agricultural labourers in 1970, while they occupied only 5% of professional positions. By 1976 the percentage of women occupying professional positions increased to 17%, and by 1980 they made up 19% of Iraq’s professional workforce. After 1968, the increase in the number of girls and women educated in Iraq made them an important part of the new programme of restructuring historical memory through the education system and also as part of organizations that targeted the loyalty of women and attempted to teach them how to be a part of the ‘new’ national identity.

Attempts to manipulate Iraq’s history and control knowledge production began long before the Ba’th party solidified its rule in 1968. As the government party, their initial focus was on promoting Pan-Arabism, with its central focus on the Arabic language and history to the exclusion of the cultural heritage of other ethnic and linguistic groups such as the Kurds and Christians. Emerging in the early 1920s, Pan-Arabism was inscribed into the early framework of Iraq’s modern-day education system. Modeled on the Ottoman system, Iraq’s modern curriculum followed the French late-nineteenth century emphasis on

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137 Working Progress of the Iraqi Republic to Improve the Women’s Status: The National Papers Presented to the International Congress for the UN Women’s Contract held in Copenhagen, (Baghdad: General Federation of Iraqi Women, Secretariat of Studies and Researchers, August 1980), 30-34.

138 These significant gains contributed to making Iraqi women some of the most literate and educated women in the Middle East by 1980, although these shifts fail to address improvements made to gendered equality in the home and in the workplace as women began to emerge from the home to occupy a new role in Iraq’s public life. Working Progress of the Iraqi Republic, 44.
language and national history. Using classical Arabic grammar, Satri al-Husri (the ‘father of Iraqi education’) instituted a programme excluding local dialects in a mandatory curriculum for urban and rural children throughout Iraq. In an attempt to strengthen national consciousness, al-Husri instructed teachers that the goal of history was to present the fatherland as a cohesive state, and to focus on a national past within the broader Arab homeland, to the detriment of ethnic histories.\textsuperscript{139} The 1930s were a decade of discontent as British presence and control over the political apparatus bred in the schools a generation of disaffected youth urged by their teachers to embrace communism as a means of strengthening the state and uniting the people against their colonial oppressors.\textsuperscript{140} A decade later, German ‘volk’ ideologies of a primeval ancestor nation filled the history books in Iraqi schools with nationalist hyperbole and militaristic \textit{jihad} aimed at strengthening the nation-state.\textsuperscript{141}

Following the failure of Rashid Ali’s coup in 1941, British officials once again assumed control over the education system and altered the textbooks and all teaching material to reflect ‘Iraqi’ history with a focus on the broader history of Mesopotamian antecedents. The teaching of history was now focused on the pre-Islamic past, with a greater degree of ‘historical accuracy’ and an attempt to synthesize the history of all ethnic and religious groups.\textsuperscript{142} The extent to which Iraqis internalized pan-Arabism is difficult to assess, given the strong Sunni and urban influences of this movement. The political elite, largely Sunni from the period of Ottoman rule in Iraq right up to the present day, had a significant impact on the ways in which the modern state has engaged with other Arab

\textsuperscript{140} Batatu, \textit{The Old Social Classes}, 645.
\textsuperscript{141} Simon, “The Teaching of History in Iraq,” 43.
\textsuperscript{142} Batatu, \textit{The Old Social Classes}, 646-647; Simm, “The Teaching of History in Iraq,” 49.
nations as well as how they engaged the wider political cultures developing in response to the British mandate.  

The Ottoman Empire was a Sunni institution that privileged the employment and education of Sunnis. Upon the creation of the nation-state, few Shi’a or Kurds were educated at a level that enabled them to participate in the leadership of the new government. The British exploited the ethnic exclusivity of the Sunni government to maintain control over this minority political apparatus. Al-Husri and other notable Sunnis set into place their political domination over the Shi’i majority and minority groups including the Kurds and the Christians, by creating an education system that viewed the past through the lens of pan-Arab unity. Successive Sunni regimes used the education system to project Pan-Arab and later ‘Iraqi’ national ideologies of belonging, attempting to draw together dissenting and diverse groups into one coherent national past and promote Iraqi nationalism.

Nationalism is a particularly problematic term for discussing the development of identity in Iraq since its precise meaning shifts over time. The term ‘nationalism’ is also used to discuss overlapping but distinct ideas of ‘patriotism’, ‘Iraqi nationalism’, and ‘pan-Arab nationalism’. Some historians have suggested that its multiple uses imply that the ideas and followers of these various ideologies of nationalism have a greater degree of coherence and continuity than actually exists. Pan-Arabism and Iraqi nationalism are arguably part of the political ideologies of Sunni urban elites, linked to the rise of nationalist movements in the 1920s and 1930s under Yasin al-Hashimi, the uprisings led by Abd al-Salim Arif in the 1950s and 1960s, and the more coherent unification of nationalisms under

Saddam Husayn in the post-1968 period.\textsuperscript{146} As politically conscious Iraqis mobilized behind ideals of social justice and an independent Iraqi state, only a small number of these can be considered ‘pan-Arab nationalists’ since most of the Shi’i, Kurdish, and Christian populations did not participate.\textsuperscript{147}

How then did this small elite of Sunni leaders impose ideas of Iraqi unity within the framework of pan-Arabism on such a diverse ethnic population? In his foundational work, Hanna Batatu suggests that Iraqi identity is founded upon overlapping identities in which communal characteristics are preserved within national moulds, allowing ethnic and religious identities to exist within a united national identity. Nationalism and old loyalties co-existed in the pre-Ba’th period, when nationalism absorbed some of the older communal identities.\textsuperscript{148} By drawing upon these old loyalties and nationalisms, the Ba’th were successful in fulfilling their goal of hegemony in the post-1968 period, minimizing counter-hegemonic ideologies through their manipulation of the education system and the historical memory of the people. Defined as “the collective understanding that a specific group share about events in the past that it perceives to have shaped its current economic, social, cultural, and political status and identity,”\textsuperscript{149} historical memory is thus “an analytically different form of memory that is used by hegemonic or counter-hegemonic elites.”\textsuperscript{150} The Ba’th were so effective in their use of historical memory to shape nationalism because they focused primarily on commemorating the pre-modern era and in particular the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia and the ‘Abbasid Empire. By appealing to the \textit{al-Jahiliya} or

\textsuperscript{146} Sluglett and Sluglett, “The Historiography of Modern Iraq,” 1414.
\textsuperscript{147} Marr, \textit{The Modern History of Iraq}, 10-11.
\textsuperscript{148} Batatu, \textit{The Old Social Classes}, 22.
\textsuperscript{150} Davis, \textit{Memories of State}, 4.
pre-Islamic period of Iraq’s history, the Ba‘th merged all ethno-religious groups under the umbrella of nationalism informed by a common ancient past.

Politically inscribed historical memory resonated broadly during the Ba‘th regime because it exploited political cleavages based on ethno-religious and class difference. Iraqis desired a politically stable state after decades of social and cultural changes that had destabilized the nation-state. Following the Qasim Revolution of 1958, the state’s efforts to appropriate culture was directed towards improving sectarian discrimination and diversifying the intelligentsia. Drawing upon the legitimacy of the Iraqi intelligentsia, Qasim for the first time in Iraq’s history attempted to systematically appropriate folklore and control cultural interpretations of the past to solidify political legitimacy. Although al-Husri made efforts towards this end in the structuring of the education system in the 1920s, the Hashemite monarchy maintained only tentative efforts to legitimate their regime by manipulating historical memory. Qasim’s efforts to control cultural production shifted the focus away from pan-Arab ideologies that made Iraq merely a region of a larger pan-Arab state, and towards the use of folklore to bridge the gap between Sunni and Shi‘i Arabs, Kurds, and ethno-religious minorities like the Chaldeans and Assyrians. This folkloric past emphasized the commonalities among these groups using such markers as cultural rituals, cultural production, common foods, dress, dance, among others.

The ‘Project for the Rewriting of History’ (Mashru’ I’adat Kitabat al-Tarikh), so central to the Ba‘th’s efforts to reshape historical memory, represents a significant shift away from Qasim’s attempts to draw groups into a pan-Arab past. The project, which was put in place in 1968 but not officially implemented until 1979, was not just a programme of

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151 Davis, Memories of State, 5.
political indoctrination, but rather, “an attempt to construct a new public sphere, including
the reconstitution of political identity, the relationship of the citizen to the state, and public understandings of national heritage.”153 This far-reaching Project was a state-imposed propaganda campaign disseminated through the work of historians, intellectuals, and state ministries, as well as through the popular campaign promoting Iraqi folklore and the cultural authenticity of this manipulated national memory.154 As Eric Davis notes, the scale of the Project was unprecedented anywhere in the Arab world. Moving far beyond attempts of political indoctrination or repression, it relied upon rhetoric and recognized historical symbols to control all aspects of political and cultural life after 1979.155

Whereas earlier Sunni regimes focused on Pan-Arabism as a means to unite older loyalties, the Tikriti Ba’th shifted their ideological approach away from Pan-Arabism and towards “Mesopotamianism” since this was a heritage to which all Iraqis regardless of ethnic or religious background could relate. With a focus on Iraq’s ancient civilizations, the Ba’th after 1968 made Iraq the “primus inter pares among Arab states in creating a Pan-Arab nation.”156 Leading up to the Iran-Iraq war in 1980, the ‘Project for the Rewriting of History’ increasingly marginalized Islam and gave precedence to Arabism and historical tribal ties. Under Saddam Husayn’s leadership, the role of Pan-Arabism in the rewriting of Iraq’s history not only set Iraq apart from other Arab nations, it also strengthened the

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153 Davis, Memories of State, 110.
154 Ibid., 148-170.
155 The use of rhetoric and symbols as a mechanism of control has also been noted in similar authoritarian regimes in this region of the Middle East, including in Syria’s Asad regime, where the symbolic production of state-sanctioned narratives of the past were closely regulated. As Lisa Wedeen notes, although this means of controlling the production of historical narratives does not necessarily imply that coercion is not employed, certainly not the case in Iraq or in Syria, rather that coercion was not the exclusive form of control upon which these regimes relied. Wedeen argues that “symbolic displays of power not only operate in tandem with overt coercive controls, they are themselves a subsystem of coercive control.” Lisa Wedeen, Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 27.
156 Ibid., 150.
regime’s tribal base by privileging Arab tribal values as the basis for Iraqi culture and society.\textsuperscript{157}

In his seventh “thesis,” Saddam Husayn wrote that, “history should serve the ends of Pan-Arab nationalism (\textit{al-qawmiya al-arabiya}) while simultaneously countering the dangers of regionalism (\textit{al-qutriya}).”\textsuperscript{158} He argued that the historian should employ symbols that promote the “Iraqi region” as part of the Arab nation or homeland, but avoid invoking separatism on the part of non-Arab minorities such as the Kurds. Among the Iraqi women I interviewed were second-generation participants who were born into and grew up during the implementation of this hegemonic project and its attempts to consolidate memory and rewrite the past.\textsuperscript{159} Women soon became an important part of this project to mould all Iraqis to a new nationalism that manipulated the past in order to control ethnic and religious cleavages within Iraq society. In employing this method of control frequented by minority governments, Saddam Husayn was well aware that a direct attack on the Shi’a majority and the Kurdish minority groups could have produced fatal uprisings against his rule. The appropriation and restructuring of historical memory was an effective means of reorienting how ethnic groups engaged with the past, and how they came to internalize a new national identity. As the state became the center of all social action in Iraq in the 1970s, the Ba’th increasingly sought to ensure the loyalties of women and children.\textsuperscript{160}

\textsuperscript{157} In order to mask the fact that sectarianism was used as the basis for filling jobs in the state’s administration, the Revolution Command Council issued a decree in 1978 that forbade Iraqis from using surnames that referred to their tribal or regional backgrounds. The comprehensive study of Iraqi tribes, \textit{\textquoteright}Asha\textquoteleft ir al-\textquoteright Iraq (\textit{The Tribes of Iraq}), was also banned during the 1970s and 1980s. Davis, \textit{Memories of State}, 204.


\textsuperscript{159} See especially, Salbi and Becklund, \textit{Between Two Worlds}; Nadje Al-Ali, Iraqi Women,

\textsuperscript{160} Hanna Batatu, “Class Analysis and Iraqi Society,” in \textit{Arab Studies Quarterly}, 1, no. 1 (1979), 230.
Iraqi women were recruited to this national and ethnic campaign as the biological reproducers of the nation, a notion that pre-dates the Ba'th. It originated in nineteenth century Ottoman policies that sought legal control over the bodies of women by restricting their marriage partners. By enforcing these restrictions, the Ottoman government attempted to keep the blood-lines intact, preventing Sunni women from marrying and bearing children with Shi’i Iranian men. As Karen Kern argues, women as the reproducers of the nation were also the “reproducers of ethnic, religious and national groups.”161 As the bearers of culture and identity, they were essential to delineating the boundaries of the Ottoman-Sunni state which subordinated women’s citizenship to its needs.”162 In their attempt to pull easternmost frontier provinces into their defined borders, the Ottomans used these patriarchal structures to ensure the future of Sunni governance. Implicit in the laws prohibiting marriage across ethno-religious boundaries was the belief in a common blood and belonging, and that Sunnis would inherit the nation of Iraq as its rightful leaders.

Drawing upon ideas of common blood and belonging, Saddam Husayn promoted a nation of common origin in order to secure the rule of his minority government and the ascension of Sunni Muslims. This myth of common origin was “constructed across difference,”163 so that all groups, though hardly equal, belonged to one Iraqi nation. The regime also promoted patriarchal gender relations.164 Women as the symbolic reproducers of the nation were once again the bearers of national and communal ‘honour’, especially in times of hardship, such as the Iran-Iraq war, and increasingly during the decade of sanctions

162 Kern, Imperial Citizen, 152.
in the 1990s. The state imposed on women of all ethno-religious backgrounds to produce soldiers to fight for the glory of the nation, making them both the biological and cultural reproducers of the nation.\textsuperscript{165} In his own words, Saddam Husayn spoke of the important historical role that Arab women had played in the nation, and what he expected from all Iraqi women in their continued commitment to reproducing the nation:

> The women of our country are the descendants of the immortal Arab women who fought valiantly side by side with their menfolk, wrote the poetry of chivalry and glory, and participated in the great Arab heritage of civilization. Thanks to their conscious commitment to the Revolution and the ideals and interests of the masses, and their correct understanding of the national characteristics of our civilization and heritage, the Arab women, together with their Kurdish sisters and all other women of Iraq, are capable of following a correct path and playing their pioneering role in the construction of the revolutionary society.\textsuperscript{166}

Even so, the Ba‘th went to great lengths to highlight differences between ethnic and religious women in Iraq whilst simultaneously calling for all Iraqis to work together on behalf of the nation.\textsuperscript{167} The Ba‘th regime exploited political cleavages within the women’s activist movement, re-writing of the history of the women’s movement in Iraq before 1958. By officially recognizing the Iraqi Women’s Union’s history of women’s activism in Iraq, the Ba‘th all but eliminated any opposing narratives. The “awakening” of women in Iraq\textsuperscript{168}

\textsuperscript{165} Al-Ali, “Reconstructing Gender,” 741.
\textsuperscript{167} In a speech to the GFIW in 1977, Saddam Husayn argued that women were better suited to family life and raising children than to fighting in the army. By upholding the strength and stamina that women in Iraq were historically revered for, they were fighting on behalf of their nation. Saddam Hussein, “‘The Revolution and the Historical Role of Women,” The Revolution and Women in Iraq, trans., Khalid Kishtainy, (Baghdad: Translation and Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1981), 51-54.
\textsuperscript{168} This “awakening” is largely associated with a focus on improving the literacy, health, education, and legal rights of women in Iraq during the revolutionary period. This was in many ways premised upon an earlier ‘Women’s Awakening’ (Nahda al-Nisa’) during the 1920s which also focused on education, as well as emancipating women from the veil. Nadje Al-Ali, Iraqi Women: Untold Stories from 1948 to Present, (London: Zed Books, 2008), 12. See also, Zainab Salbi and Laurie Becklund, Between Two Worlds, Escape from Tyranny: Growing up in the Shadow of Saddam, (New York: Gotham Books, 2005).
amid the turmoil of the 1940s and 1950s brought many community-based associations
together in 1945 to form a more coherent organizational form: the Iraqi Women’s Union
increase cooperation among different women’s associations in Iraq and thus to strengthen
women’s efforts toward raising their social, civil, and economic position, as well as
improving their health and legal status.” In its infancy, the Union also tolerated political
difference, and encouraged its members to rise above sectarian, ethnic and religious
differences. However, this cooperation was short-lived, and by 1947 when the government
began a campaign to target left-wing organizations, the Women’s League Society, formerly
part of the Union, was forced out as a member organization. The Women’s League Society
later became the League for the Defense of Women’s Rights (Rabitat al-Difa’ ‘an Huquq
al-Mar’a), which was largely an underground organization. This lower-middle class group
with its ties to the Iraqi Communist Party continued to be targeted because of their political
affiliations, and for their struggle to help Iraqi women achieve economic independence.

The Iraqi Women’s Union, the leaders of which were mostly from the ruling-elite families,
instead became the sanctioned political arm of the women’s movement.

Political and ideological differences between the Union and the League ultimately
led to the creation of two competing narratives of the women’s movement in Iraq in the pre-
1958 period. Academic research on the two distinct narratives have led to the creation of
two distinct histories of the women’s movement in Iraq. With the Ba’th support and

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170 This was also the case in women’s movements in the surrounding regions. Ruth Frances Woodsmall
and Charlotte Johnson, Study of the Role of Women, Their Activities and Organizations in Lebanon, Egypt,
171 Efrati, “Competing Narratives,” 447. The Union also received the patronage of queen mother ‘Aliya,
which they used to their political advantage, remaining neutral on the subject of British involvement in Iraq.
sanctioning of the Iraqi Women’s Union, their account has become part of the accepted and official history of pre-1958 Iraq.\textsuperscript{172} This account is largely focused on a history of women’s activities sanctioned by the regime, with a primary focus on those elite-class activists and their work with the Union. As political subversives, the oppositional narrative recorded by the Women’s League was omitted from the regime’s official account of the past.\textsuperscript{173} Scholars have tended to focus on the official narrative, but as Efrati suggests, “Only consideration of both narratives reveals the true scope of women’s contributions and the hardships they endured.”\textsuperscript{174} It is thus essential to listen to both official and subversive narratives in order to unpack the many layers of the history of the women’s movement in Iraq. Attention to the competing ethno-religious narratives also reveal the different experiences of Iraqi women and help us to better understand how ethnic community histories have been informed by a communal national narrative imposed from 1968 onwards.

\textit{Iraqi Women: History, Memory, and Ethnicity}

Competing narratives are a common point of reference for historians of Iraq concerned with the lasting effects of repression and subversion of political dissidents.\textsuperscript{175} In

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item The first and most often cited account of the history of the women’s movement in the English literature is Doreen Ingram’s \textit{The Awakened: Women in Iraq}, which was published in 1983. This account became the official account of the women’s movement during the Ba’thi regime. Ingrams dedicated the book to the Ba’thi General Federation of Iraqi Women (GFIW), the women’s arm of the regime. Efrati, 445; 461.
\item This alternate narrative received academic attention, following the English-language publication of Deborah Cobbett’s article “Women in Iraq,” published in 1989. Ibid., 445.
\item Ibid., 460.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
this section, I explore how ethno-religious difference affects how personal narratives are shaped in relation to the official account of the Iraqi past. The individual narratives of Iraqi women offer microcosms of the communal memories of diverse ethno-religious diasporic groups. This section explores these individual narratives within the broader framework of historical memory and commemoration amongst diasporic ethno-religious groups in North America.

Zeynab176, an Arab Sunni Muslim originally from Mosul, lived in Baghdad before she was forced to flee Iraq in 2006. I have spoken with Zeynab on many different occasions, both in Amman and Hamilton, about issues of identity and belonging in Iraq. Frequently impatient with my questions about Iraqi identity, she said in one of our last interviews, “Really Nadia, what are these questions you are asking me? Of course we are Iraqi, we come from Iraq! The Kurds have their own ways of course, but they are still Iraqi. We are all Iraqi because of our history and our religion.”177 Even as we discussed her experiences of forced exile because of sectarian attacks with 2003, Zeynab was adamant that there is a unity in the people of Iraq that goes beyond the current divisions between ethnic groups. As with many other Sunni Arab women interviewed in Toronto and Detroit, the historic place of Sunnis in national collective memory and their ways of defining ‘Iraqi’ are shaped by the socio-economic status of their families and the historical status derived from religiously and politically significant tribal links. Zeynab’s depiction of Sunni Arabs as the ‘true’ Iraqis was a common theme echoed in interviews with Sunni Iraqi women who defined the prominence of their ethno-religious heritage in Iraq’s past. Many Sunni Arab women

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176 All names have been changed to protect the privacy of the women and their families. Interviews were conducted from 2008 to 2010.
interviewed were quick to point out the lineage of their families (especially in relation to my own), speaking to the historical importance of tribal lineages at the core of the ‘Project for the Rewriting of History’. Whereas she believed that all Iraqis were ‘Iraqi’, there were inequalities between her definitions of ‘true’ Sunni Iraqis, and what she considered groups who had settled in the region but were not “native Iraqi,” such as the Armenians, Chaldeans, and Jews.\textsuperscript{178}

As a former member of the General Federation of Iraqi Women (GFIW or \textit{Ittihad}), a predominantly Sunni arm of the regime co-opted to mobilize women, Zeynab was affiliated peripherally with the Ba‘th agenda to promote the Arab heritage of Iraq. Although unwilling to speak at length about this connection, she was quick to point out that her beliefs in uniting Iraq through this nationalist ideology did not mean that she endorsed Saddam Husayn’s use of violence and terror against ethnic minorities. Closely associated with the sanctioned Iraqi Women’s Union, the GFIW was established after the regime rose to power in 1968, co-opting select female activists in the ‘teaching’ of loyalty and service to the Ba‘th party, and to the nation-state.\textsuperscript{179} As a vehicle for the re-socialization and mobilization of women, the GFIW leaders were appointed and funded by the Ba‘th, who coordinated their programmes and mandates.\textsuperscript{180} By establishing over 250 centers throughout Iraq, the bureaucratic structure of the organization attempted to reach women of all socio-economic and ethno-religious backgrounds in urban and rural regions. The redirection of women’s allegiances to the party and state were part of a broader method of tactics designed to better the status and development of women in Iraq. Part of this

\textsuperscript{178} Interview with author in Toronto, 10\textsuperscript{th} December, 2009.
programme was to bring about legislative reforms that benefitted women, such as the modest changes made to the personal status laws in 1978, governing divorce and child custody cases. The increase in women’s education and literacy was perhaps their most significant achievement since these changes benefitted women across the country regardless of their social class or ethno-religious background. The Ba’th also instituted a network of day-care centers for urban working-mothers. Childcare became an important element in women’s economic engagement, since this enabled working-class women to increase the family budget by pursuing work outside the home. In the case of middle-class professional women, most refused to put their children in the centers, drawing instead upon extended family members to care for children.\(^{181}\)

The official Ba’th programme to support the ‘family’ by increasing the number of educated women and creating greater economic opportunities for women, was intended to increase loyalty to the state by diminishing connections between individuals and their family/ethnic/tribal group.\(^{182}\) Threatened by the allegiance of the population to tribal divisions which continued to order the social classes and political affiliations of Iraqis (including of course the Tikriti Ba’th control over the state apparatus), organizations such as the GFIW were designed to undermine these old loyalties and include women as active participants in the restructuring of historical memory.\(^{183}\) So too, some scholars have argued, was the state’s control of child-care and health care, meant to undermine the family unit and


\(^{182}\) In direct contrast to states such as Lebanon, where ethno-religious identities were legally incorporated as a basis for formal representation in the state, and the heterogeneous elite organized around competitive and often conflicting political ideologies. Sectarian factions in Lebanon shared control over the population, whereas in Iraq the manipulation of the political processes were dominated by a single head of party and state. Furthermore, Lebanon’s programmes were designed to keep women in kin/ethnic/tribal groups, whereas Iraqi programmes strove to draw women into the state by distancing them from their kin/ethnic/tribal groups. Joseph, “Elite Strategies,” 195.

male control of the family by encouraging women to leave the home and join the workforce.\textsuperscript{184} This process of female socialization benefitted from the relatively homogeneous nature of the Iraqi elite during this period, and the fact that many educated Sunni Arabs supported the ideological framework established by the regime. The state coerced women into abandoning ethnic, religious and kinship ties to the community, and forming new loyalties that promoted the state version of Iraqi history.\textsuperscript{185} The GFIW promoted this agenda by ‘teaching’ the new historical memory of Iraq’s past to women, glorifying the ascendance of the Sunnis as the true leaders of Iraq.

The ascension of the Sunni elite of landholders, intellectuals, and military officers began in the fifteenth century, as the division between Sunni and Shi’i began to emerge. Settlements of Shi’i Safavids in Iran, Anatolia and Azerbaijan became increasingly dangerous opponents of the Sunni Ottomans in Iraq. Sunni-Shi’i rivalry strained Ottoman-Safavid relations, as they struggled to control trade routes, access to coastal ports, and the silk trades.\textsuperscript{186} This conflict over religion, politics and economics has shaped the historical development of the Muslim Middle East, creating a growing divide between the Shi’i state of Iran and the Sunni-dominated communities of the former Ottoman Empire (including present-day Iraq.) These differences continue to shape the ways in which ethno-religious groups interact within the nation-state in present-day Iraq, and also the ways that the state government interacts with governments of neighbouring nation-states. Ottoman control in Iraq until the end of the nineteenth century instituted a state-supported Sunni religious

\textsuperscript{184} Davis, Memories of State, 263.
\textsuperscript{186} Max Scherberger, “The Confrontation between Sunni and Shi’i Empires: Ottoman-Safavid Relations between the Fourteen and Seventeenth Century,” in The Sunna and Shi’a in History: Divisions and Ecumenism in the Muslim Middle East, eds., Ofra Bengio and Meir Litvak, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 64-65.
establishment, which viewed the Shi’i population of Iraq as settlers in this region. These tensions were complicated by the long history of the Shi’i shrine cities in the south of Iraq which perpetuated a constant flow of people between Iraq and Iran, giving rise to the riches of Shi’i religious families and landowners in these southern regions.  

As Iraq gradually shifted towards a British imperial market system of large-scale industry, private-property and the means of controlling production began to drastically alter the distribution of land and wealth in both urban and rural areas, including tribal desert lands outside commercial centers. Property was not the “dominant basis for stratification” prior to the twentieth century, and Iraq was divided into a network of isolated and semi-autonomous city-states and tribal confederations. In cities such as Baghdad and Najaf, the social stratification according to hierarchies of wealth and religion were already apparent. As Iraq moved into an industrial capitalist system, tribes became sedentary and property was increasingly concentrated into historically prominent families. Batatu argues that this created a new ruling elite whose power depended less on kinship ties and increasingly on material wealth. In the 1920s and 1930s, these upper mallaks or landowners (mostly Sunni, though a few of the wealthiest were Shi’i landowners from the

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188 Batatu, The Old Social Classes, 6-10.
189 Ibid., 11.
shrine cities) emerged as a “class in itself,” and by the 1940s and 1950s they were increasingly “a class for itself,” emerging as a distinct politically self-conscious group.

During these early years of the monarchy, the relationship of ethno-religious group to class was a prominent theme in the rise of a distinctly Sunni elite in Iraq. In the rural regions, Sunni tribal warring ‘People of the Camel’ became the dominant force over the Shi’i tribal peasant (marsh-dwellers), or ‘People of the Sheep’. In the urban regions, Sunni Ottoman political dominance dictated the ascension of Sunnis into a firmly economic, political, and increasingly military ruling elite. The consolidation of state power in Iraq was largely a product of colonial policy in conjunction (although certainly connected to) the emergence of a class-based ruling elite controlled economic and political power. State-power under the monarchy became increasingly concentrated into two branches of the Sunni elite: the Sharifians and the tribal sheikhs. The Sharifians, military and civilian officers loyal to King Faysal, became Iraq’s ruling elite under the British Mandate. Educated in Baghdad’s military academy, most of these Turkish and Iraqi Sunni officers were originally from lowly families, but rose to prominence during Faysal’s political ascendency. By consolidating the political and economic position of the tribal sheikhs and redistributing tribal lands to the urban Sunni middle classes, the legitimacy of the foreign king in Iraq’s newly appointed monarchy was established.

For example, in Basra, the landlords of the province in the 1920s were all with the exception of one (Shaikh of Muhammarah), Sunni, whereas the cultivators of their palm gardens were predominantly Shi’i. The same was also true of the administration of Basra and several other southern towns, which were run almost entirely by Sunni Arabs while the town was made up of a majority of Shi’a (the only exception here is the Shi’i Holy Cities). In Baghdad, the socially dominant families were predominantly Sunni even though the two sects were almost evenly matched in terms of total population numbers. Batatu, The Old Social Classes, 44-45.

Ibid., 12.

Ibid., 45.


Pool, “From Elite to Class,” 74-75.
King Faysal’s programme of nation building in Iraq emphasized the new middle-class intelligentsia, promoting unity through the education system and increasingly associating the Shi’is and the Kurds with the new state. Faysal succeeded in linking the monarchy to the nationalist movement, and in so doing, he retained the loyalties of the officer corps, thus consolidating political and royal policies. His successor, Prince Abd-ul-Ilah, was by contrast unable to secure the loyalties of the propertied old Sunni families, the tribal sheiks who held significant power in the rural regions, and the British colonial forces.\textsuperscript{195} The officer corps, the backbone of social and political order in Iraq by the 1930s, became divided between Kurdish, pan-Arab, and Iraqi nationalist sentiments, leading to successive coups attempting to bring down the Hashemite monarchy. As the monarchy became increasingly alienated from the nationalist movement, they tied their fortunes to the British and to the rural tribal sheiks. This excluded the old politically powerful Sunni families and the large urban middling and labouring classes. The uprising of 1941, the \textit{Intifadah} of 1952, and the Revolution of 1958 represented the culmination of nationalist sentiments, the shift towards the Left, and the growing frustration of the urban middle classes. The new national loyalty increasingly reflected the lack of cohesion of Iraqis since it did not appeal to Kurds, failed to assimilate the Shi’is, and lacked the intimate associations of old loyalties.\textsuperscript{196}

Zeynab, the interviewee, comes from an old Baghdadi family, part of the upper class in Baghdad who grew in prominence with the accumulation of land during the monarchy. Even as tribal structures began to disintegrate under the rule of the Hashemites, social status

\textsuperscript{196} Batatu, \textit{The Old Social Classes}, 36; Marr, \textit{The Modern History of Iraq}, 50-54; Pool, “From Elite to Class,” 76-78.
became associated with the material wealth enjoyed by this small group of families to which Zeynab belonged. Elites like Zeynab’s family continued to enjoy the privilege of class and family status during the early years of the Ba’th regime. The disparity in wealth between the upper landholding class who wielded considerable political strength in the state administration in Baghdad, and the growing new middle class or urban educated merchants and educated tradesmen, continued to cause significant tension in the urban centers. 197 Saddam Husayn’s rise to power was in part attributed to the promise he made to diminish these disparities in material wealth and redistribute land into the hands of the middling and lower classes. The decline of the upper class was precipitated by the social and economic reforms brought about by Saddam Husayn after 1979, which prompted many of these families to flee the country. Those who stayed continued to live in fear of Husayn, who abhorred their elite and historical prominence in Iraq’s past. They endured the growing misery of the declining living conditions during the war with Iran followed by a decade of international sanctions. 198

The incursion into Kuwait, the Iran-Iraq war, and the decade of sanctions feature only peripherally in Zeynab’s narrative. It is evident from her detailed account of family history over the past two generations that these important periods in recent history significantly altered the course of her life, and that of many others in her social circle of upper class Sunni women. Yet Zeynab claimed that, “No, sanctions did not affect us, you know, we were ok. My husband made good money and we could have a nice life. Yes, people did suffer, but not us. It would have been nice to travel, yes, I wanted to see

197 Tripp, A History of Iraq, 194-195.
198 Marr, The Modern History of Iraq, 279.
Despite her best intentions to downplay the effects of these traumatic periods on her life, it was clear from her account that mobility was limited and travel outside the country was restricted. When I asked Zeynab about the possible effects of the ‘Project for the Rewriting of History’, she was dismissive of notions of “programming” an understanding of the past, saying: “the past is the past, you can’t change that.” And yet her claims that Sunnis were the people with first claim to the region, who had been there long before the incursion of Shi’is and Kurds, made it clear that her historical memory and understanding of the past had been altered to some extent by the Ba’th reorientation of history. The inaccuracy in her account of Sunni history in Iraq was corroborated by other women I interviewed, who asserted that Shi’is were not originally from Iraq and that the Kurds and Christians came to Iraq after the Muslims. Many of the Sunni women I interviewed were unable or unwilling to talk about a more historically accurate account of the Iraq’s past, especially in relation to the histories of Iraqi Jews and Christians. This suggested to me a degree of awareness that there is conflicting evidence that challenges the production of historical memory, and supports Sunni claims to indigeneity in Iraq.

In conversations with Shi’i Iraqi women, it was also evident that their understanding of historical events were reconstructed and reshaped for political ends. Ameera, a recent Shi’i refugee to Canada whose family originated from Nineveh in northern Iraq, described

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200 Zeynab is a very close acquaintance of mine, and I know from speaking with her on many occasions both formally and informally that these periods of repression had a devastating effect on her family. Her father, once a notable historian, was pressured by the government to promote the Ba’th version of Iraqi past which he refused to do, leading to his demotion from a prestigious position within the Iraqi Academy and eventual alienation from academic life. Two of her siblings left the country to establish lives in Sweden and America, and she was unable to visit them until she arrived in Canada as a refugee. After marriage, she was forced out of her position as electrical engineer at the Iraqi National Energy Board due in part to her father’s tense relationship with the state, and the association with her husband’s family (many of whom were targeted as by the Ba’th because of their former association with the Communist party.)
201 Interview with author in Toronto, 13th August 2009.
what life during Saddam Husayn’s regime was like for Iraqi Shi’is: “Life was better – no killing. Even though Saddam was not good, Shi’is could make a good salary. Well at least there was peace. We could enjoy our lives- socializing, we had electricity and water, and my brothers could leave the house after 6pm.” Ameera’s narrative highlights the nostalgia that many recent Iraqi female refugees express towards the former Ba’th regime. The recent toppling of the regime and the consequent state of anarchy has led to the total breakdown of security. These events have contributed to the idealizing of life during the Saddam Husayn’s regime, and to the message of historical memory perpetuated by the regime. Many women commented that life was good during this period, by which they mean that in comparison to the current situation, their lives were tolerable because of day-to-day necessities like basic security, electricity, and water. This does not mean, however, that life was actually “good”. Rather, this refers to the current state of chaos in ‘democratic’ Iraq in comparison to the strict regulations in place during the years of the regime.

In discussions about the place of the Shi’a in Iraqi history and their treatment during Saddam Husayn’s rule, Ameera’s historical memory provides a snapshot of how the ‘Rewriting History Project’ was internalized by ethnic groups in Iraq. Her narrative also speaks to the ways in which resistance to the ghettoization of Shi’is in the professional classes because of their religious beliefs has created an alternate narrative of Iraqi Muslim past. Ameera commented that “Shi’is are not originally from Iraq- yes, this is true. We came from Iran in the beginning and settled in Iraq, I think because of the shrines.” In follow up questions where I attempted to ascertain how she had come to this conclusion, she asserted that, “Actually everybody knows this. This is why we had so much trouble from the

203 Ibid., 17th January 2009.
Ba’th when the war was with Iran. Of course, Saddam thought we would fight for our homeland.”\textsuperscript{204} And by homeland, Ameera was referring to Iran, believing that Iraqi Shi’is are not indigenous to the Iraqi nation-state, like Iraqi Sunni Muslims.

The idea that Shi’i is originated in Iran has a long lineage within the collective historical memory of Iraqis. Iraqi Shi’is are recent converts to Shi’ism, a direct result of developments which took place mainly during the nineteenth century as Iraq’s Arab nomadic tribes settled down and took up agriculture.\textsuperscript{205} As the shrines of Najaf and Karbala in southern Iraq set the stage for Shi’i state formation, a more unified religion and a more cohesive value system emerged. Fragmented old tribal confederations looked to the shrine cities to regain stability and address the crisis in leadership. The transition from a nomadic to a settled agricultural economic system led to the emergence of a new class system based upon the socio-economic and religious interactive system of communication between converted tribes and the shrine cities. The top mujtahids of Najaf and Karbala promoted Arab attitudes of manhood, and religious rituals such as the Shi’i cult of saints, drawing tribal allegiances closer to the centralized system of loyalties developing in the embryonic Shi’i state.\textsuperscript{206}

Threats to the socioeconomic status of the mujtahids and the sayyids in addition to the perceived threat from the British-Iranian pact led to the Najaf uprising against the Sunni government in 1920. This, and other attempts to rise up against the minority Sunni government were quickly quashed, as the state powers focused on diminishing the power of the Shi’i clerics and the semi-autonomous status of the shrine cities. The failure of the Shi’a

\textsuperscript{204} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{205} Nakash, \textit{The Shi’is of Iraq}, 4.
majority to rise against the Sunni minority state is attributed mainly to their inability to mobilize the merchant class, especially after 1958. Control over the Shi’i waqf (fee levied on burial of Shi’is in the holy cemeteries of the shrine cities) came under control of the Ba’th, and in the absence of this source of income, the Shi’i madrasa (religious place of higher learning) went into decline, and eventually Najaf lost its status as a major academic center in the Shi’a world. Leading up to the Gulf War, Saddam Husayn appealed to the tribalism and Arabism that united Iraqi Shi’is with the Sunnis, making public appearances dressed as a tribal shaykh. Reinforcing the distinct culture of the Kurds during this period, Husayn promoted the similarities between the Arab populations of Iraq as he courted this majority population in an attempt to solidify their loyalties against the Iranian state. In 1991, the U.S. and Iran pledged support for uprisings against the Ba’th regime in the Shi’i south and the Kurdish north. The failed Intifada and the persecution of Shi’i guerillas are silently remembered by the Shi’i people and have become part of their memory of trauma and suffering at the hands of the Ba’th.

The different ritual and organizational forms of Shi’i Islam have played an important role in the formation of the modern states of Iran and Iraq. The formerly Safavid state of Iran was mainly Shi’i by the eighteenth century, and the religious traditions rose from within a system of socioeconomic and religious values, whereas in Iraq the Shi’i faith was imposed on the social reality of the disbanded tribal system. Iran’s Arab tribal values were encapsulated by the Shi’i religion, and the rise of the modern state, as well as the central and modernizing programmes of Reza Shah and his son lessened but did not subvert the power of the clergy. In Iraq, tribal values were permeated by the Shi’i religion, and Sunni rulers

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over time eradicated much of the traditional power of the Shi’i religious clerics, by redirecting the income generated from charities, pilgrimages, and the lucrative corpse traffic associated with the shrines in southern Iraq. The establishment of the modern state also pulled many Arab Shi’is towards Baghdad, and successive Sunni governments reduced ties between the Iranian and Iraqi Shi’is leading to the decline of a Shi’i state in Iraq. Ameera has internalized the idea of the Shi’a as ‘aliens’ and this shapes how she understands her place as an Iraqi. The emphasis on the Shi’a as an alien population was a popular message disseminated through history books throughout the twentieth century following the failed uprising of 1920. The relationship between the Shi’is and the Sunni government in Iraq has shifted over the past century as relations with Iran worsened after the Iran-Iraq war, followed by growing tensions with the West. Shi’is increasingly came under attack after the failed 1991 Intifada, and Saddam Husayn’s paranoia of the Shi’i threat enforced ideals of Arab unity and Arab nationalism through the cultural production of images and iconography

209 ‘Corpse Traffic’ refers to the transfer of bodies for burial in holy sites located in Southern Iraq, dating from at least the tenth century. In order to be buried in the holy cities of Najaf and Karbala, Ottoman sanitary regulations stipulated that bodies transported from Iran to Iraq must be dry-buried for three years prior to their final burial in Iraq. However, this lucrative industry soon resulted in a massive illegal transfer of corpses intended to by-pass the three-year wait and fees imposed by Ottoman officials at the border. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the scale of this industry had transformed the economies of these cities, where the livelihoods of the majority of people depended on this traffic. Active debates amongst Shi’i mujahids in 1911 over the naql al-jana’iz customs associated with the practices raised questions about disgraced corpses and the authenticity of practices according to Islamic law. In order to deal with the growing traffic and the illegal smuggling of bodies, the Corpse Traffic Law of 1924 was passed, which was later replaced by the Corpse Traffic Law of 1967, which further absorbed the burial dues and the officiating of procedures by the state. In an effort to divert funds away from the British, Reza Shah sought to abolish this tradition by shifting the Iranian corpse traffic towards the holy cities of Mashhad and Qum in Iran, subsequently enhancing their religious status. Nakash, The Shi‘is of Iraq, 196-201.

to appease illiterate Shi’is living in urban ghettos in Baghdad, and diffuse the calls for political representation.\(^{211}\)

The Ba’th assertion of Shi’i ‘aliens’ is deeply rooted in the legal and political systems of Iraq, which for so long allowed the regime to control all elements of life for Iraqis. Premised upon the nationality law of 1924, the foreign presence of Shi’is in Iraq was promoted in an attempt to curb the threat of this majority ethnic group to their rule. The Iraqi nationality law distinguished between Iraqis who held Ottoman nationality before 1924 and those who maintained Iranian nationality. Because the majority of the Shi’i mujtahids in southern Iraq were from Iran, the ‘Abd al-Muhsin al-Sa’dun government introduced an amendment to the existing law of immigration which allowed officials to deport any foreigner engaging in antigovernment activity. Few mujtahids were deported before 1963, but critical amendments made to the nationality law in 1964 drastically affected their situation. The 1964 law stated that all those who held Ottoman nationality before 1924 as ‘indigenous Iraqis’ (asliyyun), and forced all others to apply for Iraqi citizenship. After 1964, the constitution was amended to block Shi’is from access to high office in the state, and later amendments denied Iraq citizenship to a greater percentage of Shi’is in Iraq, fuelling a wave of deportations that peaked during the 1980-1988 period of the Iran-Iraq War.\(^{212}\)

Ameera, and several of the other Shi’i women interviewed, were unwilling to answer questions about the persecution of their ethnic group. The promotion of the Shi’is as a foreign people in Iraq was clearly ingrained into their sense of belonging in Iraq and in their accounts of Iraqi Shi’is. Despite feeling this sense of foreignness in their own country,
Ameera noted that, “Maybe we have not been in Iraq from the beginning, but we are still Iraqis.”\textsuperscript{213} This distinction of Shi’is as being Iraqi despite their dubious claims to indigeneity in this region also stems from the Shi’i push for Iraqi nationalism based upon a unified nation in which all peoples participate in the political process. In contrast to her classification of Iraqi Shi’is as originating from Iran, Ameera commented that, “We fought for Iraq during the war with Iran. Really we are not like the people of Iran at all – we have a totally different history and language.”\textsuperscript{214} Despite the similarities in religious background, Ameera’s narrative promotes the idea that the ethnic bonds of the Shi’a in Iraq do not rely solely on religious beliefs, rather they are a complex blend of Arab tribalism, rituals, and common culture rooted in the Iraqi region and shaped by the common experience of Ottoman rule, monarchy and Sunni governance over the past century.

Chaldean and Kurdish female narratives differed greatly from Shi’i historical narratives in their claims to indigeneity and belonging in Iraq. Indeed, there are many similarities in the ways in which Chaldean and Kurdish women in Toronto and Detroit constructed alternative narratives from that of the Ba’th Sunni meta-narrative. In my discussion with Rita, a recent Chaldean migrant from Mosul, one of her first observations was that Chaldeans were the “first nation in Iraq.”\textsuperscript{215} She emphasized the long history of the Christians in this region, saying that the Muslims were virtual newcomers to Mesopotamia in comparison to the Chaldeans and Assyrians. Like many of the other Chaldean women I interviewed, Rita felt that Christians suffered the ultimate persecution by the Ba’th on account of their religion. Unlike the Kurds, Rita argued, Christians were shut out of the political process under Saddam Husayn and forced to flee in order to live in safety

\textsuperscript{213} Interview with author in Toronto, 17\textsuperscript{th} January, 2009.  
\textsuperscript{214} Phone interview with author, 20\textsuperscript{th} February, 2009.  
\textsuperscript{215} Interview with author in Detroit, 7\textsuperscript{th} November, 2009.
and provide for their families. In interviews with Chaldean women, recent refugees were emphatic about the devastating effects that the U.S. invasion has had on Christian populations in Iraq. Although most Chaldean women were willing to admit that their situation under Saddam Husayn’s government was increasingly intolerable, most emphasized the current conflict as the culprit for decimating the Christian populations of Iraq. Rita captured this anguish in her narrative: “We are killed in the country that we were born in, we were raised in, and we have sacrificed for throughout our history.” In recent years Rita and others claimed that Christians are told: “the country doesn’t belong to you.” “Its not fair,” she added, “no one hears us, no one can protect us.”

Although Iraqi Christians currently make up less than five per cent of the total population of Iraq, they have long played an important part in the development of this region. Their struggle to gain representation in the political process is rooted in their claims to indigeneity in this region and also to the distinctions between their Chaldean, Assyrian and Syriac traditions. Many believe that the Chaldeans are one people with a common history and heritage dating back to King Nebuchadnezzar, ruler of the New Babylonian Empire. Modern scholars who argue for a distinct history of the Chaldean people claim that they originated in the ancient land of Chaldea in South Babylon, and following governor Nabopolassar’s rise to King of Babylonia in 625 B.C., the term ‘Chaldean’ became synonymous with Babylon. The Empire of Chaldea, which dates back over 4000 years, went on to defeat the Assyrians, becoming heir to their lands as the last national Empire of Mesopotamia. Assyrians of this region continue to argue that there is no

216 Ibid., 7th November 2009.
217 Leslie Goffe, “Chaldean’s USA,” The Middle East (Nov. 1999), 50.
connection between the ancient people of Chaldea and modern day Iraqi-Chaldeans. Assyrian scholars claim that all Chaldeans and Syriacs are of Assyrian ethnicity since the persecuted Nestorian people (whom they believe were the ancestors of today’s Chaldeans), were driven from Basra and Baghdad, ending up in Mosul. The proximity of Mosul to the ancient seat of the Assyrian Empire in Nineveh has cast much doubt in the minds of Assyrians that they are in fact two distinct peoples, instead believing Chaldeans are originally Assyrians who were converted much later to the Roman Catholic faith.219

It is possible that this modern association with the Empire of Chaldea dates back to 1585 when the Bishop of Mosul was appointed the ‘Patriarch of the Chaldeans’. Following the Western Church’s split in the fifth century with Nestorius, the Chaldeans were finally reunited with the Roman Catholic Church.220 A tribal based culture, Chaldean kinship and clan networks follow closely with what came to be considered the ‘Arab’ tribal model. Despite the blurring of boundaries between Assyrian and Chaldean lineages in the past, today’s populations speak different dialects and are now divided between the Eastern (Assyrian) and Western (Chaldean) rites. The Patriarch of Babylon was established in Mosul in 1830, moving to Baghdad in 1950 following the substantial internal migration of Chaldeans to the city. There are now over 130 parishes worldwide and the Chaldean Church has adapted to the needs of its diaspora by establishing eparchies in newly formed communities such as Detroit (1982) and Los Angeles (2002). Seventy per cent of today’s remaining Iraqi Christians are Chaldeans, and a large percentage of these reside in Detroit’s

As Christians began to leave in greater numbers after 1990 in response to the worsening conditions following the Iran-Iraq war and increasing threats to their security, their emigration significantly reduced the Christian community of Iraq. Their migration and resettlement in communities such as Detroit has, however, created important expressions of “Oriental Christianity” in the West.222

The different experiences of Chaldean women reflected the timing of their migration and arrival in Detroit. Rita, a recent immigrant from Mosul, was adamant that she was ‘Iraqi’ despite the violent persecutions by Islamist groups that drove her from Iraq in 2004, and her experiences living through the Iran-Iraq war. Rita’s historical memory is based upon the collective memories of early settlement in ancient Mesopotamia. Her understanding of Iraqi history has been shaped predominantly by oral histories passed down through Chaldean family members and shared within the community.223 Her understanding of the history of Chaldeans in Iraq does not seem to have been affected in the same way by the Ba’th attempt to promote the Arab past after 1968. Oral history and the recording of memories is a common element of tribal culture for peoples living in northern Iraq, in particular the Kurds and the Christians (Chaldeans and Assyrians). In many ways, Rita’s historical narrative of the Iraqi past more closely mirrors that of Kurdish Iraqi narratives which make claims to the land based upon their distinct minority ethno-religious identity, and its historic and geographic specificity within what is now the modern nation-state.

222 O’Mahony, “The Chaldean Catholic Church,” 442.
223 Many Chaldean women spoke about the important part that the Church had played in ‘teaching’ them their history. Oral histories passed down in their native language have enabled this community to keep alive the collective memory of a Chaldean past with an Iraqi present.
Second and third generation Chaldean women living in Detroit identified as Chaldeans rather than Iraqis. This distinction is in many ways misleading since recent refugees argue that Chaldean is an Iraqi ethnicity and the identification with Iraqi is implicit. Based on conversations with U.S. born Chaldeans in Detroit, there is a distinct ethno-religious identity that has formed on the basis of a common diasporic narrative is rooted in their experiences as American citizens. Second and third generation Chaldeans in Detroit are part of the second wave of migration from the region of Telkaif in northern Iraq. This second wave of chain-migration linked kin networks from earlier waves of migration, with families who left Iraq after 1958. Rita’s exile narrative has been shaped by growing up during the Ba’th regime, living through the Iran-Iraq and Kuwait conflicts, and a decade of international sanctions, before her forced exile by Islamist militants in 2007. Rita’s sense of belonging to the Iraqi nation is undoubtedly shaped by her more intimate ties to the region as her place of birth and the country in which she was raised. Rita’s claims to belonging as an Iraqi, is in many ways linked to the oppression of Iraq’s Christian minority and their fight to reclaim a place in Iraq.

Despite these differences, there were important similarities in how recent migrants in comparison to settled second to third-generation Chaldeans in the U.S., considered religion and language to be key in differentiating their people from Arabs and Kurds. For Chaldeans, religion is truly central to their identity, whereas for Kurds, region and culture are key, and religion is not as central to constructions of identity. In comparison to the

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224 Sengstock, Chaldean Americans, conclusion.
225 Hanish, “The Chaldean Assyrian Syriac People of Iraq,” 35; Kamos, Ancient and Modern Chaldean History, introduction.
Chaldeans, Kurdish identity is also shaped by the political cultures of the states into which parts of Kurdistan have been incorporated. Straddling the borders of Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey, the Kurdish people of each region have become distinct, fractured from the broader Kurdish community in this region by military forces that threaten their minority rights. In Iraq, the Kurds are overwhelmingly Sunni Muslims although there are also small pockets of Jewish Kurds and Christian Kurds in the Northern region of Iraq, suggesting that language and culture are central to Kurdish identity.

Claims to ethnic distinctions based upon linguistic ties are historically somewhat dubious. By the time of the Arab-Muslim conquests of the seventh century, “the ethnic term ‘Kurd’ was being applied widely to an amalgam of Iranian tribes, some of which may have been indigenous “Kardu”, but many of which were of Semitic or of other origin.”

The “Kardu” who defeated Xenophon’s Ten Thousand during the famous retreat to the Black Sea in 400 B.C. became equated with their military might, and by the time of the Crusades were selling their military service to regimes across the Mesopotamian region. Existing mainly on the fringes of empires for millennia, tribal chiefs maintained economies of export (livestock) until upheavals in Anatolia caused by Mongol and Turkoman invasions in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries pushed Kurdish tribes to extend territorially northward onto the eastern plains of the Anatolian Plateau. Later rifts between the Ottoman and Safavid Empires enabled the Kurds to expand territorially and also extend their military volume.

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prowess by cooperating with the armies in a system of border policing. As an economically efficient source of manpower for imperial armies, Kurds existed for centuries as semi-autonomous people. With the expansion of direct Ottoman control over the eastern borders, the status of Kurdish emirates was undermined, leading to the decline of their semi-autonomous status. The growing power of local shaykhs forced the Kurdish amirs to rely upon the British to reinforce their self-governance.

Following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in 1918, the Treaty of Sevres (1920) attempted to create an interim autonomous Kurdish region in Turkey. The revolt led by Ataturk coupled with British interests in the region ultimately dashed the hopes of self-determined governance for the Kurdish people, who found that they were now divided between four states and subject to ethnically nationalist governments. Although Kurdish tribalism has continued to be the organizing principle in Northern Iraq, loyalties were mixed, especially in cities such as Kirkuk following Ataturk’s Muslim uprising. The growth in prominence of shaykh families produced revolutionaries Jalal Talabani (PUK) and Mustafa Barzani (KDP), who led competing factions of the Kurdish fight for nationhood, that struck mutual amnesties with the central powers at various points during the Qasim and al-Bakr administrations. Barzani’s threat to Ba’th rule as he mobilized the Kurds with help from Iran, Israel and the American CIA forces led the Iraqi government to capitulate to Iran’s demands for their share in the Shatt al Arab waterway, striking a definitive blow to his attempts to topple the government. After his defeat and effective exile to the U.S., the opposition leader Talabani regrouped Kurdish forces and carried on the struggle for Kurdish independence in Iraq.

The great diversity within Kurdish society in Iraq has made it equally difficult to control, but also to mobilize as a force for sovereignty.\textsuperscript{231} Within this diversity, the histories and identities of Kurdish and Christian Iraqis in Northern Iraq are intricately woven into narratives of conflict and coexistence. Chaldeans, Armenians, and Turkoman in the northern region have been severely persecuted by both Arab Iraqis and Kurds over the past century. Western interference in the relations of local communities of Christians living in the Kurdish north has had tragic long-term repercussions on relations between ethnic and religious groups in northern Iraq (notably in the massacres of 1933 and later in Kirkuk in 1959).\textsuperscript{232} Despite these violent divisions between Christians and Kurds in the North of Iraq, there are also families of mixed (Kurdish, Arab and Christian) backgrounds, fusing linguistic and religious cultural characteristics. The enforcement of Arabic in elementary and secondary schools has also diminished the numbers of Kurds who are able to communicate across Kurdish dialects. Ultimately, single ethnic labels are clearly inadequate in attempts to define who identifies as Kurdish and how Kurds fit into an Iraqi collective identity, because these identities are in essence fluid and have different meanings at various points in Iraqi history.\textsuperscript{233}

Kurdish historical memory is typically expressed in women’s narratives according to their identity as a minority in Iraq and also their political struggle for an independent state. Saheena’s version of the past is perhaps the most cohesive and pointed narrative in terms of

\textsuperscript{231} Forces working against ethnic unity for the Kurds include geography, cultural and political fragmentation, and linguistic differences. As a small minority in the nation-state in which they reside, the Kurds in Iraq are perhaps the best example of the ability of such a disparate group to mobilize on behalf of a permanent solution to their dilemma. George Harris, “Whither the Kurds?” \textit{Global Convulsions: Race, Ethnicity, and Nationalism at the End of the Twentieth Century}, ed., A. Winston, (Van Horne, Albany: State University New York Press, 1997), 205-223.


articulating exactly how the Ba‘th rewriting of history has contributed to excluding ethnic minorities and censoring the historical memory of minority groups in Iraq. Active in the Kurdish movement for self-determination through transnational organizations such as the National Congress of North America, Saheena asserted that, “Kurdish people are the indigenous people of Iraq ever since the mountains were there – Iraq didn’t even exist at that time.”\textsuperscript{234} She claims that “the Kurds are the Iraqis, there were no Arabs in this region before a thousand years ago.”\textsuperscript{235} In discussions of the ways in which history has been manipulated by the recent regime to enforce their political views upon the population, she responded that, “Most Arabs are ignorant and in denial of the true history of Iraq, especially after all these years of oppression around them. There is ignorance because of the censoring of history books. This occurred long before Saddam, and is a true structure of colonialism. Education has bred ignorance in the Iraqi people – this is not a chosen ignorance.”\textsuperscript{236} Her words not only echo the sentiments of Rita’s narrative, they also speak to the damage that the Ba‘th Project has had on a generation of children educated within this constructed memory of Iraq’s past.

Saheena, like many of the other Kurdish women I interviewed in Toronto, is politically conscious and active in attempts to get Western governments to assist the Kurds in their goals towards self-governance. Believing that part of her fortune in being able to settle in Canada is to assist those left in northern Iraq, Saheena commented that, “Thank god I came here (to Canada)…and now I must use my new power to help those women suffering in Iraq.”\textsuperscript{237} In terms of how she viewed her place within the Iraqi nation, she spoke to the

\textsuperscript{234} Interview with author in Toronto, 8\textsuperscript{th} November, 2008.
\textsuperscript{235} Ibid., 8\textsuperscript{th} November 2008.
\textsuperscript{236} Phone interview with author, 11\textsuperscript{th} January, 2009.
\textsuperscript{237} Ibid., 11\textsuperscript{th} January, 2009.
complexities of articulating one identity that engages all elements of belonging: “It’s complicated – I am Kurdish-Iraqi-Canadian- who knows!” However, in discussions on Iraq’s future and the possibility of an independent Kurdistan, Saheena and many of the other Kurdish women were emphatic that they would gladly give up their Iraqi citizenship for this end. For many of the women, identification as Iraqis was a technical reality even if this identity did not hold any meaning beyond the practicality of citizenship. Saheena spoke about the growing identity crisis in Iraq, which has deepened in recent years, as Iraq increasingly becomes “everyone’s home and nobody’s home.” By this, she explained that, “Iraq was a mosaic under the oppression and force of obligation to live together under one roof, the moment they could get away, and they did. Now every group is asking for their own nation.”

This notion of an Iraq held together by oppression is a common theme that threads through the narratives of Iraqi women from all ethno-religious backgrounds. The fine balance that the Ba'th attempted to achieve after 1968 involved maintaining a kind of ‘homogenous-heterogeneity’ in which all groups censored their opposition to the regime and prevented their differences from drawing attention to their religious or ethnic identities. Saheena sees Iraq as a “false state, created by the British for oil.” Furthermore, she claims, “Had it been a state, really, it would not have broken apart.” In her narrative, she addressed why Iraq has suffered such a crisis since the fall of the regime, in a poignant metaphor about the family: “If you are divided from your family for many years, when you

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238 Ibid. Not all Kurdish women responded in this way, in fact some were adamant that they not be considered as ‘Iraqis’ in the research resulting from their interviews. In a group interview in Detroit, one Kurdish woman claimed that, “I’m not Iraqi, I am Kurdish. When you say Iraqi this means Arab or Christian, but I am none of these, I am Kurdish. Yes I am born Muslim, but that is a relationship between me and God. But who I am, I am Kurdish and very proud of it.” Group interview with author in Detroit, 7th November, 2009.
239 Interview with author in Toronto, 8th November, 2008.
239 Ibid., 8th November 2008.
240 Ibid., 8th November 2008.
come back together you are still a family because there is a sense of belonging – no one can come up to you and say they are your cousin, because they are not. This is the case in Iraq – they were never a family to begin with – Iraqis belong to each other because circumstances brought them together, not real ties."\(^{241}\) Saheena’s narrative resonates with those of other Kurdish women interviewed, in that they believe they are Iraqi, but not a part of the Iraqi nation-state. Rita and Saheena spoke of their roles in diaspora and their part in educating the world about what they had witnessed. In a moving admission, Saheena stressed that, “I shall deliver this voice – for people living in the diaspora, this is our duty to educate the people about the legitimate rights of our nation. Actually, this is a role I created for myself.”\(^{242}\) Active participation in the Kurdish movement is extremely important to her sense of being and belonging outside of the homeland. In her attempt to reclaim her identity and reform her place in the world, Saheena’s narrative illustrates both the turmoil of a people in diaspora, as well as the new roles which life in exile can create for women.\(^{243}\)

One of the most apparent themes in the narratives of these women is that ethnicity and religion have a fundamental impact on how immigrants from Iraq create historical narratives. If ethnicity and religion are so important to the different ways of remembering the past, they are also a foundational element in establishing individual and communal identities. The multiple meanings and uses for the term ‘Iraqi’ in the narratives of diasporic women suggests that the term is so inherently problematic as to render it virtually meaningless as a unifying concept for the people of Iraq. The relevant scholarship presents

\(^{241}\) Interview with author in Toronto, 8\(^{th}\) November, 2008. The irony of this metaphor is extremely layered and complex, especially in the context of the Ba’th party’s use of family and the transitional meaning of family in modern Iraq. Belonging to a family means something very different since the regime in comparison to the more primordial use of ‘family’ and ‘tribe’ in pre-modern Iraq.

\(^{242}\) Phone interview with author, 11\(^{th}\) January, 2009.

\(^{243}\) Saheena was quick to point out that her political participation in the fight for a free Kurdistan would not have been a possibility for her had she remained in Baghdad or in Sulaimanie. There are few avenues of activism open to women outside of participation in militant factions, especially since the fall of the regime.
a number of different theoretical models by which to evaluate identity in Iraq. One camp of scholars argue that there cannot be an Iraqi identity because the concept of Iraq fails to fulfill the prerequisites of a modern nation-state, noting, for example, the state’s refusal to acknowledge the place of ethnic/religious groups other than Arabs in the nation. Others attack what they view as the fallacy of Western claims that Iraq’s ethnic, religious, and sectarian communities remain polarized due to the ‘fragile’ nature of Iraq as a nation-state held together by an oppressive regime. If in fact prevailing ideas of Iraqi identity miss the point because people cannot conform to sociological categories that distinguish one from the other, then it is possible to begin to understand how there can be so many different interpretations of ‘Iraqi’ identity.

Iraqi women’s narratives offer multiple and overlapping expressions of ‘Iraqi’ identity creating a space for both ethnic/religious identities in addition to a national identity. Before the Ba‘th came to power and began to move towards re-writing the past, nationalism and old loyalties were able to co-exist because nationalism, while corroding older loyalties over time, also absorbed some of the psychological elements of tribal loyalties. By drawing upon these older nationalisms, the Ba‘th were able to create a historical memory of a united Iraq, and an Iraqi identity founded upon these new ideas of unity and a single past. As Eric Davis argues, “Hegemony can only be successful if it finds its origins in society, not in the state apparatus.” This was the case in Iraq prior to 2003. The success of successive Ba‘th regimes from 1968 onwards in rewriting the history of Iraq and creating a ‘culturally authentic’ identity for Iraqis lay in their ability to draw upon

245 Fatah, “The Question of the “Artificiality” of Iraq as a Nation-State,” 52.
247 Ibid., 22.
cultural and ethnic alliances that already existed in the pre-modern state.\textsuperscript{249} The Ba‘thist ‘Project for the Rewriting of History’ thus depended as much on the use of existing difference as it did on creating a “false consciousness” of similarities for such a diversely ethnic society.\textsuperscript{250}

The extent to which this ‘false consciousness’ becomes a part of immigrant identity in North America is an aspect of the Iraqi immigrant community that requires further analysis. Most of the women expressed feelings of gratitude towards the freedom afforded to them as women in North America, in terms of gender equality, personal safety as well as freedom of speech. As these recent refugees reinvent themselves as part of a new and porous historical dialogue in which their agency in the present enables them to remember the past in their own words, they recreate the parameters of their identity as Iraqis and as part of transnational ethno-religious communities of migrants. Their experiences in diaspora as well as in moving out from under the hegemonic oppression of the state has allowed them to reconsider how they identify as women, and as citizens of an enormously complex region of the world. Their identities are fluid, as are their narratives, changing as they rediscover aspects of the past previously obscured by decades of political repression.

\textit{Conclusion}

The “dialectic of memory and counter-memory”\textsuperscript{251} is an important tool in the study of immigrant groups in North America who have previously lived under repressive socio-political systems. Historical narrative allows us to evaluate the past on an individual basis,

\textsuperscript{249} Ibid., 282.
\textsuperscript{250} Ibid., 282-283.
\textsuperscript{251} Ibid., 283.
something that is often overlooked in the analysis of political and economic systems. By exploring how ordinary Iraqis interpret their history and their place in the nation, we can better understand how Iraqi immigrants negotiate an identity in Toronto and Detroit. Furthermore, the use of historical narratives in the case of female migrants gives us a unique view of the past as well as a sense of how women from culturally and religiously diverse nations such as Iraq find their place in the past and the present. Ultimately, the women interviewed have expressed the ongoing importance of male hegemony over the history of Iraq both through the politically repressive programme of ‘Re-Writing History’ as well as through the exclusions and manipulations of women in the meta-narrative of the past. In the next chapter, the influence of male hegemony in female narratives is addressed in greater detail.
Chapter Three
Dual and Dueling Narratives: Negotiating the Retelling of the Past in the Formal and Informal Interview Space

On a cold Saturday in January 2010, Marwa, a young Sunni refugee woman and I sat on hard plastic chairs in a Toronto mall exchanging personal stories over a cup of coffee, the prelude, I hoped, to a rich and revealing formal interview that did not happen. As the short and disappointing taped interview ended, I put away my tape recorder and gathered my things to leave. She hesitated, surveying the crowd, and then leaned into me to ask, “Do you know my greatest fear?” I shook my head no. “When the phone rings at night,” she whispered, “My heart stops, and I think they will say my father is dead.” For a moment, I thought I had imagined it, the jovial bustle of the food-court where we sat contrasting so sharply with the gravity of her words. When I asked why her father was still living in Baghdad, she replied: “You see, he must, because otherwise they will take everything – the house, the business, our things. You know, they have tried to kidnap him several times before.” “The Shi’is,” she practically spit out, “they are the ones – always they are the ones…the cause of all our problems. They come from Iran and take over our country and kill our people.” “They are not Iraqis,” she insisted, “but in the end they will have Iraq for themselves.” Caught off guard, I wondered what to say, but before I could decide, this remarkably intimate moment was over and the interviewee stood to leave. Smoothing her clothes, she added with a sad smile, “This is the way for the Iraqi women. What can we do? We must sit and pray for the men to be safe.”

1 Interview with author in Toronto, 24th January, 2010.
As Marwa’s account suggests, Iraqi women shape their narratives, both formal and informal, in relation to official narratives enforced by the Ba‘th ‘Re-writing History Project.’ The central question driving this chapter is how diverse groups of Iraqi women living outside of the homeland, and whose experiences did not conform to the national myth, negotiate this official version of the past. In addressing this question, I engage debates within feminist oral history theory and method, drawing primarily on the work of feminist scholars of Muslim women who, having interviewed diasporic women from authoritarian regimes, observe that the interview can create a space in which women are able to speak critically about the dominant patriarchal and imperialist interests that have shaped official collective national memories, and that by drawing on their own subjective experiences as women whose lives do not conform to a national myth, they also tell of a different past, one reflective of their own lives. Marwa, like other Iraqi women, offered a counter-narrative that undermines the masculine national myth of a unified Iraq, and like others, doing so ‘off the record’ after the conclusion of the formal taped interview. In short, subjective experiences shared in an informal safe space engendered counter-narratives.

As an exploration of how Iraqi refugee women reconcile the imposed collective memory of Iraq’s past with their particular ethno-religious and gendered experiences, this chapter documents and seeks to account for the two distinct – and competing - narratives of Iraqi women interviewed in Amman, Toronto and Detroit. The first is an official narrative informed by the Iraqi ‘myth of nation’, and the second an unofficial (and often unrecorded) counter narrative that emerged out of women’s efforts to deal with the demands of the

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2 Saddam Husayn was particularly concerned with the Shi’is and the Kurds, extensively targeting their efforts to gain political independence. The regime’s efforts also included the suppression of smaller ethno-religious minority groups, including the Armenians, Chaldeans, Syriacs, Assyrians and the Iraqi-Jews.

official and imposed nationalism, as well as trauma and displacement. I highlight the sense of “loss” communicated in the interview space and the role of fear, both in Amman, where women live in close proximity to the homeland, and in diaspora, in the suburbs of Toronto and Detroit, during the current war on terror.

Western feminist oral historians have claimed that by capturing the subjective experiences, or subjectivities, of their female informants, they have corrected the power imbalance that normally privileges men, and attached equal weight to women’s experiences and their interpretations. However, as Muslim feminist scholars have argued in response, the oral research methods designed to include women in the historical narrative have been applied almost exclusively to secular constructions of womanhood, the implication being that religious women of colour, particularly of Muslim origin, represent a subservient class and thus are victims in need of saving. My position in relation to the Iraqi community shapes the dynamic of the interview space. Indeed, in conversations with me, some female participants molded their narrative to appeal to secular Western sensibilities of womanhood and were hesitant to talk about religion on the record. By contrast, informal discussions that emerged after the recorded interview was completed initiated a space in which participants were willing to talk about faith, their views on feminism, and the role of women in the family. The focus of this chapter is on how women used formal and informal spaces within the interview to shape dual and frequently dueling narratives, and how the presence of a

translator within the interview space affected the ways in which women shared their personal testimonies of migration, trauma and loss.

**Translator and Facilitator: The Problematic Third-person in the Interview**

The biggest challenge I faced in the process of interviewing Iraqi women was making initial contacts and gaining the trust of recent victims of disruption, loss, repression and violence. In Amman, my stepmother Shehede was essential to the process of facilitating interviews and also often as translator in the interview.\(^6\) As I developed a reputation within the community based upon my connections to an ‘old’ and respectable Iraqi family, I was later able to initiate contact with participants in North America without such assistance.\(^7\) In Iraqi culture, the relationship to class and between classes informs all social interactions and is an important element in determining female reputation.\(^8\) Operating within this social framework, I was not simply a researcher, but a member of the ‘respected’ Al-Gailani family. One woman began her interview with a knowing smile and a reverent nod, saying,


\(^7\) Reputation and social standing in Iraqi culture are defined by the class status of the father’s family. Access to upper and middle class Sunni and Kurdish women through family contacts initially restricted me to this social spectrum of Iraqi society. Hanna Batatu discusses the formation of the class system in Iraq in his foundational work, The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: a Study of Iraq’s Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, Ba‘thists, and Free Officers, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978).

\(^8\) Batatu, The Old Social Classes, introduction.
“I know who you are my dear. You come from an old family. You are a good girl.”

References to my own supposed modesty and reputation were also closely connected to the respect and social standing of my family. The moral regulation of women and gender inequalities that organize the patriarchal structure of Iraqi families also shape the negotiation of female memory, informing the construction of dual narratives.

As a woman with hybrid status, I stood on the fringe of this community, at once belonging but also distant enough to be entrusted with the personal experiences and recollections of traumatic pasts in an uncertain present.

The many handbooks and guidelines available for new interviewers embarking on oral history research rarely discuss the unspoken negotiations that exist before each party enters the interview. In the process of establishing contact with interviewees, there is a tenuous period in which the interviewer must broker the initial contact and earn the trust of the interviewee in order to set up the interview. This ‘first contact’ is an overlooked but important point in the interview process, establishing both the tone and dynamics of the interview space. Shehede’s role as facilitator and her help in establishing contact with Iraqi refugee women in Amman was essential to the early process of establishing my reputation within the community and starting out as an interviewer. My own identity came under

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9 The emphasis on ‘good’ implied that I was a woman of virtue from a respectable family, or a woman of virtue because I am from a respectable family. Interview in author in Jordan, Amman, 12 September 2008.


severe scrutiny, and was typically the initial subject of conversation during the interviews. Although initially this foray into my private life was unwelcome, I soon came to realize that this was part of the negotiation of information in which I was expected to engage if they were to divulge their personal narratives. The initial sense of trepidation that I continue to feel at the beginning of an interview is also the result of my precarious position on the margins of Iraqi culture and community. I come from a mixed background (half-Iraqi, half-Welsh), and left Iraq when I was very young, making my connection to the homeland and culture tenuous. Nevertheless, this connection with Iraq exists, providing me with a hybrid passport and the flexibility to shift between insider and outsider status. The position of insider-outsider is layered and complex, and further muddied by the imperial connotations of having a slight British accent, which continues to be a mark of status and prestige in post-colonial Iraq. This hybrid existence reinforces the complications of belonging in the third space, in this case caught somewhere between East and West.12

Hybridity is at once physical, psychological, geographic and cultural.13 The interviewee is initially faced with an interviewer who ‘looks’ Iraqi, but what they hear is a foreign language and accent that immediately shapes my position as ‘other’. Being the ‘other’ in this case is an interesting paradox to the more typical colonial constructions of ‘othering’ that occurs when diasporic groups migrate from the developing to developed countries.14 Language is an important factor in collective identity for Iraqis. Many of the

12 Bhabha, The Location of Culture, introduction.
13 Radhakrishnan, Diasporic Mediations, conclusion.
14 The colonial stereotype and the Orientalist construction of ‘other’ derives from Said’s discourse and is further complicated by Bhabha’s commentary on the structured condition of ambivalence and simultaneous alienation of the colonial subject. Edward Said, Orientalism, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979); Homi Bhabha, “The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism,” in Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures, Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever et al, eds., (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1990), 71-88; Shanaz Khan discussed the specific ways in which Muslim and Arab
women commented on how fortunate I was to have received a Western education and to speak English fluently and with a British accent. Interviewees also felt compelled to explain aspects of Iraqi culture and tradition in detail, however trivial, due to my assumed ignorance of these rituals. Although I had expected language to feature more prominently in differentiating myself from the women, it was ultimately the fact that I had grown up outside of Iraq without an Iraqi parent for most of my life that determined the line between having Iraqi blood and actually being ‘Iraqi’. This is not to suggest that language is not a critical factor in shaping Iraqi and Arab identity. However, in the case of migrants who had settled in North America over the past few decades, many had children who did not or would not speak Arabic with their parents. The fluid boundaries of Iraqi identity in diaspora contributes to the confusion over who belongs, and why. Whilst physical hybridity can often mask the more fundamental differences in culture, identity, and language, the gulf that exists between those who have a geographic bond with Iraq ‘the homeland’ and those who do not remains the greatest factor determining whether one is ‘Iraqi’. Ultimately, those women whose memories had been forged in Iraq distinguish themselves from those who had not; the latter particularly includes young women who left Iraq at an early age for locations within the Middle East, Europe, and North America.

Drawing on intimate connections within the community, Shehede initially brokered contact with interviewees and served as translator for the interviews conducted in Amman.  

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women are shaped by the “simultaneous alienation that occurs at the nexus of desire and aversion,” Khan, Aversion and Desire.

15 A particularly heart rendering example of the divide between generations in terms of education and understandings of both the past and the present is, Salbi and Becklund, Between Two Worlds.

16 Oral history research on women in diaspora, in particular tend to draw from personal and familial contacts within the community. Accessing the female voice is often a difficult task, and this is often (though certainly not exclusively) true of groups migrating from the ‘third world’ where women are more isolated upon settlement in North America. Other important elements that can hinder access to migrant women are linguistic/cultural boundaries, traditional etiquette and generational shift. Agnew, “A Diasporic Bounty,” 171-
As an Iraqi refugee herself, Shehede helped to level the playing field, enabling the women to overcome the sense of insecurity and embarrassment they felt as unwanted refugees in Amman. Her involvement also affected my ability to ‘control’ the interview process and how I was received by the interviewees.\(^\text{17}\) I consistently fought her authority during the interviews, trying to establish my voice as interviewer and straining to reign in her desire to gossip and reminisce about Iraq’s ‘golden age’. It was only when I was able to establish interview contacts independently from my stepmother in North America that I realized the valuable role she had played in facilitating the ‘safe space’ within which women could share their narratives. As translator, Shehede helped me navigate between Arabic and English parts of the interview as the flow of the discussion shifted between the two languages.

Upon returning to Toronto, and beginning the process of transcribing my interviews, I discovered many instances where Shehede used language to manipulate the narrative and ‘protect’ the interviewee from divulging personal memories of trauma. One particular example was in an interview in which I asked the participant what daily life was like for women during the years of sanctions under the rule of Saddam Husayn’s Ba’th government. Nadje Al-Ali’s extensive research on women during the period of international sanctions on Iraq has shown that the opportunities that women had enjoyed during the ‘golden years’ of Iraq’s economic boom was abruptly reversed in the nineties. Travel became increasingly difficult, and women were forced back into the home due to crippling cuts in childcare programmes and many families found their fortunes significantly altered.\(^\text{18}\) In English,
Sunni participants responded that they hardly felt the difference since they continued to be able to access higher education, healthcare, and travel. A few minutes later she joked with my stepmother in Arabic about the irony that for the first time in decades they were able to travel, and they were reduced to being transported as *shroogi* refugees. Urged by Shehede to keep the realities of her personal experiences off the record, the participant used language to negotiate between the formal and counter narrative. Shehede later confessed that she did not consider it appropriate to discuss their situation during the sanctions period, by which she meant the Sunni upper-middle class to which they both belonged. This convoluted means of shaping narratives was an ongoing theme in the process of sharing authority with a third party in the interview space.

There were several similar examples of Shehede’s manipulation of participants’ narratives during the interviews in Amman that only became apparent later in the transcription process. However, there were also instances in which both my hybrid status and Shehede’s role as translator threw the interview off course in midstream. This occurred, for example, during an interview with an Iraqi Shi’i woman contacted through a CARE Jordan community-aid worker. The participant came from a lower socio-economic background than did Shehede. As with most Iraqi refugees in Jordan, the woman was struggling to sustain her family and was receiving support (including a housing allowance) from local agencies such as CARE. Having received a minimal education, this participant’s English skills were significantly lower than that of the majority of my interviewees, both in

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19 The definition of this word is somewhat contentious and certainly derogatory. The literal meaning of the term means ‘East of the Euphrates’, and in its modern usage it refers to poor Southern Iraqi farmers, the majority of which were Shi’i Arabs, who migrated into Baghdad in the 1930s and 1940s. As they formed slums on the outskirts of Baghdad, they were referred to as ‘shargawi’ or ‘shroogie’. This derogatory term has remained in the daily vocabulary of middle and upper-middle class Iraqis in reference to the poor and peasant class of Iraq. The term retains its original ethnic connotations even when it is used in reference to other ethnic or racial groups.

20 Interview with author in Amman, 26th September, 2008.
Jordan and in North America. Our primary means of communication was therefore through
the translator. The interview started relatively well, as the woman documented why she had
left Iraq, and how the family was coping with the transition to refugee status outside the
homeland. When I asked her if she had plans to apply through the UNHCR programme for
placement in Canada or America she became increasingly agitated, raising her voice
aggressively towards Shehede. The interview soon devolved into an angry exchange
between translator and participant, from which I was excluded. As the participant became
more and more aggressive, and with her shouts still audible in the distance, we hurriedly
made our exit.21

In the aftermath of what began as a very productive and informative interview,
Shehede informed me that the woman was incensed by my question about seeking refuge
beyond Jordan because she considered her place to be in the homeland, defending the
country from foreign invasion. When the participant asked the translator whether she
agreed with her stance, Shehede had noted her plans to immigrate to Canada, which further
annoyed the interviewee and led to a very angry exchange between the women over ethno-
religious difference. My own background was called into question, as she accused my
father of neglecting his duties to raise a proper ‘Iraqi’, immersed in the culture. The
participant questioned the loyalty of Sunnis to Iraq by pointing out that since 2007, most of
the middle class Sunni professionals have fled the country. This embittered exchange is
emblematic of the ongoing hostilities that exist between Iraqi ethno-religious groups over
who are considered the true ‘Iraqis.’ In the emotional space of the interview, the historic
divides between Sunni and Shi'i permeated the personal narrative of the participant, blurring
the boundary between past and present.

21 Interview with author in Amman, 30th September, 2008.
The careful negotiation of space and boundaries fundamentally alters the subjectivity of the researcher in the practice of observing the subject and the process of recording oral history. As Kathryn Anderson and Dana Jack note, “A woman’s discussion of her life may combine two separate, often conflicting, perspectives: one framed in concepts and values that reflect men’s dominant position in the culture, and one informed by the more immediate realities of a woman’s personal experience.”

In the informal space, female participants not only opened up about memories of the homeland and their experiences of migration, but also their individual role in the violent past of the nation. Off the record, some women felt secure enough to share their experiences of war and loss, and stories of how they negotiated their role as religious or Muslim feminists.

In the case of one participant, a former collaborator for Kurdish guerilla forces operating in the region of Suleimaniyah, who has been living in Canada since 1997, she provided narratives that were diametrically opposed to one other, and difficult to navigate as an interviewer. In the recorded interview, she gave no clear indication of her affiliation to the militant group, and her answers to my questions adhered closely to the ‘myth of nation,’ which promotes the idea that all of the different religious and ethnic groups in the region have coexisted for centuries without bitterness or conflict prior to the U.S. invasion in 2003. In the taped interview, she gave only one indication of her family’s involvement in the paramilitary organization fighting for an independent Kurdish nation, when she

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23 She claimed that the militant group was associated with the Kurdish Democratic Party in the 1980s, fighting against Ba’th forces to establish the political autonomy of the Kurdish Parliament.
acknowledged the traumatic nature of living in Kurdistan during the state attacks on the North, when she lost several close family members.\textsuperscript{24}

However, many hours after the interview was over, and she had served coffee and relayed in animated form her fond memories of home, she took out a photo album and matter-of-factly began to recite her personal experiences of war, loss, and trauma.\textsuperscript{25} As her brothers and father fought on the ‘frontlines’ of the independence movement, she took part within the “private sphere” guarding the cache of weapons the family had amassed from regular checks performed by Ba’th troops stationed in Suleimaniyah. Her detailed accounts of losing her brother and father were intertwined with sweeter memories of childhood and political activism, and how she had come to identify as a feminist. She used fond memories from her past to retell her trauma, threading past hurt with joy, and loss with love. The most striking use of this means of remembrance in her narrative was in the following excerpt:

I remember the day my father was taken away. He was such a sweet man, so kind, everyone loved him. When I close my eyes I can still smell his aftershave and remember how he used to hold my hand as he walked down the street greeting everyone, doing his business. He was an important man, my father. High up and very well respected. All my family were like this, oh yes, educated and respected – we were a good family. They killed him and would not return the body. Because he was tortured.\textsuperscript{26}

The woman’s retelling of personal trauma and loss in the post-interview space gave rise to a subjective narrative of the past that stood in opposition to the official one.

Iraqi women like those already described constructed dual narratives through various means, but, most commonly, offering coffee and tea signified a shift from formal to

\textsuperscript{24} Interview with author in Mississauga, 10\textsuperscript{th} December, 2008.
\textsuperscript{26} Interview with author in Mississauga, 10\textsuperscript{th} December, 2008.
informal interview spaces. A visit in an Iraqi home usually involves coffee with home baked Iraqi sweets and delicacies and I began to chart the importance coffee played as an indicator of social standing, time, and intimacy. Failing to provide coffee is considered an insult towards the family of the guest, while the care and presentation of coffee reflects a family’s means and their guest’s social standing. I soon came to realize that coffee served immediately upon my arrival meant the interview should last only as long as a polite cup of coffee, and I was not invited to linger afterwards. This often occurred with interviews conducted outside the home in places of business, social aid facilities, and coffee shops. In several home interviews, women served tea during the interview, but their offer of coffee after the formal interview often invited a more leisurely period of informal discussion and gossip, opening up an informal interview space.

Upon arriving at the home of an Iraqi Jewish participant in the fall of 2010, I was immediately served instant coffee in a mug. Aware of the possible connotations of this snub, I carefully skirted around the questions about religion and memory I had hoped to ask. She rushed through her answers, pausing only to ask me about my family and how I had come to research Iraqi migration. As soon as I mentioned that my father’s family was from Iraq, she began to apologize profusely. Confused, it took me a few minutes to realize she had assumed I was British over the phone, and so had served me instant coffee in a mug. “Had I known that you are Iraqi,” she said, “I would have served you good coffee in a proper cup.”27 Relieved (and amused), I accepted her offer of kleche (Iraqi cookies made with dates and pistachios) and an informal chat once the interview was over. The participant had used coffee to indicate her perception of my social standing and background, and to limit the interview time. Viewing the formal interview space as official and rigid, she

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27 Interview with author in Toronto, 8th November, 2010.
withheld her personal experiences until we inhabited more intimate space after the tape recorder was shut off.

This pattern of using coffee to divide the interview space was replicated many times over, and, it was then that women were most likely to tell personal stories that contradicted the official views of nationalism and collective memory captured on tape. This is particularly true of references to religion and sectarian divides within Iraq. My questions were meant to explore how sectarianism and nationalism has shaped the women’s identity over the past three generations, and how and whether they informed the construction of Iraqi communities in diaspora. The current civil violence and the clash of religious sectarianism caused by the tribal struggle for control over Iraq’s governing body means that religion has become increasingly politicized and divisive for Iraqis in the diaspora. When asked about religion, the women tended to rely upon official narratives during the taped interview, stating that religious minorities had co-existed in harmony for centuries in Iraq, and that the current crisis was a result of outside influences. During informal conversations following the official interview, however, women often contradicted this history and were quick to point the finger at those they felt truly at fault for the current conflict. Following the taped interview, a distinct shift also occurred in tone and subject, a somber and formal account of religion giving way to gossip, fortune telling, and other informal topics, the better to establish intimacy in a comfortable environment.28

Religion offered a site for the articulation of subjectivities in the interview space. In many cases, women sought to mold their narratives to appeal to what they considered to be secular Western sensibilities of womanhood and religion. This was especially true of

Muslim participants who were hesitant to discuss religion during the taped interview, though several expressed their indignation towards Western women for assuming their husbands subjugated them. But in informal discussions after the recorded interview, many more opened up about faith and women’s role in religion. This occurred during a group interview in Detroit with eight Sunni, Shi’a and Christian Iraqi women. Following an interesting but polite discussion of the changing role of religion in Iraqi politics, we stayed seated around the dining table while I explained the consent forms to the group. As they began to talk amongst themselves about issues I had raised, one of the Kurdish Muslim women said they actually rarely thought about women and religion. She started questioning the Christian women, asking why they revered Mary, the mother of Christ, since she was a ‘whore’. As the conversation developed before me and I sat there speechless, silently wishing the tape recorder was playing, I realized that this off-the-record debate spoke more clearly to the religious and ethnic divisions in Iraq. And, indeed, as I thanked each of them individually for signing the permission form, each one told me what they considered to be the primary causes of internal strife in Iraq. Niceties aside, each woman offered their views on Iraqi sectarianism in the homeland and diaspora, and who was ultimately responsible for the current civil chaos.29

These women’s official narratives complied with the accepted patriarchal and gendered norms of the Ba’th ‘Rewriting History’ narrative, and their public performance of it in the formal group interview suggests women conform to the gendered cultural norms expected of them.30 Having recently fled a totalitarian regime, women are also fearful of state surveillance and retaliation. The women sought to promote the notion of a “civilized”

29 Group interview with two Sabean women, three Kurdish, two Chaldean and one Sunni Iraqi women in Rochester, Detroit, 5th November, 2009.
Iraq in the official interview space, suggesting, perhaps, that the women perceive the official interview space as a colonial arena in which they, as colonized, are forced to prove their civility. But even as their counter-narratives might point to a less than civil Iraqi state and history, they waver more between official and unofficial narratives. It seems clear that the colonial framework by which they are judged in diaspora has created something of an identity crisis for Iraqis, who in a Western setting are often difficult to distinguish from other Muslim racial/ethnic groups. In response, Iraqis are quick to identify themselves as the most ‘civilized’ of the Arabs given the illustrious history of Iraq as the birthplace of the Mesopotamian civilization. This idea of being ‘civilized’ is a strong underlying theme binding various expressions of their collective past, and strongly linked to a unifying sense of nationalism that all ethno-religious groups aspire to. The group interview reflects the hesitancy of Iraqis to discuss the current sectarian fighting in the homeland even though it is a reality of daily life in Iraq. Still, in the informal space, the women broke down the barriers of civility and divulged personal opinions and experiences of sectarianism and violence that painted a picture of Iraq’s past and present far different from that of the unified collective narrative presented during the taped interview.

Giving voice to a subjective narrative in opposition to the official collective narrative also enables Iraqi women to break free of the patriarchal bonds of nationalism as well as the expectations of female friends and family. In group-settings, women tended to withhold their opinion on religious divisions. This was also true of family interviews, in which the younger second-generation women often did not challenge the opinions of first-

32 Although intersubjectivity is typically used in oral history theory to describe to interaction between the two subjectivities of interviewer and interviewee, it is applied here to understand why women oscillate between normative and counter narratives. Abrams, Oral History Theory, 58.
33 Group interview in Rochester, Detroit, 5th November, 2009.
generation women until after the interview was over and we had a chance to discuss their personal experiences privately. The most striking case of discord following a group interview occurred in Toronto during the winter of 2008. An acquaintance had invited all of her closest friends - all Kurds originating from Sulemaniyah - to a dinner party so I might explain my project and interview them in an informal setting. Over coffee, music, and seemingly endless amounts of food, I engaged the group in conversations about living in the Kurdish north and what part the Kurds played in the myth of nationalism. These women were far more eager to discuss the fallacy of a united Iraq and the trauma they had experienced as a result of the Ba’th campaigns to rid the north of political opponents. Kurdish Muslims, they said, were culturally different to Arab Sunni Muslims in thought and behavior, particularly in the greater respect and social standing that women enjoyed. 34

As the gathering dissipated after many hours of enjoyable conversation and eating, one woman lingered behind the rest and asked if she could talk to me privately. She wanted to tell me her story and experiences of trauma and loss. As an activist in Iraqi Kurdistan, she fled in the early nineties to the Iranian border on foot with her brothers, where she was captured and held in a detention camp for many months. Having endured sustained physical and sexual abuse, she eventually made her way to Canada. She explained that during her captivity in Iran, she was informed that her parents had been murdered by Ba’th soldiers. In a tragic accident shortly after arriving in Canada, one of her brothers accidentally shot the other brother, and in his grief was subsequently admitted to a mental-health facility. In response to her traumatic past, she declared herself an atheist, yet was fearful of sharing her personal religious beliefs with the others, while openly critical of theirs:

34 Group interview conducted with eight Kurdish women and one Arab Sunni woman in Toronto, 8th November, 2008.
How can they believe in God? What God would do this? God is dead. He will never exist to me again. My heart is broken because of my brother. They are hypocrites, making me feel like an outcast because of my hair, my clothes, the way I act, [the fact that] I am not married. Who are they to tell me how to feel?  

She explained, too, that the women refused to acknowledge her fiancée because he was not ‘suitable’, being of a lower social-class, less educated, and a Shi’i Muslim. Still, these subjective narratives offer her a means by which to subvert the collective, indeed hegemonic, framework governing the official ‘myth of nation.’ Since the ‘dialectic of memory and counter memory’ is informed by repression and dispossession, historical memory is a key component in understanding how myths of origin and belonging are formulated in Iraq, and carried into the diaspora.  

Gender inequalities further complicate the process of remembering and retelling the past. Parin Dossa suggests that “unless women’s stories advance patriarchal and imperialist interests, they are not heard, and these stories do not make their way into the national and international corridors of power.” In the case of Iraqi women, their narratives are formed based on the hegemonic conditions of nationalism and the role of religion in the creation of the ‘myth of nation’. As the above interview suggests, the ‘myth of nation’ and claims to a unified past continue to dominate the formal narratives of Iraqi women in diaspora. In the interview space, participants struggled to redefine the boundaries in order to reorient the power dynamics in their favour and craft unofficial narratives of individual lives. Notions of ‘civilized’ peoples become conflated with religious unity, complicating the ability of religious groups to distinguish their place in Iraq’s collective memory and position  

35 Group interview with author in Toronto, 8th November, 2008.  
37 Parin Dossa, Racialized Bodies, Disabling Worlds, 21.
themselves within an Iraqi community in diaspora, and this is especially true of non-Muslim Iraqis. Furthermore, codes of civility confine women according to expected patriarchal norms, reinforced not only by men but also by female Iraqi friends and family. Ultimately, the dichotomy between the official and counter narratives of Iraqi women suggests that it is imperative to construct an alternate space within which these women can articulate new understandings of their subjectivities.38

Location and Dislocation

As recent immigrants, women in Toronto and Amman have left behind friends and family, and the threat of loss looms heavily over their daily lives. Much like Marwa, the young interviewee of the opening anecdote, women in Toronto repeatedly expressed their fear of hearing the phone ring late at night, and both recent refugees in Amman (where proximity to the regime instilled much fear) and Toronto said they phoned home frequently to check on friends and family. Anxiety and the threat of loss runs through the interviews with second-generation foreign-born Iraq women in Toronto, and many confessed to trouble sleeping, eating disorders, anxiety disorders, and depression. And like Marwa, many of these young women are intimately tied to the homeland through technologies providing direct contact with family and friends in Iraq on a daily basis.39 Fathers or husbands continue to live in Iraq and send back remittances to families settled as refugees in Canada. It also heightened their sense of alienation, since they did not identify with Canadian

women, whom they felt could not understand lives filled with daily fear. In these interviews, where women shared their deepest fears, I frequently felt the weight of their stories, shared in part to lighten the burden of remaining emotionally strong for their families. Second generation U.S. born Iraqis in Detroit constructed much different narratives of trauma and identity. Having never lived in Iraq, these women drew upon collective memories of trauma and persecution in their expressions of community and individual identity as Chaldean-Americans.

Perhaps the best example of how proximity to homeland, and the newness of refugees, affected the shaping of narratives involved a Sabean family I interviewed in Amman in the summer of 2007.40 This interview also highlights the importance of understanding the relationship between counter and official narrative, and serves as a reminder of the ongoing realities of religious persecution in Iraq, and the transnational connections (both implicit and explicit) that transcend national borders.41 Despite having ready access to networks of Muslim Arab and Kurdish Iraqi women in Amman, it was an ongoing struggle to gain the trust and consent of Chaldean, Assyrian, and Sabean families to be interviewed. Having worked with several community agencies (including CARE and MITNAZ), I was eventually granted a meeting and introduction to a Sabean family living in Amman’s bustling city center. To protect the safety of the family, the community worker who assisted me in setting up the interview asked that I keep the interview a secret and she would not provide a phone number or let me contact the family in advance. In the apartment, the shades were drawn, the air was stale, and the atmosphere was tense. The

40 Interview with Sabean family, Amman, 30th September, 2008.
mother sat with her sons, and spoke in a muted but level monotone of the persecution they had suffered and the family members lost over the past thirty years. Her official narrative differed significantly from the majority of Arab and Kurdish interviewees in Amman who spoke of the unity between ethno-religious groups and the freedoms and protections afforded to these groups by the state prior to the U.S. invasion in 2003. Instead she detailed the persecution of minority groups such as the Sabeans by Saddam Husayn’s Ba’th government.42

During the interview, I asked her what were her personal reasons for leaving Iraq when she did, she responded that she wanted to create better opportunities for her sons. Having been informed in advance of the family’s situation by the community worker who facilitated the interview, I was aware that her family had suffered personal loss in Iraq, and felt that her response to this question was a result of her desire to protect the privacy of her family and prevent her trauma from becoming part of the recorded portion of the interview. After the interview was over, Shehede began arguing with the woman over her interpretation of Iraq’s past. Their disagreement over the place of non-Muslims in the national commemoration of the past quickly sparked the creation of a counter narrative. The interviewee admitted leaving Iraq due to death threats, and showed us the evidence of ongoing threats sent from within Jordan by a fundamentalist Islamic group based in Iraq. She informed us that her sons had been unable to leave the apartment for months because of the threats. Informally, she detailed how her brother had been murdered in his home shortly before they decided to flee to a refugee camp on the border between Jordan and Iraq. Although in this case the recorded interview contained a much different official account of

42 Interview with Sabean family in Amman, 30th September, 2008.
ethno-religious divides in Iraq’s past, the counter narrative of trauma shielded the personal loss of the interviewee from the record.\textsuperscript{43} In this particular case, proximity to the homeland was certainly a factor in the construction of narrative because of the imminent threat of physical violence and the very recent loss of family members in the homeland. This interview illustrates the impact of fear in shaping narrative and memory. In such cases, fear and the threat of violence prevent Iraqi women in diaspora from providing a complete account of their lives and memories during the official taped interview.

Female counter-expressions of the past, of religious identity, and their place in the Iraqi diaspora do shift over time and in relation to their location within the diaspora. In several cases, I was able to carry out follow-up interviews with women interviewed in Amman after they arrived as refugees in Toronto.\textsuperscript{44} A Sunni woman I interviewed with her three daughters in Amman in 2008 openly expressed her dislike of Iraq’s Shi’i population, blaming them for the disintegration of a once great nation. She stressed that the Sunnis alone had created the great civilization of Mesopotamia. Several times, she referred to the Iraqis as the “only civilized people in the world” and said she hated the thought of migrating to Canada where there “is no history and no culture, only snow.”\textsuperscript{45} In 2008, she had been in Amman for three years, and her narrative expressed her strong emotional connection to the homeland. Conveying her adherence to the official ‘myth of nation,’ she spoke of returning home soon to help in the rebuilding of a “greater Iraq.”

\textsuperscript{43} Interview with author in Jordan, 30\textsuperscript{th} September, 2008.
\textsuperscript{44} There were large numbers of middle class Iraqis living in Amman in 2008 and 2009 when I conducted the interviews, and educated Sunni professionals in particular created social networks of friends and family who lived in close proximity and gathered on a regular basis to celebrate holidays and events. Their situation in Amman was temporary; although many Sunni families lived in relative comfort, their narratives reflected the precarious uncertainly that plagued their lives. See also, Jeff Crisp, Jane Janz, and José Riera, \textit{Surviving in the City: A Review of UNHCR’s Operation for Iraqi Refugees in Urban Areas of Jordan, Lebanon and Syria}, (UNCHR Policy Development and Evaluation Service, July 2009), 8-9.
\textsuperscript{45} Interview with author in Jordan, 15\textsuperscript{th} September, 2008.
In a follow-up interview in Toronto in 2011, she confessed even during the formal interview to liking Canada very much and being impressed with “the opportunities, so many different foods - my God, everywhere you turn there is Thai or Sushi or Indian [food]. You can really do anything you want here and no one can tell you what to do.” When I reminded of her previous hesitancy and views of Canada she replied, “My eyes have been opened. Once I came here I saw so many different people and they are all living together and no one is being killed. What more can you ask for? Only that it is hard for us to find jobs, but in time, Insha’Allah this will change.” Over time and distance, her Canadian experiences had also changed her views on Iraq’s past, as indicated by her approval of the Chaldeans she has met in Windsor and Detroit, saying “they are all very successful because they are helping each other,” whereas Iraqi Muslims were not, but “only seeing it as what can you do to help me.” Moreover, she attributed the Chaldeans’ success to the fact that they had “kept the old ways alive more than us,” ascribing to this minority Christian group ‘traditional’ Iraqi characteristics of mutual support.

There was an even greater transition in her daughter’s narratives in Amman in comparison to Toronto. Much of my discussion with her daughters in Amman had focused on their experiences in diaspora as young women under the age of thirty. The eldest daughter was married with two small children when I first interviewed her in 2008, and the other two daughters were attending private colleges in Amman. The eldest married daughter considered moving to Canada as positive, since her children, “will never have to experience what it is like to live in a war. What it is like not to know if your family will be

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46 Interview with author in Amman, 15th September, 2008.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
alive the next day. Who can live like this?”

In Amman, the two unmarried daughters lamented leaving their home in Iraq and refused to entertain the notion of settling in Canada, explaining that they would never be able to find an Iraqi husband and raise their children “like in Iraq.” Now in Toronto, in this follow-up interview, the eldest married daughter was far more negative about life in Canada, commenting that, “it makes good Muslims bad, and Iraqis forget who they are here.” Her unmarried sisters were, on the other hand, far more positive about the opportunities for women: “you can do anything you want here in the University. They have courses for everything. Women can do more jobs in Canada.”

As for finding a potential husband, both agreed there were many ‘good’ families in Windsor and Hamilton and far more Iraqis in Canada than they had expected. Moreover, marriage was no longer their foremost concern; as one sister noted, “I am not worried about marriage now, I just want to study and be a doctor.” They explained that the opportunity to be a working mother in Canada without the stigma experienced in Iraq encouraged them to choose a higher education before a marriage partner.

Time and distance, then, had displaced the desire of these four women to return to the homeland and had also tempered the pressing homesickness and anger they felt as recent refugees in Amman. In Amman they remained tied to the homeland and to notions of normative roles for women in Iraqi society. In Toronto, all four women discussed a newfound sense of independence, more explicitly in the case of the unmarried daughters who no longer focused on marriage exclusively and instead considered choices that in turn gave them a sense of freedom and independence not expressed in Amman. Examples of

49 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
52 Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq.*
53 Interview with author in Amman, 15th September, 2008.
successful Chaldean communities in Toronto and Detroit shifted the mother’s long-held dismissal of Iraq’s religious minorities. The married daughter remained optimistic about the prospect of returning to work after having children, remarking that, “in Iraq this would not have been possible for me, people will talk and my husband will not like this.” Even though her financial situation in Canada was the primary reason for returning to the workforce, she nevertheless embraced it as a new and liberating opportunity. Interestingly, none of the family members (including the father) consider themselves as part of the ‘Iraqi community’ in Windsor; instead they embraced their independence from “the old ways, you know, where everyone is watching what you are doing, what you are buying, who are you eating with, who does your daughter marry.” This shift from the ‘old’ ways to ‘new’ ways embodies both a physical and imagined transition from East to West, emboldening the women.

The dual narrative pattern, however, does not apply evenly across the board. In my interviews with Chaldean and Kurdish Iraqis residing in Toronto and Detroit since the early nineties, I noted overall less resistance to speaking critically ‘on the record’ and a greater degree of consistency between formal and informal narratives. Women who had fled Iraq during this period of upheaval tended to be far more critical of the state’s violent policies against its people. Kurdish women who left Iraq during its crackdown on political enemies in the north were particularly vocal about their experiences at the hands of the Ba‘th army, and their painful memories of the occupations of Kirkuk and Suleimaniyah. Also less fearful of making political statements on the record were those who had emigrated prior to 1980. When asked about religious minorities in Iraq, one of these women boldly declared:

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54 Interview with author in Toronto, 6th September, 2010.
55 Ibid.
“Iraq was a mosaic under the oppression and force of obligation living together under one roof. The moment they [religious minorities] could get away, they did – now every group is asking for their own nation.”

Yet, even in these cases, loss and trauma were noticeably absent from their formal narratives. Even in informal discussions, Kurdish women typically discussed loss without emotion and in the third person, suggesting that, like other survivors, in order to cope in the present, they felt the need to disassociate from this traumatic past.

Also absent in the narratives of pre-U.S. invasion Kurdish women’s narratives were tropes of nation and national unity so prevalent in the narratives of Sunni and Shi’i Iraqi women. No doubt, this reflects their political affiliations, as many women freely admit a desire to see a sovereign Kurdistan restored. They did, however, conform to the view that religious groups in Iraq had lived in relative harmony for millennia before the present sectarian divisions, indicating their partiality as Muslims to the foundational notions imbedded in the ‘myth of nation’ that Iraq was founded on Islamic principles which predate the spread of Islam through this region of ancient Mesopotamia.

There was an interesting paradox between the constructions of loss and trauma in the narratives of Kurdish women who migrated to Toronto in the 1990s and those of second-generation, U.S. born Chaldean-American women in Detroit. Whereas Kurdish women tended to distance themselves from discussions of personal loss and trauma, Chaldean-American women embraced narratives of trauma and persecution passed down through their families and communities. Despite having lived in the U.S. their whole lives, their Chaldean-American identity has formed around community-lead commemorations of past

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56 Interview with author in Toronto, 10th December, 2008.
58 Davies, Memories of State, 273-278.
traumas and the ongoing persecution of Chaldeans in Iraq. Second-generation women constructed their identity in relation to these past persecutions of Chaldeans, connecting the past traumas of their families with the plight of current Chaldean refugees fleeing Iraq. Through settlement and refugee aid work in organizations such as the Chaldean-American Ladies of Charity, these women remain connected to the Chaldean community in Iraq and continue to reconfigure their identity as hyphenated Chaldeans in America. In helping to counsel refugees through their experiences of war and trauma, second generation women often adopt refugee narratives of displacement and loss as their own, claiming: “we are still suffering in Iraq” and “even though we have lived in Iraq since the dawn of time, they are still killing us and saying we are not Iraqi.” Embracing the persecution of this minority group strengthens the lineage of these foreign born Chaldean women while simultaneously legitimizing their claims to the homeland.

**Conclusion**

The differences in the construction and delivery of narratives in interviews conducted with women in Amman, Toronto, and Detroit suggests that time and distance alter the relationship between the individual and their ethno-religious group, as well as their connection to the homeland. In diaspora, the women’s perspectives on the place of religious groups in Iraq’s collective past shift as the threat of loss is distracted by more pressing daily concerns like education, marriage, employment, and acculturation. New identities are forged as communities reconvene (as in the case of Chaldeans in Detroit) and nationalisms are reconsidered and reconstructed in the aftermath of life during successive autocratic

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regimes. As Saskia Witteborn notes, “the diasporic imaginations of Iraqis are characterized by resistance and survival and transcend national, social and political spaces.” Over time, Iraqi women find new ways to express lived histories and to understand their place in Iraq’s past. Second generation Chaldean-American women in Detroit are an active part of reimagining Chaldean identity and the history of this community in Iraq, claiming their place in its future. As Toronto’s second-generation Iraqi women come of age, they too become part of the process of redefining the identity of this diasporic community through their own experiences of war and trauma, and collective memories commemorated through the oral retelling of family histories.

Iraqi women clearly articulate two very different and often conflicting narratives. The first is defined by the gendered interpretation of the Iraqi collective past, reflecting a masculine collective memory structured to confirm the Ba‘th national narrative, and the second is shaped by the subjective reality of Iraqi women’s experiences, past and present, that challenge that official myth. As the interviews with Sabean, Kurdish and Arab Muslim women in Amman and Toronto suggest, one needs to incorporate elements of both narratives in order to understand the whole, learning to “listen in stereo, receiving both dominant and muted channels clearly and tuning into them carefully to understand the relationship between them.”

This process of ‘listening in stereo’ to formal and informal, official and subjective, narratives enables the listener to reconstruct the composition of memory from lived experiences in the homeland, gendered interpretations of nation and national unity, and the new realities of displacement. As we have seen, the interview can open up a ‘third space’, a

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safe space, but also a site of resistance within which women can reproduce official narratives in conjunction with the subjective female experiences of trauma, war and dislocation. Adopting a ‘thick description’ approach, one that explores the intersectionality between official and unofficial narratives, helps enormously, as does contextualizing these encounters within a framework of social and cultural interactions.62 Omitting the unofficial histories of women would produce a fractured and incomplete account of Iraqi women’s past and thus their present. These women fill the silences of the interview (public) space with counter narratives shared in the informal (private) space after the interview, taking comfort in this ‘female’ space. The realities of Iraqi women’s narratives suggest the importance of being culturally sensitive in our interpretations of ethical guidelines governing the interview space, which often confine the researcher to write only about formal interviews documented and recorded on tape.

Chapter Four
‘Becoming’ American and Canadian: Community Activism and Claims to Citizenship

Scholars have long been interested in the role that ethnic organizations play in the reception and settlement of immigrants, and their integration into the mainstream of host societies. This chapter addresses this theme while also highlighting the important gender dynamics involved. As ethnic communities have expanded and diversified, so too have the resources available to assist immigrants in their transition into life in North America. By the 1970s, religious and community organizations no longer bore the burden of immigrant aid, as government funding became accessible through programmes designed to promote pluralism and multiculturalism. The incorporation of ethnic and community-based organizations into a more centralized process of assistance and information distribution changed the nature of immigrant aid, both in the U.S. and in Canada. The role of cultural preservation has expanded, as organizations have partnered (albeit hesitantly in many cases) with government agencies to provide newly arrived immigrants and refugees with assistance in settlement, retraining, counseling, and education. This chapter explores the multifaceted role of ethnic and government-funded organizations in the lives of Iraqi immigrants in Toronto and Detroit. As a relatively ‘new’ ethno-national group in North America, Iraqi ethnic communities offer a particularly good example of the changing nature of ethnic organizations in “multicultural” receiving societies, and the discrepancies that exist between government-funded and non government-funded associations. As administrators,

1 This process differs between Canada and the U.S., since Canada has a programme of official multiculturalism as part of the Constitution, whereas the U.S. has a long history of pluralistic approaches to immigrants through federal aid to bilingual education and the federal Ethnic Heritage Studies Act, but not an official policy of multiculturalism.
counselors, and mentors, individual Iraqi women, play complex roles within these organizations. This chapter explores how ethnic organizations, government-funded aid associations, and Iraqi female staff, promote ‘good citizenship,’ and how such ideas are translated through practices of civic engagement and duty.

Women play an integral part in ethnic and government-funded organizations as professional counselors, board members, executives, mentors, and volunteers. This enables them to provide support on an individual and intimate basis as well as professional and retraining counseling to refugee families. But how do individual and collective notions of citizenship shape the ways in which Iraqi women provide advice regarding family disputes, employment, settlement, and integration? Keeping in mind the complex nature of ‘Iraqi’ identity explored previously in the thesis, this chapter examines the extent to which ethnic divides are promoted as part of the political agendas of ethnic groups in diaspora. Detroit’s Chaldean community provides an illustrative case of how ethnic organizations maintain, and to some extent even enforce, ethnic divides within migrant communities. Yet, ethnic organizations can also help to bridge new and old understandings of citizenship, and this provides guideposts for learning to negotiate dual citizenship and ideas about hyphenated identity.² Through the process of voting as expatriates in Iraqi elections, Chaldeans in Detroit and Muslims in Toronto maintain their (often) tenuous connection to homeland politics and reinforce their identity as Iraqi citizens. By engaging in the democratic exercise of voting abroad, Iraqi migrants navigate the complex boundary between being and belonging outside of the homeland. The extent to which ethnic agendas conflict with notions of ‘good citizenship’ in Canada and the U.S., and how this undermines or reinforces

the goals of official and unofficial multicultural policy is key to understanding how new Iraqi refugees internalize ideas of civic duty, citizenship (civic and diasporic), and inclusion in North America.3

**Ethnic Organizations and Sectarian Divides**

Focusing on six ethnic organizations that provide assistance to Iraqi immigrants and refugees in Toronto and Detroit, I explore the extent to which they draw upon sectarian

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3 The national context into which immigrants integrate also influences how they engage with the host country and reconfigure ethnic and national identity in diaspora. Canada and the U.S. have developed along different national and ethnic trajectories, when it comes to how immigrants are included as citizens. Before ideas of polyethnicty and multiculturalism emerged in the 1970s, the dialectic of assimilation and pluralism was debated at length to determine how a democratic society should preserve the integrity of national/ethnic groups in a system of assimilation. John Higham, *Send These to Me: Jews and Other Immigrants in Urban America*, (New York: Athenaeum Press, 1975), 198. Some critics argue that the U.S. has not developed as a multinational state, and so ‘common citizenship’ is designed to create strong national ties. Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman, “Return of the Citizen: A Survey of Recent Work on Citizenship Theory,” in *Theorizing Citizenship*, ed., Ronald Beiner, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), 302-303. In Canada, by contrast, ‘differentiated citizenship’ allows for certain self-governing rights within the constitution for founding national groups. However, a consideration of the rise of pluralistic policies in Canada and the U.S. suggests similarities in the process of moving from assimilation to integration. Before the 1970s, Canada adopted a model of Anglo-conformity, expecting immigrants to assimilate into the cultural norms of the majority. Canada’s shift away from assimilationist policy occurred earlier and under circumstances not present in the U.S. Nathan Glazer, “Individual Rights against Group Rights,” in *Human Rights*, eds., Eugene Kamenka and Alice Erh-Soon Tay, (London: Edward Arnold, 1978), 100. In 1971, a “policy of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework” was officially legislated in Canada as a federal response to the lobbying of ethnic groups, in particular Ukrainians in the prairie provinces, and to heated debates surrounding the rise of French Canadian nationalism and the need to clarify who qualified as distinct national groups in Canada. Michael Temelini, “Multicultural Rights, Multicultural Virtues: A History of Multiculturalism in Canada,” in ed., Stephen Tierney, *Multiculturalism and the Canadian Constitution*, (Vancouver and Toronto: University of British Columbia Press, 2007), 45. In the U.S., assimilationism was the dominant model before the mid-1960s, although there were also competing pluralistic discourses. Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001). By the 1970s, a similar shift towards what might be considered multicultural policies occurred in the U.S., though it occurred not as an officially endorsed federal government policy but instead through a range of policies adopted at the federal, state, and local levels. These included, notably, affirmative action in federal hiring practices, bilingual education through federal grants, and the Ethnic Heritage Studies Act encouraging a kind of multicultural education. see John Skrentny, *The Minority Rights Revolution*, (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2002); James Crawford, *Bilingual Education: History, Politics, Theory and Practice*, (Trenton, N.J.: Crane Publishing Company, 1989). As Will Kymlicka points out, the oft-stated main difference between America’s ‘melting-pot’ and Canada’s ‘ethnic mosaic’ is misleading since the ethnic mosaic simply means that “immigrants to Canada had a choice of two rather than one dominant cultures to assimilate to.” Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 17. In short, the different cultural policies do not greatly affect the official position on polyethnicity and multiculturalism in each country.
differences in an effort to strengthen ethnic identity in diaspora and achieve recognition beyond the borders of ethnic communities. These organizations include government funded immigrant assistance programmes such as the Arab Community Centre of Toronto (ACCT) and the American Community Center for Economic and Social Services of Detroit (ACCESS), which provide resources to Arab communities including Iraqi Muslims, Christians, and Kurds. Also included are community-funded organizations such as the Chaldean Federation of America (CFA), the Chaldean American Ladies of Charity (CALC), and the Assyrian Canadian National Federation. I examine why the levels of support from within these communities under scrutiny differ, and how this affects the ability of organizations to promote their mandate. I also explore how and why these organizations promote the engagement of Iraqi immigrants in civic citizenship in the host country.

The Chaldean community in Detroit represents one of the largest ethno-religious communities of Iraqis living in North America. After the Second World War, Chaldeans began to settle in the south-end Dearborn section of Detroit, forming a cohesive ethnic enclave based on clan and kinship bonds. Chaldeans were the first Iraqi ethnic group to found an organization in Detroit, responding to the growing need for a systematic aid and support network within the community. In 1961 Archbishop George Garmo officially sanctioned the Chaldean American Ladies of Charity (CALC). The goal of this organization was to maintain Chaldean heritage and family values and help successive generations connect with their heritage. Organized and administered by women, CALC was

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4 The statistics for Iraqi ethnic communities are difficult to corroborate since the census does not generally differentiate between Iraqi and Chaldean/Assyrian in Canada or the United States. Figures are available for Chaldean ethnic organizations and church records, and recorded by Mary Cey Sengstock in her most recent book, *Chaldeans in Michigan*, (Michigan State University Press, 2005).

5 This early Chaldean community settled densely in close proximity, founding local businesses in an area that has come to be known as ‘Chaldean Town’. Sengstock, *Chaldeans in Michigan*, 57.

based on a system of church volunteers, who organized clothing and food drives as well as social occasions, all designed to promote community building. In the 1980s, the Chaldean community experienced a dramatic influx of new migrants, increasing the population from a few thousand in the early 1970s to approximately sixty five thousand by the early 1990s.\(^7\) The growing need for more systematic financial and immigrant-assistance programmes led to the creation of the Chaldean Federation of America (CFA), the Chaldean Chamber of Commerce, and the Arab American and Chaldean Council (ACC). Established in 1981, the CFA became the first non-profit umbrella association of its kind to provide a strong political voice on behalf of Christian minority rights both in Iraq and in the U.S. Representing nine major Chaldean organizations in metropolitan Detroit (including the Chamber of Commerce, the ACC, and the CALC), the CFA aspired to “work on issues related to Chaldean minority issues, help people integrate and get to know the law in this country.”\(^8\)

In 2006, Executive Director Joseph Kassab, spearheaded a resettlement initiative dubbed ‘Operation R-4’ (Research, Relief, Resettlement, and Re-empowerment), which works with the UNHCR and the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) to facilitate the urgent resettlement of minorities at risk in Iraq.\(^9\)

The CFA and the CALC are both operated and administered by ethnic Iraqis and draw predominantly on funds gathered from within the community. The breadth of their resources and the community support that these organizations garner suggests the importance of these organizations to the Chaldean community in Detroit. One such example of the scope of this organization is the success of ‘Operation R-4’, which has

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\(^7\) Community records also suggest that approximately ten thousand or more may have been missing from the record. Sengstock, *Chaldeans in Michigan*, 45.

\(^8\) Joseph Kassab, interview with author, 6\(^{th}\) November, 2009.

\(^9\) Joseph Kassab, interview with author; also on their website at, [http://www.chaldeanfederation.org/](http://www.chaldeanfederation.org/). Operation R-4 helps not only Chaldeans at risk, but also Assyrians, Syriacs, Mandeans, and Iraqi Jews to resettle in the U.S.
assisted in sponsoring over thirty-three thousand Chaldean refugees from Iraq to settle in Detroit.\(^{10}\) This initiative is a vast undertaking that involves the cooperation of affiliated organizations, particularly the CALC to help with the paperwork involved, as well as to provide practical assistance to refugees and their families upon arrival. This programme highlights the transnational scope of this organization in traversing numerous national borders to advocate for the safety of Chaldeans at risk. The CFA works closely with the UNHCR to find families to sponsor refugees and to complete immigration documents on behalf of hopeful refugee families. The resources and manpower necessary to operate a programme of this magnitude point to the strong support network within the organization and the continued presence of the CFA in the lives of second and third generation Chaldeans in Detroit.

The Assyrian Canadian National Federation is by comparison a very modest grassroots organization operated from a family-owned Assyrian restaurant by a dedicated handful of advocates seeking to help sponsor Assyrian families leaving Iraq. Officially established in 2003, this organization works with the Assyrian church to raise funds that provide language classes as well as drug and crime prevention seminars to the Assyrian community in Toronto. Financial costs incurred in the resettlement of refugees are often borne by individual sponsor families, which limits the scope of their efforts to help Assyrians leave Iraq. Since the Assyrian community in Toronto developed much later than the Chaldean community, the Assyrian Federation lacks the numbers, cohesion, and funding to expand and assist in a more systematic programme of resettlement. The Assyrian community in Toronto is currently estimated to be approximately twenty thousand, hence

\(^{10}\) This number represents the total count for all Iraqis of Chaldean, Syriac, and Assyrian heritage that have been admitted to the U.S. through ‘Operation R-4’. Chaldean Federation of America 2008 Program Update, *Chaldean Federation of America fonds*, Bentley Historical Library, Michigan.
much smaller than the Chaldean community in Detroit, which in 2003 was estimated to be in the region of a hundred and twenty thousand.\textsuperscript{11} The Assyrian Canadian Federation also suffers from lack of support from within the community, undermining the efforts of the executive to expand the scope of assistance programmes.\textsuperscript{12} This is due in part to infighting within the community and to different loyalties of community members, whether to the religious community in Toronto, or the transnational political movements in the U.S. and in the homeland seeking to mobilize Assyrians in support of autonomous status within Iraq.

Notwithstanding the dramatic difference in the size and scope of Chaldean community organizations in Detroit and the Assyrian Federation in Toronto, there are notable similarities in their goals and mandates, both of which speak to ethnic divisions within the Iraqi communities of Toronto and Detroit. The presence and composition of Chaldean and Assyrian organizations strongly indicate that kin and clan networks are transported and replicated in North America, facilitated by chain migration from specific locations of origin to the North American destination.\textsuperscript{13} Cleavages between groups are heightened in North America as minority groups with little political clout in Iraq find a stronger political and community base in Toronto or Detroit, by drawing upon traditional kinship networks.\textsuperscript{14} Ethnic bonds are particularly strong in the case of the Chaldeans in

\textsuperscript{11} Until the 2000 Census enabled Chaldeans to be determined as a distinct ethnic group apart from the ‘Arab’ grouping, all population data was collected and approximated by the Chaldean Church. Even after this option was available, CFA executives believe it is likely that most Chaldeans continue to be listed as ‘Arabs’. The most accurate numbers are still considered Church and community records. Sengstock, \textit{Chaldeans in Michigan}, 8.

\textsuperscript{12} Sam Shlimon and John Narsa, group interview with author, 9\textsuperscript{th} December, 2009.


\textsuperscript{14} Sengstock, \textit{Chaldeans in Michigan}, introduction.
Detroit, who have formed intricate networks of professional and community based organizations over two generations, and promoted the economic, cultural, and political agendas of this group in the U.S. In the case of the Chaldeans, developing and empowering a distinct identity in diaspora has become the explicit goal of the CFA. Despite the smaller scale of the Assyrian communities, these too are dependent upon transnational kinship networks of aid to assist refugees hoping to settle in North America.

The strength of community networks of Chaldean members and volunteers in Detroit has enabled the Chaldean organizations to promote ethnic difference and identity in a number of ways. One way they have “promote[d] public awareness and understanding of the Chaldean family, history and culture”\(^\text{15}\) is by working in conjunction with local school boards to increase awareness of their ethnic group. In the 1970s, the Detroit Public School Division of Educational Services approached community leaders from the Mother of God Chaldean Church and the CALC for information that would help them expand ‘multicultural’ awareness in the classroom by providing material about Chaldean beliefs and culture.\(^\text{16}\) The goal of this programme was “to assist both monolingual and bilingual classroom teachers in introducing and implementing classroom activities that encompass the diverse cultural and linguistic heritages of Detroit.”\(^\text{17}\) In addition, the stated mission of this programme was to “impart a sense of admiration for the cultural heritage and linguistic background of the many people who are an integral part of the Detroit school

\(^{15}\)“Chaldean Federation of America Missions and Goals”, *Chaldean Federation of America fonds*, Bentley Historical Library, Michigan.

\(^{16}\)An example of the kind of state-supported multiculturalism funded by the federal Ethnic Heritage Studies Act.

\(^{17}\)Multicultural Awareness for the Classroom: The Chaldeans, published by the Detroit Public Schools Division of Educational Services Department of Curriculum Development and Services, Department of Bilingual/Bicultural Education.
By 1978, the Detroit School Board included as part of their syllabus a lesson plan that drew comparisons between aspects of Chaldean history and culture and that of more recognized Western groups. The information offered, which included a manual on history, language, literature, religion, geography, and mythology, provided extensive coverage for a community of its size at the time. Encouraged by the state, this self-promotion was in part a response by the Chaldean Church to the growing Iraqi Muslim and broader Muslim and Arab communities in Detroit, which threatened to undermine Middle Eastern Christian identity by the 1980s. This desire to stand apart as an ethno-religious group and the space within which to do so has allowed the Chaldean community to flourish as a socio-political entity and expand its influence in arenas of municipal politics and finance. The activism of the Chaldean Federation and their numerical strength has enabled Detroit’s Chaldeans to effectively promote awareness of their ethnic difference in mainstream America, a feat not matched by Assyrians in Canada.

Another example of how the Chaldean community in Detroit has been successful in promoting their identity as a separate and distinct ethnic group is illustrated by the 2000 Census. In the spring of 2000, the Chaldean News, an affiliate of the CFA, urged members of the community to take pride in completing the census form by responding in the following manner: “On the long form, question #10 asks about ethnicity, please write Chaldean in the blank. And on the short form, question #8 asks about race, you can check ‘other’ and write Chaldean.” Such a strategy offers clear evidence of a desire to stand apart from an ‘Iraqi’ or ‘Arab’ designation. Defining Chaldean as an ethnic group

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18 *The Chaldeans*, Detroit Public Schools Division of Education.
19 Ibid.
20 Sengstock, *Chaldean-Americans*, conclusion.
also speaks to the important way in which Chaldeans have come to understand how they can draw upon difference to stake out a place in the polyethnic state. This form of integration encourages ethnic groups such as Chaldeans to maintain cultural markers such as language, religion, social practices, and institutions. Although these ethnic differences originate in the homeland, pluralistic cultural policies in North America create a space in which groups such as the Chaldeans can explore new and productive ways of expressing difference.

Whereas the early settlement of Christian Iraqis in Toronto and Detroit enabled the formation of organizations catering to their ethnic specifications and interests, more recent Arab Muslim and Kurdish Iraqis rely primarily on a variety of government-funded organizations for financial, emotional, and legal support. Without the support of an established community framework, Muslim refugees who left Iraq following the U.S. invasion and rise in sectarian violence after 2003 are forced to rely on government subsidies in the initial period of settlement in Canada and the U.S. The American Community Center for Economic and Social Services of Detroit (ACCESS) and the Arab Community Center of Toronto (ACCT) both cater specifically to Arab community needs in these cities. ACCESS first opened its doors to Arab refugees and immigrants in 1971 and now operates a number of community-based programmes designed to serve the particular needs of Arab refugee communities. Established in 1978, the ACCT was similarly founded in response to the growing numbers of Arab migrants settling in the Greater Toronto Area. Much like ACCESS, the ACCT provides a wide range of counseling, training, and settlement services for Arabs from all backgrounds. Unlike community-funded organizations such as the CFA and the Assyrian National Federation, both ACCESS and the ACCT are primarily

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23 Interview with Laila Bondugiki (deceased) at the ACCT, Mississauga, 22nd November, 2008.
government-funded organizations, working in conjunction with citizenship and immigration bureaus to help resettle and assist Arab refugees and immigrants.\textsuperscript{24}

ACCESS and the ACCT have more in common with each other than with ethnic community organizations. Both now operate what they consider to be a religious and politically neutral mandate that promotes acceptance of all Arab groups regardless of ethnicity, nationality, or religion. Iraqis are able to access a wide range of assistance programmes designed to help them transition to life in Canada and the U.S. Despite the breadth of ACCESS services - some ninety programmes involving more than two hundred fulltime staff as compared to ACCT’s twenty programs - both organizations provide assistance \textit{regardless} of difference rather than on the basis of ethnic differentiation within the Arab immigrant population. Since the focus of these assistance programmes is on providing migrants of Arab backgrounds with care and guidance, their advocacy is broadly based and does not focus on ethnic difference. In their mission goals, these organizations advocate awareness in mainstream America and Canada for the understanding and acceptance of Arab culture and peoples.

ACCESS and the ACCT work in conjunction with government immigration agencies to provide ‘front line’ assistance to newly settled refugees and immigrants. These gatekeeping organizations work on behalf of the government to provide necessary services in ways that are culturally sensitive and tailored towards people of Arab backgrounds. This

\textsuperscript{24} These organizations are differentiated according to community funded versus government funded based on whether 60\% or more of their overall funds come from government grants and subsidies. The ACCT approximates that at least 75\% of their overall budget comes directly from Citizenship and Immigration Canada (ISAP) and the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration (NSP) and the remainder of their funds range from endowments to individual subsidies. Just over 60\% of the overall ACCESS budget is drawn from government subsidies alone, ($11, 754,769 of the total $17, 469, 967 budget as of 2009) while the rest is drawn from endowments, rental fees, and additional revenues.\hspace{1em} http://www.accesscommunity.org/site/DocServer/ACCESS-AR2000; interview with Laila Bondugiki, 22\textsuperscript{nd} November, 2008.
broad-reaching designation of ‘Arab’ subsumes Iraqi ethnic identity, and prevents ethnic identity from conflicting with the goals of the organizations, which are to promote acceptance and integration. These organizations encourage Arab identity in North America, but also, as in the case of the ACCT, “offer a variety of programs aimed at promoting the full participation of immigrants of Arab origin in all aspects of Canadian life.”25 Although both organizations are able to provide assistance in the languages most familiar to ethnic groups such as the Kurds, there is no space within which Iraqi Kurds, for example, can use these organizations as platforms for political advocacy, in the way that Chaldeans could within the CFA.

Notwithstanding these differences in advocacy work, ethnic organizations and government-funded assistance programmes for Iraqis share a common goal to promote citizenship and civic responsibility in the host country. As the arms of government immigration programmes, ACCESS and the ACCT help immigrants and refugees with the process of becoming citizens.26 Yet, the CFA similarly claims to, “serve as a catalyst for the assimilation of thousands of Chaldeans into the American culture.”27 The Assyrian Canadian Federation is even more explicit in promising to “educate our youth to become purposeful citizens in a democracy with full knowledge of the responsibilities as well as the privileges of citizenship.”28 It is interesting that these ethnic organizations that struggle to maintain ethnic difference in diaspora also promote ideas of civic citizenship in the host country.

25 [http://www.arabcommunitycentre.com](http://www.arabcommunitycentre.com)
26 An important distinction, since the U.S. Bureau of Refugees and Immigration, and Citizenship and Immigration Canada subsidize these resettlement services.
27 Joseph Kassab, Executive Director of the Chaldean Federation of America, interview with author, 6th November, 2009.
One of the ways to explain this allegiance to citizenship in the host country is that it actually reinforces the efforts of ethnic organizations at promoting difference and identity in successive generations. Second and third-generation Chaldean-American citizens hold on to their Iraqi citizenship in an effort to remain connected to their ‘homeland’ (imagined or otherwise) and to the broader community of Chaldeans who remain in Iraq. Chaldean-American community organizations promote the benefits of living in the U.S. to first-generation migrants who may not yet consider themselves to be ‘American’ citizens. For second and third-generation American-born Chaldeans, then, the meaning of citizenship is malleable, and their loyalties to the U.S. are in many ways intricately linked to their homeland connection through their participation in the political process in both countries as “diasporic citizens.” Immigrant group participation in host country politics binds the immigrant group more closely to the U.S. as ethnic-Americans, following the model whereby being “ethnic” is a way to be a good “American.”

Exhibiting a marked contrast to the other groups evaluated, second and third-generation Chaldeans promote the notion of a hyphenated Chaldean-American identity.

As we have seen, the differing patterns exhibited by Chaldeans in Detroit (who are able to advocate on behalf of their ethnic group for recognition as a minority group) and by

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29 Most of the executives and counselors interviewed for this project did not want to be considered as ‘American’ or ‘Canadian’, and continue to identify themselves according to their ethnic or cultural background. Chaldeans expressed a marked contrast to the other groups evaluated, since the second and third generations promote the notion of a hyphenated Chaldean-American identity. However, their ties to their ethnic group remained strong, evidenced in the growing prosperity of economic and social network facilitated through the Chaldean Federation of America. Although the Canadian Census (2001) did not have Chaldean or Assyrian ethnic categories, Arab immigrants on the whole considered themselves to be ‘Canadian’ in some respect. Due to the lack of data on Iraqis in particular, it is difficult to distinguish the extent to which these feelings are true of Iraqi Christians and Muslims. [http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-621-x/89-621-x2007009-eng.htm](http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-621-x/89-621-x2007009-eng.htm)


other Iraqi ethnic groups such as the Assyrians in Toronto, reflect various factors. The different levels of funding, in addition to community support and engagement in ethnic organizations, influences the limits of promoting ethnic difference, and their ability to help those in the homeland. Chaldeans and Assyrians depend on kinship networks to facilitate chain migration from the homeland, and to establish a system of support in the home country. However, Chaldeans have developed more extensive networks of community assistance than the Assyrians, because of their numbers and longer presence in Detroit, as well as their ability to establish a closely-knit ethnic enclave built around the Church and comprised of primarily Chaldean businesses and residences. Government-funded organizations such as ACCESS and ACCT, on the other hand, are not reliant on community support, nor do they promote community identity. Among the groups discussed here, Iraqi Christians are in a much stronger position to promote and advocate on the basis of ethnic difference in North America.

Ethnic organizations encourage the engagement of immigrants as citizens of the host country, because this is part of their agenda to promote their ethnic identity in diaspora. In part, this is also a bid for political power and political voice in the host country. The Chaldeans in Detroit are a case in point: an ethnic groups that demands recognition as a separate group while also promoting the strength of the nation by advocating that their members engage as citizens in the host country. In the case of Assyrian and Chaldean organizations, citizenship in the host country is complicated by their allegiance to what, in Iraq, were minority groups, and the transference of this ‘defensive minority citizenship’ to North America. These defense tactics place ethnic organizations in the role of dual gatekeeper, guarding the bridge between home and host country at both ends. As William

32 This notion of ‘defensive identity’ is best articulated in the work of Davis, Memories of State.
Kymlicka argues, individuals are incorporated into the political community not only as individuals but also through group membership. It is as members of this political community that individual ethnic Iraqis strengthen civic participation and citizenship.\textsuperscript{33}

\textit{The Multifaceted Role of Women in Ethnic Organizations}

This section examines the varied roles that Iraqi women play within these organizations, and how their interpretations of civic citizenship inform their approaches to assisting the integration of migrants in Canada and the U.S. As we shall see, female volunteers, counselors and mentors seek to foster notions of ‘good citizenship’ that reflect their interest in civic obedience and access to citizenship.

The Chaldean Ladies of Charity is an immigrant-aid organization with a focus on providing support and assistance to Iraqi women and children. From the beginning, the CALC was administered and directed by Chaldean women, and supported by donations from the community. Membership in the organization follows a matrilineal line, with daughters inheriting their roles in the organization from grandmothers, mothers, and aunts.\textsuperscript{34} As Vanessa Denha-Garmo, editor of the \textit{Chaldean News}, notes “women started becoming influential far before the men did by organizing as an association…the women have had a very strong voice for a long time…I’ve been involved for many years, but my mother was part of the first women to be on the board.”\textsuperscript{35} There is also a strong social aspect to the CALC that has become increasingly important over time as these women rely on their

\textsuperscript{33} Kymlicka, \textit{Multicultural Citizenship}, 177.
\textsuperscript{34} There is also a very interesting connection between Archbishop Garmo’s family members and CALC. Many of the original executives and volunteers were from Garmo’s immediate family, and the Garmo ladies have continued in their efforts to keep the Ladies of Charity engaged with the most pressing issues facing their community.
\textsuperscript{35} Vanessa Denha-Garmo, Editor of the \textit{Chaldean News}, interview with author, 5\textsuperscript{th} November, 2009.
position in the organization to maintain ties with other women from the community. A retired member of the executive board, Anne Antone explained that, “in the beginning, there wasn’t a lot you could do so it was a good way to socialize, and Father Garmo brought that together for the women…it’s another way of connecting to the community and it brings recognition to the women and to the causes.”

Indeed, the CALC continues to occupy a central role in the lives of its members, who continue to socialize with family and friends involved in the organization. In recent years, the primary focus of the organization has been on refugee resettlement and providing financial assistance and donations to refugee families in Detroit. Through its clothing, furniture and food drives, the CALC operates a programme that takes in donations and distributes these to needy families. In distributing these donated goods, these second and third-generation volunteers come into contact with recent Iraqi refugees. Addressing the issue of recent refugee women, Julie Garmo noted that “they are very appreciative of the help you give them…it’s still very new for them and it’s hard for them to be more active in the community and get involved since many of them don’t have transportation.”

The women of the CALC work as maternal caregivers, providing food, clothing, and advice for refugee women and their families. In conjunction with the CFA, these female volunteers distribute household goods and create personal connections with female immigrants. These relationships are often fraught with tensions; volunteers and executives of the CALC expressed the difficulties in understanding how to communicate and interact with recent refugees. “We didn’t have the hard time that some of the other immigrants and

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38 The CALC currently operates many programmes that reach out to female refugees to provide mental health support, family support, donations and family assistance.
refugees of the last twenty years or so have...we tried to integrate, but we always had the support of the community and the family."

When asked what these refugees hoped to achieve in resettling in the U.S., Anne Antone replied that “really they want the same things that we all do for their families...they want to integrate to a certain point, but they want to keep their identity...and especially so many that come when they don’t want to, and really they want to go back.”

In comparison to the second and third-generation women of the CALC, these new refugee women are different in their language, their dress, their education, and in their experiences of migration. The executive members of the CALC believe that part of their work is to ease the transition for Iraqi refugee women, thus promoting their integration into the Chaldean-American community and their settlement as permanent citizens of America. With the benefit of their experiences in the U.S., they attempt to “help them understand how to live and work, and become part of the American society.”

In addition to acting as cultural mediators for recent refugee women, the volunteers and executives of the CALC and the CFA also work towards helping Chaldeans become independent from federal assistance. Their notions of ‘good citizenship’ are informed by what they consider to be the American civic virtue of remaining financially independent. Executives of the CFA ensure that new immigrants do not “become a burden on the government or the community outside of the Chaldean community, we help them become independent and part of us.”

By working within the community to provide for new immigrants, Chaldean women believe that they are fulfilling their role as American

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39 Lee-Anne Kirma, executive member of the Chaldean-American Ladies of Charity, interview with author in Southfield, Detroit, 6th November, 2009.
41 Ibid., 6th November 2009.
citizens by providing examples of good citizenship. Part of their motives in providing for the needs of recent migrants is also to assist them in the process of integration. The mission goals of the CFA explicitly state that it “serves as a catalyst for the assimilation of thousands of Chaldeans into the American culture.”[^43] Integration has clearly become a more pressing reality in light of second and third-generation Chaldeans, born and educated in the U.S., who consider themselves hyphenated Chaldean-Americans.[^44] In order to preserve their ethnic identity, the CFA and CALC work to help migrants understand that being good civic participants means becoming Chaldean-American.

As second and third-generation Chaldeans, women of the CALC and the CFA consider themselves hyphenated Americans, since the U.S. is their place of birth, and Chaldean is their ethno-religious identity. The way in which these women expressed their understanding of belonging to the homeland and to the host country simultaneously as a condition of their situation in the U.S., illustrates another important reason why the CFA and the CALC promote civic participation to new Iraqi immigrants. Not only do they believe that civic engagement fulfils the role of a ‘good citizen’ but also, and importantly, these second and third-generation women feel an attachment to the U.S. as their home. Their attachment to Iraq differs greatly from the relationship that more recent first generation migrants have to the homeland. Interviews with second and third-generation Chaldean women and community organizers from the CFA and CALC suggest that their attachment to Iraq was significantly different from that of first-generation immigrants in diaspora. In many ways, the responses of second and third-generation Chaldeans suggest

[^43]: http://www.chadeanfederation.org/
[^44]: Khan, *Muslim Women*, conclusion.
that they have moved out of a diasporic framework entirely and into one that more closely resembles a form of pluralistic integration.

The changing needs and demographics of the Iraqi migrant population over the past two decades have created new challenges for counselors, mentors, and volunteers. Counselors from the CFA and the ACCT noted that many of the recent refugees are uneducated and in many cases illiterate, making it increasingly difficult for them to understand their new surroundings. They identified the challenge of communicating with migrants about appropriate family behaviour, and especially with regards to domestic violence. A consideration of such cases also illuminate the roles that female counselors play in negotiating between changing family dynamics and the growing gender within the home in response to the everyday difficulties of employment, language barriers, and financial hardship that new refugees often face in North America.

Counselors at the ACCT noted a dramatic increase in reported child-abuse cases within Iraqi families over the last decade. In many cases, counselors explained that due to the language barrier, parents were slow to learn Canadian rights and laws. Children, on the other hand, were quick to learn from their peers about protective measures set in place to protect children from abuse in the home. By accessing these newfound ‘freedoms’, Iraqi children often fail to understand the ramifications both for themselves and for their parents, and children frequently end up in government care facilities. Raouf notes that “these parents need time to learn how to operate within the system, to find a way to talk to them (children) that is not offensive, that will not be misinterpreted.”

In response to the growing number of abuse cases, female counselors are now better prepared to guide parents on the appropriate behaviour both inside and outside of the home. Counselors like Raouf,

45 Naglaa Raouf, counselor at the ACCT, interview with author in Mississauga, 7th March, 2009.
many of whom are originally from Iraq, understand how best to resolve domestic situations and instruct their clients on how to stay within the law when disciplining their children. Their advice reflects their understanding of Canadian culture and society, as well as Iraqi social and familial dynamics. Describing her position as a “cultural negotiator,” Raouf said she advised her clients to “try and be friends with your kids…the thing that we stress in orientation is not how to find a job, not how to live in Canada, but how to keep your family together, because anything can happen. You can find a job this year or next year, but if you lose one of your kids you can never get them back.”

Eman Alousi works as a counselor for Settlement and Education Partnership in York Region (SEPYR), a branch of the Catholic Community Services that offers settlement and language assistance to immigrant families in the York region of Toronto. Her experiences as an Iraqi migrant and in her work with Iraqi families parallel those of ACCT counselors: “parents don’t understand what is their role in education here.” Alousi’s role as counselor involves going into classes in the York region and leading seminars that help introduce Iraqi culture and history in an attempt to create a cultural bridge. By reaching out to immigrant families, and engaging Canadian children with Iraqi history and culture, Alousi and others are critical intermediaries between old and new worlds. As with family violence cases, it is important that government-funded organizations employ counselors from within the community, who can interpret life in North America through the linguistic and cultural forms that immigrants recognize.

46 Interviews recorded between March 2008 and March 2009 with caseworkers at the Arab Community Center of Toronto. All names and distinguishing characteristics have been withheld to protect the privacy of the participants.
47 Raouf, interview with author, 7th March 2009.
In addition to helping new migrants negotiate everyday changes such as language, education, and employment, Iraqi women in ethnic and government-funded organizations are also influential in mentoring immigrants in ‘good citizenship’ through legal assistance and business training. Muaziz Amin-Aziz, a legally trained Iraqi-Kurdish settlement counselor at the ACCT, assists Iraqis preparing for permanent residency and naturalization. In her work, she admits to helping Iraqi men and women shape their personal narratives in ways that will appeal to the protective measures in place for refugees. Aziz explained that her motive was to help Iraqis understand what it means to be a “good citizen” in Canada, (a common refrain in many of the interviews conducted with immigration and settlement counselors in Detroit and Toronto). Aziz believes that to be a good citizen, you have to live within Canadian law and learn how to be ‘Canadian’ by embracing opportunities for freedom and human rights. She explained of Canada that, “here you do not have to be a victim…you can do anything you want, every door is open to you, all you have to do is ring the bell.”49 The executives of the CALC similarly mirrored Aziz’s ideas of “good citizenship” in terms of civic participation, and “learning to be American.”50 By this, they explained that it was important for new migrants to engage with American society, and not to live in isolation. Volunteers at the CALC commented that one of the primary reasons for rising domestic tension in recent refugee families was the fact that parents did not undergo the same process of integration as their children. Upon entering the school system, children come face to face with American social and cultural norms, whereas parents living on welfare are able to maintain the illusion of living in the homeland within Arab enclaves in

49 Muaziz Aziz, immigration counselor at the ACCT, interview with author, 7th March, 2009.
Detroit. These female counselors thus play critical roles in promoting ideas of civic participation as part of becoming citizens of Canada and America based on their own interpretations of ‘being’ Canadian and American citizens.

In addition to engaging in civic participation through integration, Iraqi women also serve as mentors for immigrant women entering positions in business and politics. Jumhana Judeh of the Arab American Women’s Business Council (AAWBC) believes that North America provides the opportunity for Arab women to engage as equals in professional positions in business. By providing networking opportunities for Iraqi Arab women seeking to expand their professional networks in Detroit, the Women’s Council provides a safe space from which to launch their careers. Judeh comments that, “you can see the hunger out there in these professional women, you can see the desperation – someone to tell them that it’s ok to do both [have a family and work full time], to validate what they are doing.”

A large part of the Council’s mission to facilitate Western expansion into Arab markets, by providing cultural and gender diversity training. As part of this cultural give and take, the Council provides neutral ground for Arab women in the U.S. to engage in the business world on their own terms. Judeh explains that the only way to provide Arab women with the tools to engage in the opportunities and equalities permitted for women in the U.S. is “to break down the barriers… it’s the only way to liberate the women, and the only way to give her monetary options and liberate her from the husband and the father and make her an independent citizen in this country.” Judeh, herself an immigrant, spoke to the gendered divisions in terms of immigrant arrival and integration within the migrant population. In her

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52 Jumhana Judeh, interview with author in Dearborn, Detroit, 7th November, 2009.
53 Ibid.
interview, Judeh suggested that American-born women were better able to access higher education and become professionals than were recent migrants to the U.S. who lacked the networks of support required to allow women to work and care for their children. It is these first-generation migrants that her organization targets. In addition to providing personal mentoring and counseling opportunities, the Council also offers university scholarships for young women entering business-related degrees in the Detroit area. As Judeh argues, Arab women can have a family and a career, but to have these opportunities requires the cooperation of Arab men and an understanding that women should be treated as equals both professionally and in the home. The cultural and gender diversity training provided by the Council represents a shift towards promoting the equal participation of migrant Arab women as citizens in the workforce.

*The Politics of Voting*

Another way in which ethnic organizations promote civic duty is by encouraging Iraqis to vote as expatriates in homeland elections. The political agendas of the CFA and the Assyrian National Federation draw upon sectarian ethnic divisions to persuade Chaldeans and Assyrian migrants to vote for ethnic candidates. As the cornerstone of civic duty in North America, ethnic organizations encourage Iraqi immigrants in Detroit and Toronto to vote in Iraqi elections. Drawing on the Western media’s rhetoric of democratic process and new opportunities for equality in Iraq, in 2005 Chaldean and Assyrian organizations waged campaigns designed to promote the civic obligation of Iraqis in homeland politics. This section highlights how and why fear as well as the integration of

54 Ibid.
ethnic populations in North America, prevents many Iraqis from engaging in civic duty. Fear of retribution towards family and friends in the homeland remains a primary factor in determining whether an expatriate will fulfill his or her civic duty and vote in elections. Furthermore, as immigrant populations become settled in the host country, homeland politics become less relevant over time, resulting in a decrease in expatriate voter turnout.

Cleavages between the Arab Muslim and Christian sectors of the Iraqi community in Detroit are heightened and exaggerated in the arena of electoral politics and political allegiances. Detroit’s established Chaldean community make-up a significant expatriate voting bloc for minority seats in the Iraqi assembly. The 2005 Iraqi election represented a landmark moment for Iraqis worldwide, as they prepared to go to the polls in what the Western media described as the first democratic election in Iraq’s history. For minorities such as the Iraqi Christians, the growing sense of urgency to increase involvement in this ‘democratic’ process also reflected a growing concern for the worsening internal violence and the targeting of minority groups. On the eve of the elections, newspapers documented growing tensions between sectarian groups, as Christian and Assyrian communities were terrorized repeatedly by bombs and attacks. In Iraq’s major centers, many Christian Iraqis like the Chaldeans stayed away from the polls in an effort to distance themselves from the violence and sectarianism.

In important voting blocs such as Detroit, despite the relative security of voting, the dismal turnout also caused anxiety and frustration. The CFA expressed great disappointment when, out of the expected 60% of Chaldeans eligible to vote in Metro Detroit, only an “anemic” 6% did so.\footnote{“Local Iraq election turnout ‘anemic’ but voters express optimism,” \textit{The Chaldean News} vol. 2 issue xii (Jan 2006), p 1.} Despite the dwindling numbers, Joseph Kassab,
Executive Director of the CFA, declared that, “we want to demonstrate to the people in Iraq that we are working for them as Iraqi expats…we’re planting the seed of democracy. If we don’t plant the seed now, we’re never going to have a tree.” To maximize the efficiency of the voter turnout, the CFA executives explained that, “We’re doing it the American way. We put more than $5000 into leasing buses to bring people from the main churches to the polls. When you bring them in for the first time, you don’t have to do it again. They come on their own the next time.” Thus the expressed goal of the CFA was not just to encourage expatriate Iraqis to vote in the Iraqi elections and renew their connection to the homeland. They also sought to create a pattern of civic participation in homeland politics and to encourage the ongoing commitment of Chaldeans in the development of a democratic Iraq.

The Iraqi Muslim community in Detroit similarly suffered from a low voter turnout during the 2005 election in Iraq. Election organizers claimed that in many cases there were more poll-workers than voters, resulting in over four hundred layoffs of poll-workers due to the lack of turnout. Their reasons for the poor turnout included “lack of documentation, large travel distances, bad weather, and concern about retribution.” Another source blamed “the lack of organization on the part of the International Organization of Migration,” which failed to ensure that there were “voting centers [were] in areas where Iraqis live.” Certainly, the long distance was a factor. Of the five polls designated for Canada, three were located in the Toronto GTA (Scarborough, Mississauga and York), and one each in Ottawa and Calgary. This meant that Iraqis in the Prairies or

57 Ibid., p 2.
58 “The Iraq Election: In Michigan more poll-workers than voters, registration low, but those who did vote had their hearts in it,” The Arab American News, vol. 21, issue 990 (Jan 29-Feb 4, 2005).
the West coast had to travel to Calgary to cast their vote. Many braved the January weather and vast distance to reach the polls, including Amin Malak of Edmonton, who made the three-hour drive to Calgary along with other Iraqi expats who had travelled for seven hours from Grand Prairie.\textsuperscript{60}

Still, the International Organization for Migration confirmed that, “physical obstacles to registration…long distances needed to make two journeys, one to register and one to vote, sometimes in severe weather.”\textsuperscript{61} Many voting stations also refused to accept immigration documents as proof of Iraqi citizenship.\textsuperscript{62} Citizenship is maintained through the nationality of the father, allowing children born in America to obtain citizenship status in Iraq and vote in the elections as Iraqi-Americans. Obtaining an Iraqi passport outside of Iraq has become increasingly difficult, especially since 2003, as Iraqi diplomatic officials and staff face dramatic increases in the numbers of new immigrants seeking consular services. Another reason was timing. The Muslim feast of Eid-al-Adha fell in the middle of the registration period. However, the argument offered most frequently to explain the low turnout was that many Iraqis continued to fear retribution should their “personal details make their way into the hands of the police or other officials of their country of residence.”\textsuperscript{63} Although the IOM did its best to assure Iraqi expatriates of the strict confidentiality of all information collected, “some potential voters felt extremely wary of officialdom after having to flee their country in the first place.”\textsuperscript{64}

Fear as a factor is cause for debate, since many Iraqis, such as Mr. Suleyman of Calgary, felt safe casting his vote from Canada. Indeed, he told reporters: “finally we have

\textsuperscript{60} “To Iraq, with love, from Calgary,” The National Post (24th Jan, 2005), p A10.
\textsuperscript{61} http://www.ipu.org/cnl-e/176-iraq.htm
\textsuperscript{62} http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/iraq/election-fact-sht.htm
\textsuperscript{63} http://www.ipu.org/cnl-e/176-iraq.htm
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.
a day where we can vote for our nation’s future. We can participate without fear.” Others claimed fear was a generational phenomenon that reflected the experiences of the older generation who were born and raised in Iraq. A young female voter interviewed in Southfield said of first and second-generation Chaldeans in Detroit that, “they’re afraid that their name is going to be on the ballot and that one day it will come back and haunt them, that one day Saddam Hussein will come back in power.” Those born outside of Iraq often felt the pain of persecution through the narratives of their parents. As one voter commented, “I learned from my parents about past bitter days in my homeland and I voted in the hope of replacing that with a brighter future.” Many embraced what they saw as the benefits of voting in diaspora without the immediate risk of retribution. One voter commented that, “I love Canada because Canada is secure and we have dignity in Canada.”

A spokesperson for the IOM assured the media that the safety of voters was of top priority in the out-of-country vote: “It’s very high profile, and seeing what’s happening in Iraq we want to make sure people feel comfortable.”

Joseph Kassab of the CFA suggested that a simple lack of enthusiasm and a growing disconnect with Iraqi politics kept most from voting in the election. He noted that their membership was made up mostly of second and third-generation Chaldeans born in the U.S. Kassab condemned what he considered the predominant attitude amongst Chaldean-Americans “to take care of my family and mind my own business.” In his opinion, Chaldeans were being overshadowed both in Iraq and in the U.S. by more vocal and

67 “Chance to vote a treat, Iraqis say; expatriates can register at five centers across Canada to exercise their right,” The Globe and Mail (Jan 19th 2005), p A12.
68 “Iraqi expats here eager for free vote,” in Toronto Star, (Jan 18th, 2005), p B03.
involved minority groups such as the Assyrians and the Kurds. He commented that, “We should follow the lead of our Assyrian brothers and sisters,” he argued “who have both a national presence in America and are a political force in Iraq, despite the fact that their numbers are smaller.”

The frustration felt by Kassab and other executives of the CFA highlights the growing disparity between the Chaldean-Americans of Detroit and the tenuous ties that bind them to the Chaldean communities in Iraq. The Chaldean-American community is split between the elites who want to be involved in diasporic politics and the ordinary members of the community, many of them second and third-generation American-born Chaldeans, who have increasingly become Americanized and are less interested in the homeland politics and sectarian struggles.

In Canada, 40% of Iraqi expats turned out to cast ballots compared to only 10% of Iraqis in the U.S. This suggests that the newer migrant population in Canada is more strongly invested in homeland politics, and more likely to meet the eligibility requirements to vote. In Canada, too, factors like weather, distance, and timing helped keep the majority of Iraqis away from the polls. Still, the higher Canadian turnout suggests the recent settlement of Iraqi communities in Canada also mattered. These migrants (especially Assyrians and Chaldeans) arguably feel the threat of retaliation much stronger than do second and third-generation Chaldeans in Detroit.

Conversations with Iraqi women in

71 http://www.belgium.iom.int/PDFDocuments/OCVLeafletFinal.pdf
72 Fear and threat of retaliation is certainly a difficult issue to quantify according to who feels the threats the most and to what extent fear informs political decisions in diaspora. Over the course of my interviews, fear was an ongoing theme, which women addressed in many different ways, including the fear of retaliation towards family left in Iraq. Based on my research, I believe fear is heightened in the case of minority groups such as the Assyrians and Chaldeans in Toronto, since these communities have been persecuted mercilessly by the Ba’th regime over the last twenty years. However, even within my own family (Sunni Muslims), fear plays a significant part in connecting migrants to the homeland through transnational networks of family and friends. Politics in Iraq has become infused with fear and distrust, and voting is one of the key examples of how this fear plays out to divide and complicate community bonds. Hala Fatah, “The Question of the
Toronto suggested that their recent exile has left them suspicious and fearful of the elections process in Iraq. Many claimed that the elections were not at all democratic, and that participating was not worth the risk. It will be interesting to trace how the participation of Iraqis in homeland elections changes over time, as second and third-generation Iraqis grow up in Canada. Will they perhaps develop a stronger sense of ‘diasporic citizenship’ than Chaldean-Americans in Detroit? Considering the millions of Iraqis currently living outside the homeland, their continued participation will be a crucial factor in determining the future of Iraqi politics.

Media reports of the expatriate elections illustrate the complex nature of the internal politics of diasporic communities. The main focus for the local ethnic and mainstream press tended to be the perceived unity in Iraqi communities and Iraqi immigrants’ desire to work as one to rebuild their homeland. At the Southfield polls, some Chaldeans maintained that, “I’m Chaldean, but today we are all Iraqis” and “I am Iraqi first…I’ve seen a lot of persecution and this is the first time I’ve voted for Iraq.”

Imam Hisham al-Husainy of the Karbala Center in Dearborn in a gesture of goodwill voted alongside Chaldeans at the Farmington Hills polls, expressing his view that, “There is no difference. We are all Iraqis…this means our future and our dignity. It means a future for our children and the next generation.”

In Canada, the Toronto Star similarly reported that “Shiite and Sunni Iraqis in Toronto are working together to make sure nothing disrupts what is for them something new and precious: the right to vote.”

Election worker Omar Alsadoon said that the Iraqi community in Toronto exemplified how divisions could be

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75 “Iraqi expats here eager for free vote,” Toronto Star, (Jan 18th, 2005), p B03.
overcome, “both Sunni and Shiite and some Christians too, we all are working together to make Iraq better.”\textsuperscript{76} The media played an important role in promoting the positive attitudes of enthusiastic Iraqis flocking to the polls to vote as one nation for the future of Iraq. Some voters spoke convincingly of a unity amongst Iraqis in the establishment of a stable government: “the secret now is for Iraq to keep together because Iraqi people, they love each other. There is a big harmony. Whatever we heard from media, that is not true.”\textsuperscript{77}

Beneath the surface, however, the political agendas of ethnic groups in diaspora and the desire of minority groups to claim a stake in homeland politics highlight the continued divisions in the Iraqi communities of Toronto and Detroit. Despite the optimistic media coverage promoting feelings of unity amongst Iraqi migrants, most interviews at the polls revealed the agendas of Iraq’s sectarian groups. For Kurds and to a lesser extent Assyrians and Chaldeans, the election represented the opportunity to establish democratic rights and security as minority groups within the Iraqi state. Kurdish activist Dr. Azer commented that, “not all people feel the same. Kurds are supporting [the election] greatly because that is the only hope for them. For decades, they have waited for an opportunity to be heard and now they can go and see what they want and get what they want.”\textsuperscript{78} Similar sentiments were exposed in interviews with Assyrian voters who felt that their only chance at survival was to vote in the first democratic election in Iraq to claim their part in Iraq’s history before they were written out of national commemoration. One Assyrian voter claimed that the election “is the only chance for us [Assyrians] to survive as a religious and

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., p B03.

\textsuperscript{77} “Chance to vote a treat, Iraqis say,” The Globe and Mail (Jan 19\textsuperscript{th} 2005), p A12.

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., p A12.
As with the Chaldeans in Detroit, a community effort was in force as activists worked to ensure that as many Assyrians as possibly turned out to vote: “thousands of [campaign] brochures have been distributed in churches, community centers, stores and published in community newspapers…mini-buses have also been rented to bring in voters from Hamilton, London and Windsor.”

It also seems clear that Iraqis in Canada, though much smaller in number than those in the U.S., are concentrated mainly in Eastern Canada and exhibit stronger ties to homeland politics than their U.S. counterparts. In Canada, Neil Bissoondath argues that old world feuds frequently override loyalty to the host country because multicultural policy encourages immigrants to consider their loyalty to Canadian citizenship as weak and their loyalty to home as strong. Despite the policy’s stated intentions in 1971 of immigrant integration, Canadian critics have argued that multiculturalism promotes difference and heightens division rather than encouraging solidarity through multiplicity. Is it true then that by encouraging dual citizenship, Canada has created a divided psyche, making it, “impossible to make a wholehearted commitment to the new land, the new ideals, the new way of looking at life”? Or were these divisions inherent in the historical ethno-cultural make-up of Iraq and simply heightened by the freedom to choose in Canada? Will Kymlicka suggests that the U.S. demands a stronger commitment to national identity and a

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79 “Iraqis in Canada prepare to hit the polls; the ‘oppressed see this as chance to right the wrongs,’” in Toronto Star (Jan 28th 2005), p B05.
80 “Iraqis in Canada prepare to hit the polls,” in Toronto Star (Jan 28th 2005), p B05.
greater degree of assimilation to ideas of being ‘American’ than it does in Canada. In the case of Chaldean voters in Detroit, it is evident that over successive generations, the forces of assimilation and integration have acted upon second and third-generation Chaldeans, creating apathy for the politics of the homeland. For Chaldeans, as with many other immigrant groups in the U.S., citizenship in the host country “can be considered as a resource in the continual bargaining that characterizes all social processes.” Over time, the rise of group rights and the encouragement to look inward to ethnic differences may in fact erode the system of shared civic purpose and the cohesion of the nation, and contribute to the disunity of national loyalties in Canada and the U.S.

**Conclusion**

In theory if not in practice, multiculturalism and polyethnicity present an alternative to the increasing sense of homogenization in the Western world. Canada and the U.S. strive to provide accessibility for all, but simultaneously to prevent the communal needs of minority groups from infringing upon the rights of the majority. Rather than keeping people out, citizenship should ideally, as William Kaplan suggests, “seek to bring people in” and “ensure that everyone has an equal right to participate and, ultimately, to

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belong.” Ramsay Cook commented many years ago of Canada that attitudes towards inclusion require “a very peculiar state of sentiment among its citizens, since they must desire union and must not desire unity.” In many ways, immigrants in Canada and America are permitted, and in many respects expected to retain multiple identities as multicultural citizens.

As this chapter demonstrates, Iraqi immigrants transfer and modify minority identity and ethnic difference in similar ways in Detroit and Toronto. Although the national context is important, it is secondary to the common origins and diasporic identities that these groups exhibit across the border. In addition, the time of arrival and generation with the host country also shapes the relationship over time between immigrant groups and the homeland. As is the case with exile diasporas, the point of ‘origin’ is key to their construction of identity in the host country. Among Sunni/Shi’a, Kurdish, Assyrian, and Chaldean Iraqis, the “tension between being in one place physically, the place where one lives and works…and thinking regularly about another place far away” is common to articulations of first, second, and third-generation identities as women, men, and youth negotiate a space in the host country. Because the point of ‘origin’ is more complex than mere physical geography, and implies the origins of the nation and the place of the ethnic group in its historical memory, Iraqis are drawn to communities and organizations that speak to their ethno-religious lineage. Iraqis bring to North America fractured loyalties, recognizing at once the presence of the Iraqi nation in their lives, but also their place within

89 Ibid., 262.
91 Kymlicka, Multicultural Citizenship, 180-182.
92 Radhakrishnan, Diasporic Mediation, 207; ed., Agnew, Diaspora, Memory and Identity, conclusion.
ethnic and sectarian groups. Chaldean and Assyrian ethnic organizations replicate ethnic
divides and minority identity by providing assistance and support for their own group,
promoting the strength of the community through networks based on ethnic identity and
lineage. These Iraqi Christian communities depend upon ethnic identity to consolidate a
support network, and to establish a place as hyphenated citizens in Canada and the U.S.
The point of origin in this case is the historical roots of the ethno-religious lineage, binding
these groups as persecuted minorities in Iraq and as growing communities in diaspora.

The importance of nation and the point of origin as a geographic space are
heightened in the discussion of electoral politics in the homeland. As the last section
demonstrates, ethnic organizations play a key part in promoting the civic duty of Iraqis in
diaspora to engage with homeland politics. In their attempts to overcome the apathy and
fear expatriate voters often feel, the CFA and the Assyrian National Federation promote
support for ethnic candidates and the participation of ethnic groups in the election for the
purpose of expediting their political agendas. To a lesser extent, the Chaldean community
replicates this method in the U.S. political process, although their efforts and objectives are
on a much smaller scale. Despite the local media’s attempts to portray the elections as an
example of unity amongst Iraqi immigrants in Canada and the U.S., in reality, voting drives
funded by ethnic organizations aim to strengthen the political presence of minority groups
in Iraq’s government.

As we have seen, there are major differences in how ethnic community and
government-funded organizations define their mandates, especially with respect to
promoting political citizenship and ethno-religious solidarity, but the common agenda that
links them - and that is often carried out by front-line female staff and volunteers - is an
emphasis on civic duty and obedience. As each section demonstrates, ideas of citizenship
inform the different ways in which organizations and workers promote civic duty and the participation of immigrants in the host country. Iraqi female counselors, mentors, and executives imprint upon new migrants their own ideas of ‘good citizenship’ according to civic obedience and engagement with the host country. Ethnic organizations similarly promote the participation of Chaldeans and Assyrians in the host society and recognize the importance of accessing Canadian and American citizenship. Thus, citizenship in the host country is seen to provide the freedom to speak on behalf of ethnic and minority groups in diaspora, a tool, also, for bettering the lives of Chaldeans and Assyrians suffering in Iraq. Finally, by demarcating the strong divisions present between Iraqi groups in Canada and the U.S., the chapter has also shed light on how divided loyalties shape the integration and identity of ethno-religious groups of Iraqis in diaspora.
My interviews with young Chaldean and Sunni Muslim women reveal an enormous amount of concern over female modesty and family reputation - so much so that they might reflect a larger pattern of increasing anxiety among young Arab women in North America. As generations of Iraqi women in Detroit and Toronto struggle to negotiate between cultures, they create and recreate new ways of expressing ethno-religious identity. The influence that homeland politics, Western feminist ideals and the internal policing of women from within migrant communities have on shaping expressions of femininity, female identity, and female modesty is the focus of this chapter. Continued links to the homeland for Sunni Arab Iraqis in Toronto complicate the intersections of religious and class identities in the diaspora. A different struggle emerges for Chaldean women born in the U.S. as they negotiate their relationship to the homeland (imagined or otherwise) and what it means to be a hyphenated woman living between traditional and Western ideals of female behaviour.

The attitude towards female modesty in Arab culture suggests that the conflation of female sexuality (and promiscuity) originating in pre-Islamic nomadic Bedouin culture is still very much present in attitudes towards female modesty and virtue in Middle Eastern cultures (Muslim and Christian). Men and women participate in the figurative and physical protection of the modesty and reputation of unmarried female family members as a means to uphold the social and class status of the kin group. As Sana Al-Khayyat notes, “the phenomenon of ‘honor and shame’ bears a direct relation to family ties, and to the complex
interrelation of social organization and conduct in Arab society.”¹ Unmarried Iraqi women are expected to maintain their adhra (virginity, a feminine term for which there is no masculine equivalent) regardless of their faith or ethnic origin. Female conduct and female sexuality is thus policed from all angles within the family compact, as men and women stake their claim in upholding the reputation of the family. By exploring the active role that the women themselves play in maintaining reputation and protecting female modesty, this chapter examines how their actions reflect both traditional ideals of female roles in the family and community conveyed from the homeland, as well as the changing relationship of women from different ethno-religious groups to female modesty and the policing of the female body in diaspora. As young women growing up in the diaspora negotiate across generations, they are influenced by their mothers’ ideals of womanhood and modesty but also their exposure in North America to differing ideas about women and their bodies. In addressing the public and private performance of religiosity, femininity, and modesty, this chapter also explores how the break with tradition in Detroit’s Chaldean community and the conservative shift towards adopting the veil amongst Toronto’s young Sunni Muslim women, reflects the different ways of dealing with cultural perceptions of the female body in North America.

Comparing generational differences across the border is challenging because Iraqi ethno-religious communities in Detroit and Toronto took shape during different periods over the past four decades. As the largest concentration of Iraqis in North America, Chaldean-Americans in Detroit and Sunni Muslims in Toronto also represent very different urban communities. A comparison of them allows us to assess women’s different responses

to the challenges of displacement and re-settlement across generations. This chapter addresses how women in these ethno-religious groups engage with the broader Iraqi/Muslim/Arab communities in these regions, and how the connections shift as each new generation of migrants reformulate their relationship to the homeland and host country, and renegotiate the multiple meanings of being ‘Iraqi’. 

The origins of Detroit’s Chaldean community date to the 1900s, but these early migrants assimilated into the broader Arab-American community. The focus here is on Chaldeans migrants who began arriving after 1958 largely through a chain-migration process that vastly increased the size of the community. I conducted interviews with second and third-generation Chaldeans/Chaldean-Americans; the former, whose age is between 30-55 years, are primarily American born, while the later, 18-29 years of age, were born in Iraq and migrated to Detroit with their families. Young women from the third generation are all American-born and between 18 and 30 years of age. Toronto’s Sunni Muslim Iraqi community formed in the late eighties when Kurds and Shi’is began arriving in response to the Ba‘th regime’s increasing violence against them. After 2003, the Kurds in Toronto were joined by a larger influx of Sunni Arab Muslims who left after the American invasion and occupation of Iraq. Interviews in the Greater Toronto Area (including Hamilton and Mississauga) were conducted with first-generation (30-55 years) and second-generation (18-30 years) Sunni women who were born in Iraq.

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2 Despite the complex relationship of Toronto Iraqi Muslims to the hyphen, Chaldeans in Detroit have embraced the hyphen identity, adopting ‘Chaldean-American’ as their official status in most community and government affiliated organizations. See also, www.chaldeanfederation.org/, http://chaldeanchamber.com/.
The Chaldean community in Detroit is estimated to be approximately 120,000 people living in the Detroit metropolitan area. Spanning several generations since initial migration that began sixty years earlier, the main waves of settlement in the region have established three generations of adult Chaldeans, now estimated as one of the largest population of Christian Iraqis outside Iraq. With a view to determining the relationship between this Christian Middle Eastern community and the larger Arab Muslim community in Detroit, this next section focuses on the second-generation Chaldeans (both foreign and American-born) and third-generation (all American-born) Chaldeans living in the Dearborn and Southfield/Sterling Heights districts. As the population of the Arab community has increased over the past three decades, this community of Christian Arabs has tried to emphasize its distinction to avoid being subsumed into the ‘Arab’ community. Again, women are the primary subjects of my analysis. Second and third-generation Chaldean women embrace their connection with the Chaldean-American community and its affiliation with the Church, but have very little association with a broader Iraqi community in Detroit. Within the community, these women negotiate between traditional roles for women in the home and the changing attitudes towards women’s inclusion in professional life and their independence as unmarried women from the protection of their families.

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4 The Detroit community is now estimated to be the largest population of Chaldeans anywhere in the world, since the exodus of this ethnic group from Iraq following the persecution under Saddam Hussein’s regime, and the U.S. invasion in 2003. See also, “The Arab Population,” United States Census 2000.
When Chaldean migration from Iraq began over a century ago, the process was mired in U.S. governmental regulations, and men typically came alone to work and then returned home to family in Iraq. In the post-war period, as the number of Chaldeans migrating from Iraq to Detroit increased, the Mother of God Chaldean church was established to cater to their religious needs and also to provide assistance for this developing community. Communal identity has developed as a result of the important influence of the Chaldean church in the immigration, settlement and daily lives of Chaldeans in Detroit. Following a change in American immigration laws in 1968, Chaldean migrants began coming in much greater numbers, increasing the numbers of the community from tens to hundreds of thousands of people. While the inflow continued, the community’s core membership arrived mainly in the fifties and sixties. Families settled close to the Church and many began their own corner stores and groceries in the Highland Park area. As the population grew and moved into the Southfield and Sterling Heights districts of Detroit, the Mother of God Church has also relocated to accommodate its congregation.

Identity for second-generation Chaldean women is tied to the migration and settlement experiences of their parents’ generation. Having settled in Detroit with the assistance of the Church and with family members already in the U.S., first-generation post-war migrants built financial security for their families by working long hours in family owned and operated corner stores. The second-generation, on the other hand, have been educated in the U.S., have superior language skills than their parent’s generation, and are able to access professional and better-paid positions. As the previous chapter has discussed, the higher education levels and greater financial success of second-generation Chaldeans in

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6 Ibid., 28-29.
7 Ibid., 41.
Detroit has enabled them to develop strong community institutions and to create organizations that encourage the next generation to maintain ties to the community and develop professional networks. In a 2006 address honouring community elders at the Chaldean-Iraqi American Association of Michigan, the president spoke of what “the pioneer generation of the community” had provided for their children, claiming that, “without the sacrifices they made and the services they provided, we would not have the building blocks that we have today to success as a community.” The financial success of the community is further illustrated by the recent purchase of the Shenandoah Country Club and Gold Course - worth $3.5 million USD - by the Chaldean-American Federation as a revenue property and venue to hold community functions.

The celebratory accounts of such achievements overlook the internal divisions and class cleavages that women in Detroit addressed in their interviews. As noted in previous chapters, this information was often shared during the informal portion of the interview, when women felt comfortable speaking out against public claims of a united Chaldean-American community. It was also meant to provide a means of moral regulation, and women were urged to refrain from accepting government assistance even though community organizations were unable to provide for their everyday survival. Recent female migrants to Detroit also claimed that they were discouraged from accessing government assistance because it is at odds with the claim of the Chaldean Federations of America that the community can care for its own. These recent migrants also claim to have little in common with second and third-generation women who had enjoyed the help of extensive

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10 Interviews with women in the Chaldean community in Southfield and Dearborn, 5th to 8th November, 2009.
family networks and received a Western education in America giving them better access to professional jobs. The socio-economic divisions between first-generation women in comparison to second and third-generation women in this community only serves to highlight the fact that not all members of the community enjoy the financial stability and achievements promoted by these community organizations.

As members of the Ladies of Charity, Chaldean second-generation women assume the benevolent roles their mothers formerly occupied and continue the tradition of connecting with families in the community through female networks. Second-generation active members became involved primarily through their mothers, who urged their daughters to donate their time and money to helping other women in the community. For similar reasons, the mothers created female youth organizations for third-generation women, such as the Chaldean Angels, who in addition to their charitable work “provide(s) a social outlet for Chaldean teens.” Volunteers from both generations play what they consider to be maternal roles in redistributing wealth within the community, taking donations from the wealthier members of the community and donating these to recent Iraqi (Chaldean and Muslim) refugees. The organizers as well as the members of these organizations are largely American-born Chaldeans who are connected to the middle professional class of Chaldeans. These middle-class professionals are the driving force behind political and economic organizations within the community. For these women, participation in community organizations highlights their desire to promote the family unit and nurturing qualities of women as mothers of the community. In interviews, young women involved in the Chaldean Angels spoke about the importance of religion and of maintaining a good

reputation in the community by staying true to their past and to the ideals of virtue upheld by the Catholic church. This means no pre-marital sex and no divorce. In the group interview, members of the Chaldean Angels expressed concern that, as they put it, many young women in the community were becoming more “American” in their behaviour outside of the home, a reference to their interests in music, clothes, and socializing with the opposite sex. By contrast, the Chaldean Angels are upholding the values of the “past” by being “good” Chaldean women who help members in the community, marry within the community, and raise their children to understand their heritage as Chaldean-Americans.  

Through their participation in the Ladies of Charity and the Chaldean Angels, women claimed to not only maintain their connection to a Chaldean past and heritage, but also to be participating in creating a new Chaldean-American presence in Detroit. Although most of the women have never physically set foot in Iraq, they spoke often of their ‘homeland’ and their history, and how they were helping to maintain this connection by educating the community, particularly the next generation of Chaldean-Americans. Through annual Chaldean festivals as well as cultural nights, the Ladies of Charity work behind the scenes to foster community participation. With a focus on community organization and aid distribution, the Ladies of Charity take a backseat in community politics and business development. Second-generation Chaldean women continue to occupy a supporting role in community leadership, a role taken up by male leaders of the Chaldean-American Federation and the Chaldean-American Chamber of Commerce. The benevolent but certainly secondary role women play in the community has changed very little since the Chaldean-American Ladies of Charity was established in the 1950s. In many ways, their

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13 Group interview conducted with members of the Chaldean Angels in Southfield, Detroit, 7th November, 2009.
ideals parallel that of other ladies auxiliary groups of the post-1945 era (and earlier) who initiated the integration of immigrants, and addressed the socio-economic needs of their ethnic community.14

‘Traditional’ ideas about female conduct and modesty for women are a particular source of tension for second-generation women as they move from the home into the workforce and participate openly in community organizations. Ideals of female behaviour and female sexuality are central to debates about how the changing role of women in the home intersect. Chaldean-American identity in the Detroit community is framed in relation to the growing Arab population in the city. Most second-generation women refused to consider themselves as Arabs because they equate Arabs with Muslims, since Chaldeans follow the Catholic faith. As Middle Eastern Christians,15 Chaldean community leaders have gone to great lengths to disassociate their community from the Iraqi Arab population in Detroit, with significant consequences for how the Iraqi community has developed within the city.

Distinguishing themselves as Christian-Iraqis, as opposed to Arab-Christians, became a part of the fabric of community identity for Chaldean in Detroit in the 1970s and 1980s as the second generation came of age amid a large influx of Arabs into the region. In interviews with sociologist Mary Key Sengstock in the 1980s, first-generation Chaldeans identified as Iraqi, whereas the second-generation identified as Chaldeans or as Chaldean-Americans. This difference in positioning of ethnic identity occurred during a period of

15 A term frequently used in Chaldean community literature, as well as in discussions with Chaldean men and women living in Dearborn, Southfield and Sterling Heights from November 5th to November 8th, 2009.
growth in the Arab population of Detroit, as new waves of predominantly Muslim immigrants settled in this region. As the Arab community grew, Muslim organizations were established to help settle and integrate these new communities. Second-generation Chaldeans responded to this new perceived threat by focusing on ethnic difference, and promoting their distinct heritage as Chaldeans. These tensions are highlighted in a 1986 interview with Arabic teacher M. Al-Harp of Fordson high school, who said of the Chaldean community, “I feel that second and third generation is very much frustrated…they’re not sure about their values. They are caught between cultures. It’s created a lot of tension.” These tensions caused by the cultural gulf between generations was further elaborated in a community newsletter stressing that, “there is definitely a cultural gap between our first generation of Chaldean adult immigrants who brought with them a distinct set of values and behavior, and a second-generation of Chaldeans bred in America with American morals and values.” The changing nature of the community in the 1970s and 1980s suggests that as second-generation Chaldeans came of age they were caught between homeland traditions, American customs, and the threat of being subsumed into ‘Arab’ or ‘Muslim’ communities.

The similarities between Chaldean and Arab ideas of honour and female modesty in local newspaper articles helps explain why Chaldeans felt at risk of being subsumed in the growing Arab community in Detroit. Young Chaldean women were included as part of an expose on “‘Arabs’ in Detroit” in 1983, in a section entitled “Keeping their respect.” In this section, second-generation Chaldean women, then in their mid to late teens, were questioned regarding how life changed for Arab women living in America. Hana Jaber,

17 “An Appeal: A letter of concern to the youth of the Chaldean Community,” Barbara Aswad Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
then 17, commented that “Some of us don’t want to go out. We want to keep our respect. I like my culture. I am proud of where I come from. If we went out with a boy, you know what they would say about us? They would say we are loose. We would get a bad reputation even though we have done nothing.”\textsuperscript{18} Another Chaldean teen quoted anonymously, commented that, “There is pressure from cousins to be more conservative. They think I should stick to my own kind.”\textsuperscript{19} In this ongoing debate about the integration and assimilation of Arab Americans in the 1970s and 1980s, Chaldeans were included in the media as part of this ‘Arab’ community. The article above compared Chaldean women with Arab Muslim women from a range of national and ethnic backgrounds, on the topic of reputation and modesty. By creating this comparison, this and many other such articles, provide some explanation of why the Chaldean community felt as though they were being subsumed into this broader Arab immigrant community. The threat of the disintegration of their ethnic distinctiveness became the motivation for community involvement and mobilization to save their community from being assimilated into American (or perhaps Arab-American) society.

The debate over ‘who we are’ as an ethnic group is largely rooted in their religious affiliation to the Catholic rite. Ann Antone, chairperson of the Chaldean Community Cultural Center commented on the issue of teaching the next generation about ethnic identity, saying:

We will teach that we are not Arab. Chaldeans have their distinct identity. It is not just religion. We follow Christianity. However, in the early days we were pagan. The Church is our core. It is how we maintain identity and survived in an Arab land because we are Christians. We stayed who we are. We did not fight and make a scene. We did

\textsuperscript{18} Tom Hundley, “Arab or American?,” subheading “keeping their respect”, 3B.  
\textsuperscript{19} Hundley, “Arab or American?,” 3B.
not get swallowed up in the land. Even though we are only 3 to 5 per cent in an Arab Muslim land, we stayed true to our faith.\textsuperscript{20}

This emphasis on a non-Arab distinction is further complicated by the importance of religion in the ethnic identity of Chaldeans. For those Chaldeans who do not belong to the Catholic rite of the Chaldean church, and instead have converted to Protestantism, Bishop Sarhad noted that, “Ethnically for sure they are Chaldean. However, they don’t belong to the Chaldean church.”\textsuperscript{21} But if membership in the Chaldean church is the cornerstone of belonging to the Chaldean community, this exclusivity divides the community according to those who belong and those who do not.\textsuperscript{22}

In addition to women who informally spoke out against the community leadership, there were a number of women who deviated publicly from the view that the community is cohesive and united as non-Arabs. Second-generation college lecturer Deborah Alkamano is one such transgressor who speaks out against the increasingly Islamophobic views expressed by Chaldean-Americans after the 9/11 bombings. Challenging the notion that Chaldeans are non-Arabs from the Arab world just because Chaldeans practice Catholicism and speak Aramaic, she argues that the non-Arab definition is historically inaccurate and that Chaldeans are engaging in Islamophobia as a means to widen the gap between Middle Eastern Christians and Arab Muslims.\textsuperscript{23} In a conference paper presented before a mixed audience of academics and community members, Alkamano claimed that there is a distinct

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\textsuperscript{20} Ann Antone, Executive Member of the Chaldean Ladies of Charity, interview with author, Detroit, 6\textsuperscript{th} November, 2009.  \\
\textsuperscript{21} Vanessa Denha-Garmo and Joyce Wiswell, “Changing Faces: Chaldeans yesterday, today and tomorrow,” \textit{The Chaldean News}, Feb 2006, 34.  \\
\textsuperscript{22} These issues are discussed in greater detail in, Yvonne Haddad, “Maintaining the faith of the fathers: Dilemmas of Religious Identity in the Christian and Muslim Arab-American Communities,” in \textit{The Development of Arab American Identity}, E. McMarus, ed., (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1994).  \\
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prejudice against Chaldeans who identify with Arabs or who are working with other ethnic groups rather than solely within the Chaldean community, most notably in their dealings with Arab-Americans.\textsuperscript{24} Presented at an international conference sponsored by the Center for Arab-American Studies in 2006, her paper led to a huge backlash within the community through the response section of \textit{The Chaldean News}. In a letter entitled “Filled with Fallacy,” Alkamano was attacked for being “part of the problem which threatens to engulf the community in larger religions and ethnic communities.”\textsuperscript{25}

Alkamano’s criticism of the increasingly ‘Chaldean’ nature of community identity, and the personal attacks launched against her in \textit{The Chaldean News}, have been addressed by the newspaper’s editor Vanessa Denha-Garmo, also a second-generation Chaldean. Resisting the pressure to promote unity within the community, Denha-Garmo, highlights the plight of women attempting to break with the acceptable models of womanhood and ethnic identity in the community. In an interview with Mark Kay Sengstock, she noted that it is because of the influx of Arab Muslims in the 1970s that Chaldeans cling to ethnic identity as part of a determined effort to protect their distinct ethnicity. However, interviews with notable community members suggested that many opposed this shift towards exclusivity in the Chaldean community. Bishop Ibrahim commented that, “we are not static or paralyzed, we are a dynamic community. We do not want to be stones; we are a living community. Its like a tree - it cannot stay the same every year, it grows and produces new fruits.”\textsuperscript{26} On the dangers of excluding all but Chaldeans from the community, lawyer and activist Jumhana Judeh commented that, “The average American does not care whether I am Palestinian or Chaldean. In their eyes, there is no difference. In our eyes, we create a difference. We

\textsuperscript{24} “Ruffling Feathers,” \textit{The Chaldean News}, 39.
\textsuperscript{26} Denha-Garmo and Wiswell, “Changing Faces: Chaldeans yesterday, today and tomorrow,” 35.
need to stop falling into the trap set by our European colonists of divide and conquer.

Unless we as Middle Easterners unite, at least based on racial lines, the discrimination will continue.”

Alkamano’s attack on what she considers to be a constructed Chaldean-American identity is in part also a counterattack against critics in the community. Unable to live up to the imposed ideal of getting married, going to church, and having children, as she claims the men of the community continue to promote, Alkamano claims that there is a much stronger link between the Chaldean and Arab ideas of a woman’s place in the community than they might like to consider. The changing roles of women in the second-generation are the source of much debate in the Chaldean News, highlighting the latent anxiety concerning changes to the ‘traditional’ family roles. On the issue of second-generation women turning to nannies to help them cope with the increasing demands of working full time and raising children, Jennifer Korail, author of “All in the Family” (also a second-generation Chaldean), began with the declaration that “Chaldeans are by nature traditionalists. Women are raised to be especially family and culture oriented. In the past it might have been unheard of for a Chaldean woman to pursue both a career and a family.” However, an article printed more than two decades previously suggested that some first-generation parents went ‘against the grain,’ urging their daughters to break with tradition and explore their potential. For example, Oafa Eadeh urged her daughter to leave home and attend the University of Michigan so that she could have the choices and life she never had. Sue Loussia, who moved with her family from Telkaif when she was very young, grew up working in her

27 Ibid., 38.
30 “Women are caught between cultures,” Detroit Free Press, (Weds Nov 30th, 1983), 3B.
father’s grocery store in Franklin, Detroit. After establishing their business over many years, her parents put up the money for Loussia to open her own fashion boutique in Dearborn.\textsuperscript{31} Despite going against the traditional path typically followed by women in the community, both second-generation women argued that they were ‘much rooted in Chaldean ways’.

Third-generation women have benefitted greatly from the social and economic networks established by earlier generations in the community.\textsuperscript{32} Unlike second-generation women who struggled to break with tradition and become working professionals, the young women I interviewed in Southfield claimed that parents now expect that Chaldean-American women will attain a University education and work outside of the home.\textsuperscript{33} Although attitudes have changed dramatically towards the education of women in the community, there remains a stigma associated with living/studying away from home before marriage. A common element of Arab culture, young unmarried women live with their families until they are married, or if they do not marry, remain in the family home and help with the care of elderly relatives and young nieces and nephews. However, as young women explore educational options outside of Michigan, the controversy over modesty and reputation once again becomes a key component in discussions of maintaining ethnic identity and values. Janelle Franso who left for New York’s American Musical and Dramatic Academy claimed that, “It is common today for Chaldean kids to go away to college. I love our community and I love being part of it, but how could I pass up an

\textsuperscript{31} “Women are caught between cultures,” 3B
\textsuperscript{33} Interview with Chaldean Angels members in Southfield, Detroit, 7\textsuperscript{th} November, 2009.
opportunity like this? My family is very supportive of what I do.”34 Channelle Kizy, who went away to law school in Chicago said “there is no reason for your lifestyle to change because you are away from home…my parents always knew what was going on in my life, not because they demanded it, but because I wanted them to be close to me even though I was away. I felt I owed that kind of respect to my family.”35

Considered a core ‘Chaldean’ value, young women who break with the tradition of remaining at home until marriage remain under suspicion regardless of their attempts to ‘prove’ their modesty. A woman interviewed by the Chaldean News captured this tension when she said: “men treat these women as if they are exotic ‘wild girls’ who have parties and entertain men in their homes – this is of course not true because the women are working to pay a mortgage.”36 As single women gain a sense of independence from their families, third-generation women interviewed for the article all commented on the social stigma that follows girls who leave their home before they are married. It is not only the women who are judged, since as Mary Kalou noted, “There is also a lot of judgment on the parents for ‘letting’ them leave.”37 Of this newfound independence, Renee Antoon, who bought her own condo at 23 years old commented that, “Chaldean girls are so sheltered and our parents give us everything. We’re not taught to be independent. So many girls think the only way out of the house is to get married.”38 Her comments suggest a cultural shift towards an ideal of female independence more commonly associated with Western ideals of individualism and the importance of being self-sufficient. And yet, even though third-generation

34 Jennifer Korail, “Leaving the nest: more students are going away to college,” The Chaldean News, (September 2006), 31.
38 Ibid., 36.
Chaldean-American women have synthesized the ‘traditional’\textsuperscript{39} values of female behaviour with Western ideals of individuality and independence, they continue to be judged and policed from within the community according to ideas of family reputation and female modesty conveyed from the homeland more than half a century earlier, and perhaps reinforced by the constant influx of new migrants from Iraq.

Third-generation Chaldean-American women show a somewhat different pattern of integration and adaptation in the U.S. than do women in their mother’s generation. Second-generation Chaldeans, and especially those active in community organizations, have followed what Min Zhou and Alessandro Portes attribute as the “Rapid economic advancement with deliberate preservation of the immigrant community’s values and tight solidarity” model of segmented assimilation.\textsuperscript{40} Whereas third-generation young women from this community follow a pattern of “growing acculturation and parallel integration into the white middle-class.”\textsuperscript{41} Although in many ways attempts are made from within the community and even from within groups in their generation to retain ethnic exclusivity, as third-generation women venture beyond the community for education and employment, they become increasingly acculturated to Western ideals of female behaviour. These behaviours include living independently from their families, which means that they spend


less time with the family unit and young women no longer share in the burden of domestic labour, which typically includes food preparation and cleaning.\textsuperscript{42}

Attempts to maintain the ethno-religious identity of the community across generations are made primarily by appealing to the religious devotion of young Chaldeans, indicating a continued and concerted effort to tie ethnic identity with membership in the Chaldean church. One example of this kind of outreach is through the Eastern Catholic Re-Evangelization Center (E.C.R.C.), which reported some success in appealing to Chaldean youth through extra-curricular social programmes.\textsuperscript{43} In addition, the Chaldean-American Student Association (CASA) was established as a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving Chaldean culture, history, and language on campuses throughout Michigan, with branches in Wayne State, Oakland, University of Michigan Dearborn, University of Detroit Mercy, Michigan State and the University of Michigan Ann Arbor. In an interview, one executive member commented that CASA was established at Michigan State as “a means to encourage more parents to promote their children to attend MSU by creating a significant Chaldean present that is truly here to cultivate generations of well-rounded loving and Christ-like Chaldean men and women.”\textsuperscript{44} This kind of religious rhetoric echoes the claims made by second and third-generation active members of the Ladies of Charity and Chaldean Angels, with regards to upholding the traditional values of modesty and charity for women. The extent to which this rhetoric is internalized by the broader community, is somewhat dubious given the nature of critiques from within the community both publicly (female deviants), or privately in the female narratives of Chaldean community members.

\textsuperscript{44} Christina Guppy, “CASA catches on: College clubs connect to the community,” \textit{The Chaldean News}, (Jan 2007), 32, (author’s emphasis added).
Second and third-generation women have followed similar patterns in terms of education, marriage, and family planning to other Arab-American groups who settled in the post-war period. Findings from the 1990 census data indicate that Arab-American women were relatively successful and affluent in comparison to other Asian immigrant groups. Based on a study of Arab-American women living in the U.S. for between ten and twenty years, these trends also suggest that the women also have smaller families over time, indicating a greater degree of family planning.45 Their high levels of education and labour force participation in comparison to other immigrant groups indicate a high degree of assimilation into American society. These levels of professional participation are crucially affected by the high levels of homogamy found in Arab communities, since marriage to an Arab spouse meant that women were expected to take on a majority of the work within the home in addition to working outside of the home.46 This is certainly true of second-generation Chaldean women who spoke frequently in their interviews about the struggles of juggling home life and the expectations of their Chaldean spouse. These trends are beginning to change in the third-generation as Chaldean women marry at a later age and are beginning to establish financial independence from their families. Although the trend towards homogamy continues to be strong, over time as women move away from the Detroit community, these high levels of inter-marriage may begin to decline.47

This section has traced the limits of ethnic exclusivity in the second-generation, followed by a break with tradition as Chaldean youth of the third generation move away from home and establish financial and emotional independence from networks of family in the Detroit region. The U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 reinforced the Chaldean community’s

46 Read, Culture, Class and Work, 37, 117.
47 Ibid., 117-120.
desire to differentiate as Iraqis, and in particular from the new wave of Iraqi Muslim refugees settling in Detroit. Just as discrimination and the frequency of attacks against Chaldean-owned businesses rose during the 1991 Gulf War, so too have attacks since the 2003 U.S. invasion. This negative attention towards the Chaldean community, in addition to the new wave of Arab Muslim immigrants into Detroit, this time from Iraq, has reignited the community defenses, and revived the emphasis on ethnic difference. Third-generation Chaldeans increasingly identify as Americans, or hyphenated Americans in an effort to distinguish themselves from Arab Muslims in Detroit. Therefore, despite the trend among third-generation women towards leaving home before marriage and focusing on attaining economic independence, the increased violence towards minority ethnic groups within Iraq has alienated Chaldeans from the broader Arab community in Detroit, resulting in a new phase of ethnic exclusivity.

**Iraqi Sunni Arab Women: A Toronto Case Study**

Moving north and across the border into Canada, this next section examines the intra-generational negotiation of the ideals of womanhood, modesty, and reputation in Toronto’s first and second-generation Sunni Iraqi women. In this section, I explore the ways in which first and second-generation women interpret female reputation and how internal and external influences play out on the corporal site of their bodies. ‘Living transnational’ forces Iraqi women to both reconcile the traditions and expectations of family and friends in the homeland, with the realities of living in the West. Linked to global networks of Iraqis, second-generation unmarried Iraqi women face the pressures of

48 Sengstock, *Chaldeans in Michigan*, 66-68.
protecting their reputation from the threat of ‘bad’ rumours and gossip in the homeland and in diaspora, in order to protect their marriage prospects. This section explores the growing trend in veiling amongst second-generation unmarried women who choose to wear the hijab as a means of defending their modesty and protecting their reputation, believing that this will increase their chances of securing an Iraqi marriage partner.

First-generation foreign-born female Sunni participants form a distinct “ethclass” whose values and behavioural patterns were shaped as members of former aristocratic families who later became Iraq’s professional middle class after the fall of the monarchy.49 These first-generation Kurdish and Arab Iraqi women of professional middle-class background share key cultural markers, such as socio-economic status, high degree of University education, professional experience, and most have spent a significant portion of their adult lives living and working in Baghdad before migrating to Canada. In addition, over two-thirds of the first-generation participants interviewed in Toronto, ranging in age from 35 to 59 years, left Iraq as students to study in the West. During the so-called ‘golden years’ of economic expansion in the sixties, the Ba‘th government funded thousands of students to study in the West (particularly in the UK) on the understanding that they return to Iraq following completion of their studies. Although designed primarily for men, women often took advantage of the programme, accompanying husbands or brothers in their studies abroad.50 This moment in the lives of young Sunni Iraqis permitted a freedom of movement, intellectual pursuit and even a loosening of the rigid boundaries of male-female

50 Interview with author in Mississauga, 8th November, 2008.
intimacies. It is important to note here that this period of relative freedom applies to a very small group of young adults, from predominantly Sunni backgrounds, not previously considered to be political threats to the regime.\textsuperscript{51} This encounter with Western culture as young adults profoundly influenced the religious, cultural and ethnic ideals of first generation Sunni women.

The forced exile of the professional class as a result of the growing violence in Iraq has brought this group of women back into the West. Now they face the stigma of being refugees, which contrasts with the positive attention they received when they were foreign-students in the 1970s. Many of these first-generation women commented that Islamophobia was an uneasy part of everyday life in Canada. In an interview with a recent refugee, she noted that, “When I lived with my husband in Indianapolis in the late sixties we had Christian, Jewish, communist friends – no one cared. Now I feel like I have to hide my faith or people will think I’m a terrorist.”\textsuperscript{52} When questioned regarding their faith or religious affiliation, most first-generation women were hesitant to articulate their religious beliefs, and most simply stated that they were ‘Iraqi’. Expressing a self-conscious awareness of Western notions of Islam, first generation women were largely unwilling to discuss their relationship with other Muslim groups from Iraq, although they were adamant that they not be categorized simply as ‘Muslim’ because this did not adequately define them from other racial groups of Muslims. One first-generation interviewee even went to far as to suggest

\textsuperscript{51} The ways in which these freedoms affected the lives of Iraqi women in the 1960s and 1970s is explored in much greater detail by Nadje Al-Ali in her discussion of interviews with Iraqi women. Al-Ali, \textit{Iraqi Women}, 47-49.

\textsuperscript{52} Interview with author in Mississauga, 8\textsuperscript{th} November, 2008.
that Canadians considered Muslims to be ‘uncivilized’, and refused to be categorized as anything other than ‘Iraqi.’

First-generation Iraqi Sunni women were born into a period of prosperity and change in Iraq, as the country capitalized on the growing price of oil to develop its infrastructure, expand its workforce and develop an increasingly secular system of government. Whereas other countries in the region looked outside the nation to expand their workforce, the Ba’th administration looked within, drawing upon the growing number of University-educated female graduates. By the 1980s, Iraqi women were some of the most educated women in the region, encouraged by the government to participate in the public sphere and in the development of the nation. During the ‘golden years’ of the 1970s and 1980s, this generation of women travelled to study abroad, participated in public life, and embraced the state’s attempts to ‘modernize’ by reforming female dress codes, and improving women’s legal rights. However, following a period of warfare and sanctions that spanned over a decade, the ensuing inflation and deterioration of the state infrastructure, including funding for daycare services, forced many of these women back into the home to contend with the growing anger and frustration of male family members who watched the rapid deterioration of their professional conditions, wages, and quality of life.

Having experienced both the expansion of women’s legal rights and professional opportunities, first-generation women also witnessed the rapid decline of their rights and freedoms and the disruption of the ‘classes’ as families struggled to weather the storm of conflict and sanctions. Kurdish women have to some extent been more successful in their

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53 Interview with author in Mississauga, 10th December, 2009.
public role, especially in their political involvement, but these gains are increasingly under threat from conservative members of the government. Women from old and ‘respectable’ Arab Muslim families in the nineties were increasingly matched by the growing nouveau riche, a group of social climbers profiting from black market dealings during the sanctions period.\footnote{Ibid.} As the financial conditions continued to worsen from 1995 onwards, growing numbers of men left Iraq for jobs in Syria, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates, transferring the burden of responsibility to their wives as head of household in their stead.

This trend of ‘women without men’ is also present in diaspora, as men continue to work in the Middle East, providing remittances to families living in Toronto. In interviews conducted in Toronto, women highlighted the difficulties of living in the West without either their husbands or their extended families as support networks, leading to their increasing isolation from the Iraqi Muslim community in Toronto. In cases where husbands were living abroad, the women tend not to join the Canadian workforce, focusing instead on helping their children integrate into the education system and participate in extra-curricular activities such as sports or cultural clubs organized through local mosques.\footnote{Group interview with author in Mississauga, 8th November, 2008.} By contrast, first-generation women who move to Canada with their husbands or as unmarried women, express a much stronger connection to networks of Sunni Iraqi women in Toronto, Hamilton, and Mississauga. In most cases, these women worked outside of the home in some capacity, and were able to connect much more easily with other Iraqis. Chain migration to specific regions of Hamilton and Mississauga in particular have created enclaves of Sunni Iraqis, recreating old-world social and kin networks. As Iraqis continue to arrive in the Greater Toronto Area, these networks are an essential source of support and
comfort for immigrants attempting to recreate their lives in diaspora. Unlike the Detroit Chaldean community that formed around the church, the Iraqi Sunni community in Toronto is spatially diverse and lacks central community organizations. This community is connected none-the-less by ethno-religious and class hierarchies transposed from Iraq and recreated in diaspora. The women I interviewed pointed out that as the concentration of Iraqis grows in regions such as Mississauga, so too do the divisions within the community. Some suggested that these divisions were present in the homeland, but more apparent in diaspora as Iraqis had a choice of living close to or far away from each other. However, there are also interesting trends of Iraqi Sunni families relocation in recent years, who opt to settle away from large concentrations of Iraqi in Mississauga and Hamilton, perhaps indicating their desire to break away from these old-world feuds and divisions.

Many of the first-generation Sunni women viewed the hijab as a symbol of more recent conservative Islamic trends in Iraq. During the 1940s and 1950s, reforms to female dress codes were introduced, urging women to stop wearing the traditional floor-length black abaya over their clothes in public. By the late-1960s, first-generation women claimed it was common to see young women sporting mini-skirts in public. There were only a few women from the first generation participant group who wore the hijab and they explained that Sunni women often began to wear the hijab later in life after they were married with children. They view veiling as an expression of the biological stage in a woman’s life and a sign that she is no longer fertile. Salwa, who began to wear the veil following her husband’s death, confided that “I didn’t want to remarry, so I started to wear

59 Al-Ali also found evidence of women following Western fashions in the sixties, in her interviews with Iraqi women in the U.S. and UK. Al-Ali, *Iraqi Women*, 98.
hijab. Then the men, they left me alone.” Nour explained that after her husband went to work in Germany, she felt more secure living alone with the children when she began to wear the hijab. She commented that, “if you wear the hijab there is no question that you will have a good reputation.” In addition to the clear religious symbolism of the hijab, the headscarf also functioned as a deterrent to unwanted male advances and more importantly a means to protect reputation and honour in the absence of a male protector.

When I asked these same first-generation Sunni women in Toronto if they would like their daughters to wear the headscarf, they all responded emphatically that professional Sunni women should not be veiled until they are married with children. They said that one day their daughters might chose to wear the hijab, but this should not happen while they are still young and unmarried. In their explanations, even the women in hijab hinted at the importance of beauty as a key factor in the marriageability of Iraqi women. When I asked Salwa (a hijabi or hijab-wearer) what she considered to be the key factors in securing a suitable marriage partner, she responded that, “you must be beautiful, of course, and come from a good family and have a good reputation. My daughter is very beautiful and we come from a good family, so ensha’Allah we will be successful in getting her a good husband even though now our situation is not so good in Canada.”

Based on the responses from the first-generation group and especially those women in hijab, it is clear that the women believe wearing the headscarf limits marriage prospects in this ethno-religious group, and that young women are encouraged to appreciate their beauty as an asset.

The trend in both the age and marital situation of second-generation Iraqi women in Canada who adopt the veil is significantly different. Second-generation participants ranged

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60 Interview with author in Hamilton, 9th November, 2010.  
62 Interview with author in Hamilton, 9th November, 2010.
in age from 18 to 35 years, and were all born and partly socialized in Iraq. Over two-thirds of this group were single women when the interviews took place.\(^6\) Having experienced traumatic disruption during their formative years of development, these women did not follow a pattern of distinct ‘ethclass’ in a traditional sense, mainly due to their varying degrees of education and employment. The devastating effects of sanctions throughout the 1990s, and the invasion of Iraq in 2003, interrupted the high school and university education of many women, owing to the growing threats to security at educational institutions and the high mobility rates for middle-class Iraqi families. Many young women were forced to delay their education by two to three years as families fled the unrest, relocating temporarily to Syria and Jordan, before being resettled through the UNHCR to Canada and the U.S.

For those women who ended up in Toronto, most complained about the difficulties they faced having their education credentials recognized by Canadian institutions and employers. Those still in their high-school years fare the best in some respects because once they earn a degree from a Canadian institution, their integration into the workforce is easier than if they were using foreign university credentials. However, reaching post-secondary education is difficult because of the many TOEFL upgrades and additional courses required to satisfy the admissions requirements of most Canadian universities. Those who completed part of all of their university education in Iraq are in a very difficult position upon arriving, since they are most often required to re-write the exams in order to receive certification for their degree or training programmes. In many cases, women also

\(^6\) These second-generation participants are best described as the ‘1.5 generation’. The notion of a 1.5-generation is explored in the work of Ruben G. Rumbaut, among others, in an attempt to expand the statistical boundaries of the second-generation in order to explore the complexities between foreign-born immigrants who are partly socialized abroad and native-born immigrants born to foreign parents. Ruben G. Rumbaut, “Severed or Sustained Attachments? Language, Identity, and Imagined Communities in the Post-Immigrant Generation,” in The Changing Face of Home: The Transnational Lives of the Second-Generation, eds., Peggy Levitt and Mary C. Waters, (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2002), 48.
complained of the fact that in order to re-qualify, Canadian universities required additional documentation be sent from institutions in Iraq – a process which often takes 12-18 months, further delaying these women from entering the workforce in Canada.64

Education and employment are among the most important and often cited problems that young Sunni women (and indeed most immigrants) initially face, and are formative issues in shaping the experiences of second-generation Iraqi women. In addition to the more tangible problems of credentials and employment, are the struggles young women face in their attempts to understand where they belong in diaspora, and how to negotiate between their Western ideals of female bodies, and their own cultural codes of conduct. These women live within transnational social fields, and are intimately tied to family and friend in the homeland. Some of the women also live in transnational families with trans-migrants, often fathers, brothers, and in some cases mothers, who move between Iraq, Canada, and regions of the Middle East in order to provide remittances to families in Toronto. Uprooted during the formative teenage years, their connections to the homeland are heightened in diaspora as they struggle to understand divided loyalties and hyphenated identities.

As a distinct in-between group, the “sociocultural characteristics and psychological experiences of these pre-adults are distinct” from first and second-generation Canadian immigrants. These women are best described as the ‘1.5 generation’, neither fully Iraqi nor Canadian. The ‘transnational’ second-generation is able to move between different identities and develop a sense of self “shaped by personal, familial and organizational connections to people ‘back home’ and at the same time in terms of race, ethnicity and nation are part of a political process that extends transnationally.”65 Without the strong

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64 Interviews with author in Hamilton and Toronto, 12th December, 2010; 27th November, 2011.
internal network of a community organization, as is present in the Chaldean community in Detroit, this in-between generation is vulnerable to a lack of “access to mobility ladders”, resulting in their professional stagnation and inability to maintain the socio-economic status of their parents generation.66

The position of this in-between generation of women is further complicated by fact that they are of an age where one of their primary concerns is to find a husband and start a family. Typically in Iraq, endogamous marriages are arranged through families from similar backgrounds in an effort to ensure a suitable match for the marriage partners and their extended networks of kin. Families in Iraq tend to settle in close proximity to each other, with several generations often living in old family homes, providing support networks for professional women with young children, as well as unmarried or widowed family members. Although men and women from several generations typically participate in the matchmaking process, it is the senior male family members who have the final say in their sons’ or daughters’ choice of partner.67 This patrilineal organization of Arab society differs greatly from Western patriarchy, since in the case of groups such as Iraqi Muslims it refers to the responsibilities of family members to each other. In the case of men, older male relatives are charged with supporting the extended family financially while women are the embodiment of family honour.68 In diaspora, families cut off from these trans-generational support networks shift the burden to younger male relatives entreated with moderating marriage proposals and upholding the family’s reputation and social standing, both in

diaspora and in Iraq. Due to the short supply of available partners in the Toronto community, young women in Canada look to Iraq for a suitable marriage partner, relying on family networks to match them with appropriate men.

Young unmarried women living in the West are considered to be ‘at risk’ from the corrupting influences of loose morals and open sexuality. In marriage negotiations, the modesty and reputation of these women and their families are frequently called into question, as friends and family of their potential suitors inquire into the conduct of young Iraqi women in Canada. The growing religious conservatism in Iraq since the U.S. invasion has once again focused attention on women’s dress. Since 2003, head coverings have become more popular in urban centers in Iraq. On the streets of Baghdad, Iraqi women are wearing hijab as a means to protect their bodies from becoming the focus of jeers and taunts from American soldiers and Iraqi men. The young women that I interviewed in Toronto reported that this growing conservatism has affected their lives mainly through the increase in malicious gossip regarding their conduct both in the homeland and in communities of Iraqis in Toronto. A potent force of female policing, young women frequently mentioned that the threat of ‘bad’ gossip against them controlled what they wore, who they made friends with, how they spent their weekends, and what studies they chose at university.

In a reaction I consider to be ‘defensive modesty,’ many young second-generation women have responded to the policing by means of female gossip and the increasing control of young male family members over their bodies, by adopting the hijab in diaspora. There were six women from the second-generation participant group who wore the hijab, of whom

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five had adopted the headscarf upon arriving in Canada. When I asked them why they had adopted the headscarf, all five women expressed their dissatisfaction with what they considered to be ‘loose Western morals’ and the way in which women in Canada dressed and behaved in public. All five of the women began wearing the headscarf in their late teens as a personal expression of their faith. Conversations with unmarried second-generation veiled women revealed that they were more overtly conservative in their religious beliefs than their parents. As one participant, Salima, commented, “I am proud to be a Muslim, so I would like to wear hijab to show people that I am not afraid to be a Muslim.” They were also deeply concerned about protecting their modesty in diaspora, as it becomes increasingly difficult to arrange endogamous marriages for Iraqi women living outside the homeland. The perceived ‘freedoms’ that their mother’s generation enjoyed are being replaced with a growing concern about female reputation and marriage prospects. Second-generation participant Amina commented on the prospects of marrying men from the homeland, “if we wear hijab then they will know we are good, and we will get the good men from Iraq.” Female bodies thus become the cultural terrain used “to demarcate boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’;” in this case virtuous women of intact reputation versus Iraqi women in diaspora who may have fallen prey to Western temptations and are no longer considered modest and ‘pure’.

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70 Due to the scope and focus of my research on contrasting and comparing difference ethno-religious groups of Iraqis, there are relatively few veiled women as participants, and I include only the taped and official interviews conducted with women in hijab in the text above. However, there were others that I had more casual conversations with regarding their decision. Some of these women would not sign consent forms, and did not want to be part of the research. While I completely respect their decision to remain ‘off the record,’ I have included their narratives in my overall assessment of the interview material. These young veiled women were quick to identify other Iraqi women who had also made the decision to wear hijab, which does allude to a small though important trend amongst this generation. This is a trend that I intend to explore further in future research.

71 Interview with author in Hamilton, 17th December, 2010.

The families of these five women responded to this form of religious expression in a number of interesting ways. Given the increase in policing of female conduct in diaspora, I expected that families would readily welcome their daughters’ decisions to veil, silencing any rumours regarding her sexual conduct, and protecting the reputation of the family. This was, however, not the case. In only one case (the young woman who came to Canada wearing *hijab*) did the family wholeheartedly support their daughter’s decision to veil. All of the other families expressed their concern that wearing the *hijab* would attract negative responses from the Canadian public; this was especially so where the women had finished University and were searching for employment. In one case, despite the fact that two of her aunts who wore *hijab*, one participant recorded that when she first made the decision to veil she endured her cousins’ ridicule and her father’s anger for ostensibly portraying the family as backwards and conservative. First-generation Sunni perceptions of the *hijab* were informed by campaigns in Iraq during the Qasim and Ba’th regimes to separate religion from the state. This of course did not sanction a shift towards greater sexual freedoms, although many women privately suggested that this was a resulting factor. Their early encounters with Western culture as students shaped the way in which they negotiated between traditional and Western ideals of female sexuality and the female body.

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73 This trend in generational differences between first and second-generation responses to Islamic dress in North America indicates that most parents would prefer that children fit in and not ‘other’ themselves from society regardless of religious codes. In a study which spanned a number of urban centers in Canada and the U.S., Nimat Hafez Barazangi found that very few of the parents in their study were aware of the proper Quranic codes of dress for women (although all felt that modest dress was appropriate), whereas the youth response was more in line with the actual teachings of the Quran. The author suggests that there is a greater understanding of religious text in the youth response and far more diverse reactions to proper modes of Islamic dress. Nimat Hafez Barazangi, “Arab Muslim Identity Transmission: Parents and Youth,” *Arab-Americans: Continuity and Change*, Baha Abu-Laban and Michael W. Suleiman, eds., (Belmont, Massachusetts: Association of Arab-American University Graduates, Inc., 1989), 65-75.

74 Interview with author in Hamilton, 17th December, 2010.
Despite fearing for their daughters’ reputation and prospects in marriage, first
generation mothers opposed the idea that veiling was a suitable expression of female
religiosity for unmarried women. Even in families such as the example cited above where
first-generation family members wore the hijab, it would appear that the standards for
acceptable female religiosity depend upon the age and marital situation of women, and
reflect upon the family as a whole. Being ‘too religious’ suggests that the family is more
traditional, a label very few ‘non-traditional’ middle-class families wish to bear, especially
now that they are settled in Canada. One husband casually remarked during a group
interview that he wished his wife would stop wearing hijab so that she could more easily
mix with other Iraqi and Canadian women. This casual remark was met with a strong
response from his wife who quickly (and sharply) replied: “I won’t take this scarf off for
anyone. Not even you.” This exchange illustrates the deep-seated belief in this generation
that conservative expressions of religiosity is equated with a rejection of modernity and a
more Westernized way of life. Although religion was clearly a central component of life for
many if not most of the Sunni Muslims in this participant group, there was also an emphasis
on private devotion rather than the very public expression of religiosity favoured by young
second-generation Sunni women.

Given the absence of a hijab-wearing tradition in the families of second-generation
participants, and the families’ concerns or hostility towards the hijab, I asked the women
how they decided on this course of religious expression. Three of the women suggested that
they had followed the example of female friends at school who wore the hijab. In most
cases in which I interviewed families of Iraqis together, young men seemed to place a
higher degree of importance on retaining an Iraqi circle of friends in Canada. In the case of
these three women, their friends were not of Iraqi origin, but Muslim immigrants from
diverse backgrounds. One of the interviewees hinted at the pressure she had felt from her small circle of devout friends to be a “good Muslim woman, and follow the true words of Allah the merciful.” Others suggested that female friends had provided a forum within which to discuss both the physical and the spiritual nature of this decision. “I didn’t know how to put on a hijab at the beginning – it was so hard! My friend, she laughed at me, and tried to show me, but really I had to practice a lot on my own!” But another interviewee suggested that it was a very personal decision for her based on what she felt was her calling – although again, supported by her female friends who also wore hijab. This trend seems to suggest that although the families are not providing the impetus for this decision to veil, that female Muslim-immigrants are playing an important role in informing these decisions, as well as creating networks of support outside the traditional family unit.

There were also suggestions in the responses of second-generation women in hijab that they considered veiling to be a feminist statement. I was reticent to directly confront the issue of feminism because of its perceived emphasis on secular individualism. But in some cases, this did come up in conversations with women of all ages, and in the case of Salima, she spoke about being a feminist. I was most intrigued with her ideas about freedom through faith for women in Islam, and the degree of safety and agency she felt in covering her body. Her ideas of feminism reflect ideas about individual choice most often associated with Western feminisms, the notion that she had chosen this course of action, and by wearing hijab and traditional dress, she has reclaimed control over her sexuality, liberating herself as a woman. For Salima, feminism was about the right to choose, and it was her choice to cover her body. She commented that “you see, it is not about safety really

75 Group interview with author in Hamilton, 17th December, 2010.
76 Interview with author in Mississauga, 10th December, 2009.
77 Group interview with author in Hamilton, 17th December, 2010.
because in Canada you can wear what you want. But I want you to look at me, at my eyes, and listen to my mouth when I am talking.” Her rationale behind veiling then, was that controlling her sexuality meant almost de-sexualizing her body so that her voice and mind became the focus rather than the physical display of the body. This idea of agency, and of liberating by refusing, as she described, to be a part of Western culture’s obsession with sexualizing the female body, challenges Western feminism at its core, suggesting that there is a need to approach studies of religious women of colour through the lens of alternate feminisms.  

Young second-generation women in diaspora are also responding to the currents of increasingly conservative Islamic practice in Iraq. Since the invasion of U.S. forces and the emergence of Islamic fundamentalist militias, female dress and behaviour are increasingly the subject of scrutiny by these groups. Living transnational also means that these ideas are being communicated and potentially internalized by young women in diaspora. Maintaining a ‘good’ reputation and adhering to normative homeland ideas of female behaviour means conforming to more conservative expressions of religiosity in order to ‘prove’ their purity. Haideh Moghissi, Saeed Rahnema, and Mark Goodman suggest that there is also a tendency among the younger generation to identify with an idealized ‘Islam’ that is much more conservative and intolerant than the Islam actually practiced by most Muslims. Experiences of social and cultural exclusion, and of being ‘othered’ play a large part in this more political turn to global trends of political Islam and a “distorted Islam” that is projected as their own identity.  

Indeed, I was so fascinated by this idea that I spent three months in 2009 (under the guidance of several Iraqi female participants) wearing the hijab and observing the same customs that these young women have adopted. In the place of attending mosque and daily prayers (although this was not something that all five women observed on a weekly basis), I spent time reading a translated copy of the Qu’ran and silently meditating.

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78 Interview with author in Hamilton, 17th December, 2010.
79 Indeed, I was so fascinated by this idea that I spent three months in 2009 (under the guidance of several Iraqi female participants) wearing the hijab and observing the same customs that these young women have adopted. In the place of attending mosque and daily prayers (although this was not something that all five women observed on a weekly basis), I spent time reading a translated copy of the Qu’ran and silently meditating.
religiosity as a means of fulfilling spiritual needs, rather it is the use of “Islam as a powerful ideological tool of resistance – indeed, in the absence of a viable, anti-racist, and leftist movement, it is practically the only force that appears to effectively challenge global power structures and systems of domination.”80 As Muslims are increasingly racialized in Canada and the U.S., Moghissi and others suggest that this has increased the appeal of political Islam.81 Conversations with Iraqi women suggested that their increasingly conservative Islamic observances were being ‘taught’ by Muslim friends. They experience a desire to be openly Muslim and to challenge the stereotypes of Islamic fundamentalism by being part of an open dialogue that includes people of all religious backgrounds. Some, like the women referenced above, are becoming more public in their desires to distribute material to Canadians and to ‘teach’ people about the message of Islam.

Conclusion

By bringing together case studies of significantly different communities of Iraqis in North America, this chapter has examined the forces that manifest in the multi-generational ethno-religious expressions of women in Toronto and Detroit. Their interactions with and within the larger Arab/Muslim/Iraqi communities in Detroit and Toronto have had a significant impact in shaping the ways in which groups self-identify. The ongoing threat from the growing Arab and Muslim communities in Detroit has prompted a shift towards ethnic exclusivity amongst second-generation Chaldeans. Part of the process of defining

80 Haideh Moghissi, Saeed Rahnema, and Mark J. Goodman, eds., Diaspora by Design: Muslims in Canada and Beyond, (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 14.
81 Some researchers have even documented the increase in teenagers from non-practicing and secular Muslim families that are increasingly influenced by more religious friends into following conservative and often fundamentalist practices. Saeed Soltanpour, “Iranian-Islamic Centers in Toronto,” part 2, Shahrvand Weekly (926), February 11, 2005.
‘Chaldean’ in relation to the broader Arab community is by disassociating from the growing immigrant population and expressing ethnic difference. Their ability to organize and mobilize effectively on behalf of the growing professional class in Detroit has created growing class cleavages especially in the case of recent refugees. However, the Chaldean church has proven to be a formidable cornerstone of Chaldean identity, maintaining a prominent role in the lives of community members across socio-economic lines. The lack of community organizations in Toronto’s Sunni Muslim group prevents this new community from creating a central organizing network for social and economic support. Increasingly, ethnic or regional identities inform the development of female networks according to where Sunni Muslims settle, resulting in the formation of ethnic enclaves of Kurds and Sunni Arabs in the suburbs of Mississauga and Hamilton. Their recent arrival, and continued connections to the homeland cause first-generation Sunni women to be detached from Canadian society and institutions, a process which is beginning to reverse as the second-generation reach adulthood and negotiate their relationship with Canada, the homeland, and the fractured Iraqi communities in North America. Without a connection to a broader Iraqi network within the immediate vicinity, these case studies suggest that in diaspora, trans-generational ethno-religious identity is the primary force shaping the formation of individual Iraqi groups linked through their connection to the homeland, real or imagined.

Despite the differences in the lives of Chaldean and Sunni Arab women in Detroit and Toronto, female modesty and the role of women in these communities is a common anxiety expressed in their oral narratives. ‘Traditional’ definitions of reputation and the behaviour of women continue, to a varying extent, to inform the role of women both within the family and within the community in both groups of Iraqis. In the case of Chaldean
third-generation women, they are beginning to break away from close family networks in order to pursue education outside of Michigan. As female modesty comes into question, so too does the reputation of the family within Middle Eastern communities. Due to their ongoing close connection to the homeland, second-generation Sunni Arab women coming of age in Toronto are increasingly impacted by the changes in religious movements in Iraq, which has led to a new trend of unmarried women wearing the *hijab* in diaspora. As women grow increasingly concerned with maintaining modesty and securing a marriage partner given the small and fractured nature of their community in Canada, they use the female body as a means to negotiate sexuality and physically represent their modesty and good reputation. In many cases without the support of their families, these women in *hijab* are playing an active role in re-defining the limits of permissive female social and sexual conduct, participating in the policing of female bodies.
Conclusion

In a 2009 conversation with a Sabean woman in Detroit, I asked her why she thought there were such divisions amongst ethno-religious groups from Iraq living in the U.S. In her response, she described the root of the problem through a food metaphor:

Iraq is a dish that has been poisoned, and we are forced like dogs to eat from this dish. Saddam has forced us to take in his poison and carry it with us. You think we are free here to be like one community – no we are not free, actually, because we always remember the things that they forced us to believe. That the Sunnis are the chosen people, that we are not Iraqis, that we are from somewhere else, that we must worship Saddam the dictator. That is why ethnic groups cannot come together in America. This hatred follows us and eats at us inside.¹

Her emphatic and poignant response is reminiscent of the food metaphor introduced in the first chapter, which described Iraqis in a far more positive light, considering all of the groups as integral and diverse components of a dish. In the above metaphor, however, the dish is tainted and Iraq’s diverse population is being forced to bend to the hegemonic will of the regime. Capturing not only the history of repression and the marginalization of minority groups during Saddam’s regime, her words also emphasize the exclusion of all non-Sunni peoples from belonging as true ‘Iraqis’. The metaphor also incisively describes the act of consuming a lie, of being conscious of the state’s manipulation of Iraq’s history, its people and their place in the nation, but powerless to prevent it. And finally, her words stress how the hatreds of the past continue to inform the present situation of Iraqis in diaspora, rendering them unable to form a cohesive community.

Whilst writing the dissertation, I have often thought back to this interview and to the interpretation the woman offered to explain the fractured nature of Iraqi groups in diaspora.

¹ Interview with author in Southfield, Detroit, 5th November, 2009.
Her metaphor frames the many thematic threads explored in this thesis, including the manipulation of historical memory in Iraq and women’s efforts to re-assert themselves back into the collective past through counter narratives. Within the feminine spaces and intimacies of the interview, women found ways of resisting the masculine frameworks of official public memory in order to share subjective lives and traumatic pasts. Their personal narratives of trauma and other lived experiences help them reframe their identity as diasporic citizens in North America. By voting, mentoring, helping, and veiling, Iraqi women in North America are active agents in their own lives, and also in the lives of other Iraqi women.

With the historic rise in global migrations, the predicted effects of cultural homogenization have in fact only heightened the awareness and the promotion of ethnic diasporas living outside the homeland. In the aftermath of the general ethnic revival over the past four decades, ethnic minorities have gained greater legitimacy and been more successful in their attempts to assert their interests within Western pluralistic and multiethnic states.² But while these host countries become increasingly tolerant of efforts to promote difference, there are also forces within these societies that oppose (often violently as in the post 9/11 backlash towards Arabs and Muslims) these developments, regarding them as threats to national security and to the coherence of dominant ethnicities, however imagined these might be. Iraqi ethno-national and ethno-religious migrant communities are formed as a result of both voluntary and forced migrations to North America, although arguably all of the groups expressed narratives of exile as a result of past and/or present religious, cultural, and ethnic persecutions. This is especially true for the Chaldean, Assyrian, and Kurdish Iraqis who “remain minorities in their host countries and thus are

potentially faced with possible expulsion, social political and economic hardships, and alienation.”

Diasporic imagination and identity take on many different forms in the lives of multi-generational ethno-religious Iraqi women. In the case of Detroit’s Chaldeans, women’s active participation in the Chaldean church and community organizations protect against the assimilation of the Chaldeans into Detroit’s extensive Arab communities. Settled in this region for over three generations, Chaldeans are an example of how, “diasporic solidarity is not solely based on ties to the homeland,” but “it fully emerges in the host country and reflects conditions there. Based on such solidarity, there emerges a degree of cohesion within such groups.”

Some might consider this process to be one of ethnicization, but I have argued that the Chaldeans continue to live in “diaspora” especially since the second, third and fourth-generations cannot “return” to Iraq. It might also be helpful to reflect upon what they really mean by “return” since most American-born Chaldeans likely do not actually wish to migrate. Despite these somewhat ambiguous connections to ‘home,’ group identity for Chaldean-Americans continues to be premised upon a history of exile that began with earlier migrants. In recent years, as they face the struggles of overcoming generational, class, educational, social, and ideological differences within the community, institutional leaders try to encourage the younger generation to participate in community organizations and activities. The church, for example, reaches out to the youth through recreational clubs and associations meant to draw together young Chaldeans in religious-based organizations.

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The integrative force of Western education, however, enables Chaldean youth to break with traditional customs and to leave Detroit in search of employment. In addition, the community faces the difficulty of uniting an increasingly geographically dispersed community, as affluence and better job prospects in the second and third-generation has allowed Chaldeans to move from the inner city into the middle-class suburbs of Sterling Heights, Southfield, and Rochester. Increasingly, as Chaldeans are born in the U.S., they are invested in their rights as American citizens, and as a result community organizations increasingly cater to the social, political, and cultural needs of the community through funds and services offered by the host government. Ideally, the establishment of these diasporic organizations creates the possibility for “dual authority and, consequently, of dual, divided, and ambiguous loyalty vis-à-vis the host country.”5 In this case, my research indicates a growing apathy among Chaldeans about participating in Iraqi politics. With significant exceptions, Chaldeans increasingly identify as Chaldean-Americans and are gradually loosening their ties to Iraq over successive generations. By contrast, the Kurds as a politicized group committed to independence, are deeply invested in homeland and transnational politics. The diasporic solidarity of Kurdish Iraqis living in North America is evidenced through the work of women in transnational networks, some of whom I interviewed, who fight for the rights of Kurdish migrants and for an independent Kurdish nation-state.

Gabriel Sheffer argues that the fact that “identity and solidarity serve as the twin bases for maintaining and promoting constant contact among the diasporas’ elites and grassroots activists,” and that “these relations are of major social, political, economic, and cultural significance for diasporas, their host countries, homelands and other interested

5 Ibid., 203.
actors,” begs the question “whether or not these groups actually form cohesive and consensual communities.” As in the case of Sunni, Shi’a, and Kurdish communities of Iraqis in Toronto, the degree of solidarity and cohesion within these communities ranges from strong (as in the case of the Kurds), to weak (as in the case of Sunni Arabs). These new diasporas have not yet had time to coalesce and organize as ethno-religious groups and community organizations in diaspora, as have the Chaldeans in Detroit. Perhaps they are still in the process of determining if their stay in Canada will be permanent or temporary. Ties to the homeland through transnational exchanges of money, communication, ideological beliefs, and people, force these migrants to constantly renegotiate their diasporic citizenship and both their imagined and real connections to the homeland.

The generational negotiations that shape the ways in which Iraqi women in diaspora remember, retell, and re-invent narratives of the past receive much attention in the thesis. The different life experiences of foreign-born first and second-generation women, as well as those born into the diaspora, inform women’s retelling of the past and how they negotiate the pressures and policing of ethno-religious communities in the present. The narratives of Iraqi women reveal the complex process of negotiating between the official history of Iraq as promoted by the ‘Re-Writing History Project,’ and the communal histories passed down orally through their ethno-religious kin networks. Traumatic pasts are experienced differently, as each wave of migrants is subject to varying conditions and conflicts. Recent migrations of Sunni, Shi’i, and Kurdish communities settled in Toronto are intimately tied to these traumas, and their families and friends continue to feel the repercussions of Iraq’s civil unrest. For Chaldeans settled in Detroit over successive generations, past traumas are communicated through collective memories of communal pasts in which ethno-religious

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6 Ibid., 203.
identity in diaspora is tied to the continued victimization of this group in Iraq. Even though third and fourth-generation Chaldean-Americans are disconnected from the horrors of war and violence in Iraq, they participate in the perpetuation of an identity based upon victimhood and marginalization and which feeds their ethnic exclusivity in the U.S.

Second and third-generation Iraqi women are ‘growing up transnational’ in situations very different from that of their parents. As young Chaldean women born in Detroit and young Sunni women born in Iraq come to terms with the complex boundaries of womanhood and female conduct for unmarried women outside the homeland, they negotiate between acceptable standards of behaviour for women. In the case of young second-generation Iraqi women in Toronto, they develop a sense of self that is shaped by “personal, familial, and organizational connections to people ‘back home’ and at the same time in terms of race, ethnicity and nation are part of a political process that extends transnationally.”7 This is especially true of young Sunni women choosing to veil; they are engaging in the conservative practices of a political Islam, and distinguishing themselves from their communities and from the Canadian population at large. The multiple meanings that the *hijab* holds for these young women makes it difficult to say precisely why they choose this physical mode of religious representation: their motives reflect a mix of anxiety, identity, politics, ideological beliefs and, in many cases, fears for the future. As growing numbers of young Muslim migrants in Canada chose to be veiled amid growing discrimination against Arabs and Muslims in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in the U.S., the subject is sorely in need of further investigation.

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A focus on national categories such as ‘Iraqi’ glosses over the important ethnic, religious and class differences between these migrant groups, their differing migration processes, and the different ways in which they interact with host countries. Similarly, attempts to categorize a ‘Muslim’ diaspora or an Arab-American community in academic studies of these communities in North America has a tendency to conflate cultural traditions with more specific ethno-national identities and politicized ethnic identities. As I have argued throughout the thesis, we must deconstruct the imagined and imposed ‘Iraqi’ communal identity shaped by authoritarian regimes in Iraq, and understand instead how these diverse groups have come to be a part of modern-day Iraq, as well as parts of divided diasporas.

Ultimately, the thesis has sought to insert the voices of Iraqi women back into their past, and to create a space within which they can construct their own individual narratives and testaments to their lives. We need more “thick” ethnographies that examine the lives and lived experiences of diverse groups of Middle Eastern migrant women who make North America ‘home’. Marginalized from participating in the political processes in Iraq, these women in diaspora are emerging as community activists, mentors, counselors, and professionals. Their transnational participation in global Iraqi networks links them to worlds outside of North America while it increasingly roots them in Canada and the U.S. As they become settled, ethnic identities are negotiated within the frameworks of multiculturalism, as they look inwards to carve out a place in North America. For the more recent migrants, transnational connections remain strong, and the homeland is ever-present.

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in their diasporic imagination, as they continue to define their future as part of the rebuilding of Iraq.

This thesis has contributed to a number of overlapping and intersecting discussions on the histories of ethnic and religious groups in North America, the study of racialized migrant women in diaspora and the development of feminist oral history methodologies for non-western women. This is the first comparative and detailed history of Iraqi refugee and migrant women who have settled in different waves in Canada and the U.S. since 1980. Moreover, it is the first full-length study of Iraqi women and their ethno-religious identities and communities in Canada. In talking more specifically about these contributions, however, I want also to reflect on some of the approaches I adopted in the dissertation and suggest how I might refine or nuance my analysis or reconsider some of my evidence as I move forward with this project.

As a feminist migration historian, I set out to explore the diasporic identity and transnational activities of Iraqi women within an historical context. Tracing the historical development of ethno-religious identities within Iraq was key to understanding how women transported and re-imagined these identities in diaspora. Equally important was placing new refugee women within the historical context of established Iraqi communities in Canada and the U.S. Since there are so few Iraqi community studies in the North American scholarship, there was a great deal of archival research that went into developing the historical foundation of the project. I was concerned with de-centering the male elites that are more visible in these diasporic communities, and accessing the activisms or resistance of women. The questions that initially interested me included: how did Iraqi women engage with the multiethnic U.S. state as compared with official multiculturalism in Canada? As previously noted, the censorship of archival collections in Canada restricted my efforts to
examine the history of women’s activism in community organizations. In the case of Detroit, I was able to connect four generations of Chaldean women’s activities and activisms, showing how they have contributed to shaping new definitions of ethnic identity over time. The Chaldeans are an interesting example of migrant communities that remain in diaspora over several generations. They remain in diaspora because so much of their identity depends upon their exile from Iraq and inability to return home. Ideas about diasporic citizenship are transferred across generations, negotiated against the changing climate of suspicion towards Arab and Muslim groups in the U.S. Yet, a question remains: when American Chaldeans speak of “home” do they now think of Iraq as a site of pilgrimage rather than a homeland to which they really want to return to live? The Chaldeans also demonstrate how the national context shapes the formation of ethnic communities and the political cultures into which they integrate. In 2003, the male elites repositioned the community as ‘Chaldean-Americans’ – reflecting both a change in demographics but also a political-repositioning of this community. The context of the war on terror and the U.S. incursions into Iraq are important factors explaining why Chaldeans might be reticent to identify as Iraqis. But as I move forward with this research, I will revisit these claims by looking beyond the organizations’ mandates and mission statements to explore how the messages of ethnic organizations are internalized (or not) by both men and women in the community. In addition, a more nuanced discussion of political culture, the effects of the war on terror, and the broader mobilization of Iraqis, as well as more focused attention on class distinctions among women in the diaspora, may well mean a less emphatic insistence on the primary importance of ethno-religious culture. It may also help me complicate the ways in which ‘ethnic identity’ is understood from one generation to the
next and how these messages are negotiated against changing attitudes towards peoples of Middle Eastern descent.

In exploring female subjectivities, this thesis has sought to disrupt and complicate dominant patriarchal narratives with women’s informal counter-narratives. I have argued that there is a ‘third space’ in which counter-narratives can be conveyed and that attention to this space opens up new possibilities for re-thinking how we listen, both on and off the record, to women’s narratives. In reflecting upon my interviews, I have come to think more about how we conceive of the ‘interview’ – where does it begin and end, for example - and why do we only privilege recorded histories when we learn so much from the process of making contact, establishing trust and gaining access to the lives and memories of the women we interview? My focus in the thesis has been on women’s narratives – but what about the ways in which Iraqi men challenge national narratives, and negotiate identity in diaspora? It will be interesting in future research to investigate the presence of counter-narratives in interviews with male Iraqis in Toronto and Detroit. Interviews with young Iraqi men will likely offer insight into the anxieties they face and how their responses impact changing gender roles within the family as well as new trends in practiced religion among young Iraqi women. As I continue with this research, I will also think more critically about how to complicate the dichotomy of narratives offered in the dissertation between an official male myth and history of Iraq and that of women’s counter narratives by considering the counter-narratives of other oppositional groups who, both historically and in the present, have resisted the Iraqi state’s attempts to impose a particular version of history.

This thesis has situated Iraqi women within the broader scholarship on diasporic women in North America. The rich body of work on diasporic Muslim women in Canada informed how I positioned myself as a feminist migration scholar and how I positioned my
subjects as ‘Third World’ or non-western women. Although I do frame my work within a transnational feminist approach, I have drawn widely from different discussions between feminists who adopt a postcolonial framework. I wanted to understand how the seemingly uncoordinated and fragmented actions of individual women might be connected to a broader activism and circulation of ideas within the diaspora. In employing the term ‘Third World,’ I had in mind the work of scholars such as Daphne Patai, who reminds us that there is an inherent danger that the researcher will interview ‘down’ when speaking with those who are less powerful economically, politically and socially than the researcher. In interviewing Iraqi refugee women, I had been careful to try and check my western upbringing, but, in future, it will be useful to consider how the cosmopolitanism of these women, who grew up in Baghdad and view themselves as descendants of a great civilization, shaped the ways in which they view me and my small-town upbringing in Wales. After all, many of these women have lived and been educated in multiple locations throughout the West, which complicates their categorization as Third World women. In the thesis, I employ the terms ‘First’ and ‘Third’ world in reference to the histories of colonialism and Empire that have shaped these regions, despite the essentialism inherent in the development of their colloquial use. This does not solve the problem of terminology, especially given the complex forces that have shaped the transnational experiences of Iraqi women over the past four decades. In thinking through these issues, I have thought back often to Gayatri


Spivak’s enduring question: “Can the subaltern speak?” After all, had I not also privileged the voices of women from the middling classes? It might also be useful to consider the possibility of different subalterns - that even within the upper strata (and not only among the poor or working class), women’s voices can be silenced by patriarchal national narratives. This underscores the value of oral histories in capturing voices that are shaped by categories of class, ethnicity, race, and politics, but not necessarily limited to any one of these categories.

Framed as a transnational feminist study, the focus of this thesis has been on the private and less tangible acts of female resistance. The women I interviewed have challenged patriarchy through counter-narratives that disrupt imposed national narratives. In the context of Iraq’s ‘Rewriting History’ project, patriarchal nationalism propagates a collective past that reifies the achievements of Iraqi men. In this sense, Iraqi women’s pasts are silenced. I asked all of the interviewees about the history of women in Iraq or women’s achievements within the histories of specific ethnic groups, but I was consistently met with blank stares, laughter or even curiosity about the question itself. The most common responses I heard were: “you can’t find Iraqi women in the history books,” or “women in Iraq do not fight the wars,” or “women have always been the ones behind the men in power.” I do think that it points to the influence of a heavily masculine nationalist myth, or at the very least is a product of a patriarchal nation-state. In moving forward, however, I want to revisit my depiction of the Ba‘th regime’s official nationalism by

12 These were common responses to this question over the course of my interviews in Amman, Toronto and Detroit from 2007-2011.
considering, for example, the opposition it engendered among groups in Iraq, and adopt a more nuanced approach to how class and gender complicate ethno-religious identities.

I chose food metaphors to bookend this dissertation because of the central role of food in Iraqi culture and identity, but otherwise it does not feature prominently. However, themes of food, as well as intimacy, might also help to complicate discussions of ethno-religious identity. In my Detroit fieldwork, I found examples of published Chaldean cookbooks that established their lineage in Iraq through food but also demonstrated a sharing of ideas between ethnic groups over centuries of co-habitation in Iraq. In regards to intimacies, I plan to contribute to the established body of work on intimacies across borders by exploring the new ways of communicating that link individuals virtually to Iraq but also to each other in very intimate ways. The new global reality of living in the digital age heightens the interconnectedness between countries and people. The ability of people in diaspora to see kin via skype and to feel as though they are physically connected to them complicates the ability of diasporic Iraqis to ‘become’ Canadian or American.

Through these technological modes, Iraqis remain virtually connected to the homeland – they can ‘see’ the homeland and virtually interact with the spaces of their past in the

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13 One such example is Samira Yako Cholagh’s *Treasured Middle Eastern Cookbook*. First published in 1998, it became very popular within the Chaldean community, leading to a second edition. In an interview with Samira’s daughter Valerie, she said the cookbook had also made her mother something of a local celebrity, who was featured on morning talk shows and in local newspapers who hailed the book as an important way of understanding the Chaldeans and their culture. Interview with author, November 6th 2009, Southfield, Michigan; Samira Yako Cholagh, *Treasured Middle Eastern Cookbook*, 2nd ed., (Saline, Michigan: McNaughton & Gunn, Inc., 2008.)


This line of inquiry may generate new insights into how intimacy is maintained across borders. Finally, in future research, I plan to explore the extent to which virtual intimacies and communities inform the activisms of young Iraqi women, including how they craft a “religiously constituted political consciousness.”

Operating in a virtual world, bloggers create vast global ‘Muslim spaces’ online, drawing upon Islam as a framework for contending with patriarchy, empire, racism, and war. Minoo Moallem, Nadine Naber, and Pnina Werbner among others have established the framework within which to discuss these new political religious identities. I see my future research contributing to this literature on the role of women in the resistance of ‘globalization from below.’

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American Federation of Teachers Human Rights and Community Relations Department Records
Michigan Federation of Teachers Collections, Part II (1951-1963)
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Interviews

In most cases, interviews with Iraqi women were conducted confidentially, and the names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement. This is true of interviews conducted on an individual basis and in groups/focus groups. Interviews below are listed accordingly, except in the case of those interviews conducted with counselors and community workers who agreed to have their names used in a limited capacity as per the consensual agreements signed for the purposes of research and publication. In many cases multiple interviews were conducted with women on the same day, as are indicated by the interview dates listed below. Women were given the option of either being quoted completely anonymously in the research, or proposing a pseudonym, which some have done.

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Dana Bajjali, Refugee Counselor with the UNHCR, interview with author, Amman, 22nd September, 2008.
Mohamad Al-Nasser, Refugee Counselor with the UNHCR, interview with author, Amman, 22nd September, 2008.
Detroit, U.S.A

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Interview with author in Toronto, 6th September, 2010.
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Published Sources


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O’Mahony, Anthony. “Eastern Christianity in Modern Iraq.” In *Eastern Christianity:


Figure 1: Informed Consent Form


Ph.D. Dissertation Project

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INFORMED CONSENT FORM

This is to state that I, ______________________, agree to participate in the research being conducted by Nadia Lewis of the Department of History at the University of Toronto. Questions or concerns should be directed to nadia.lewis@utoronto.ca

A. PURPOSE

I have been informed that the purpose of the research is to examine how identity, religion, gender and nationalism inform the lives of Iraqi women in Canada and the US. Oral history interviews will be combined with archival and textual research to produce papers, articles, and ultimately a doctoral dissertation.

B. PROCEDURES

This component of the research consists of a series of interviews conducted between the researcher, Nadia Lewis, and the interviewee, ______________________. The interview(s) will be audio taped through the use of a digital voice recorder. In the resulting papers and publications, the interviewee will not be identified by name.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

There are minimal risks to participation in this interview. However, the interviewee can withdraw from the interview at any time without prejudice. During the interview the interviewee may request to stop the recording at any time to discuss or clarify how he/she wishes to respond to a question or topic before proceeding. In the event that the interviewee chooses to withdraw during the interview, any tape made of the interview will be either given to him/her or destroyed, and no transcript will be made of the interview.

If so desired, the researcher will provide to the interviewee copies of the interviews and any/all related papers and publications written by the researcher.

Upon completion of the interview, the tape and content of the interview belong to Nadia Lewis, and the information in the interview can be used by Nadia Lewis for the purposes of the dissertation research, and in any future publication or presentation of research.
D. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

☐ I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time without negative consequences.

☐ I agree to be quoted anonymously

I HAVE CAREFULLY READ THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

Interviewee Name (please print) _____________________________________________

Age ______________________________________

Religious or Ethnic identity (Sunni, Shi’a, Kurdish, Chaldean, Assyrian etc): ___________________________________________

Place of Birth (country and city): __________________________________________

Date of departure from Iraq: ___________________________________________

Date of arrival in Canada: __________________________________________

Education level (BA, MA, PhD, etc): _______________________________________

Are you currently employed in Canada? _______________________________________

Interviewee Signature _____________________________________________________

Interviewer Signature ______________________________________________________

Date ____________________      Location _____________________________________
Figure 2: Detroit Email Questionnaire

Interview Questions

1. Please briefly explain your personal background – name, age, occupation, where your family is from in Iraq.

2. Please explain why you moved from Iraq – did you come with family, alone, etc. Where does your family currently live?

3. Please explain your religious/ethnic background.

4. How do you identify – as Iraqi or as Chaldean/Muslim/Kurdish? Please explain why and what factors you believe are important to the way that you identify yourself (for example: religion, culture, food, language, traditions, dress, etc.)

5. Are you an active member of the Iraqi/Chaldean/Kurdish community? If so, please explain why and how you participate in activities relating to the community. Also, please try and specify when you became active, if this is a family tradition, if this is a social function, etc.

6. Please tell me about your work and your role in the Arab Community Center – when did you begin work here, what kind of work do you do, how do you feel that you are contributing to the Arab community in Toronto.

7. Through your work, what has been your experiences with Iraqis migrating to Canada – either recently or over the past twenty to thirty years?

8. Are there any changes that you see in the types of Iraqis that the ACC is now helping (in terms of economic, social, ethnic backgrounds.)

9. Do you feel that Toronto has a strong Iraqi community? Is there a sense of unity across religion and ethnicity between Chaldeans, Kurds and Muslim Arab Iraqis in Detroit? I am interested here in your own personal experiences in socializing or working with Iraqis.

10. Please tell me a bit about the role of women in the Iraqi community here in Toronto (in terms of social gatherings, special events, charity, professional ties, children’s organizations, women’s groups, etc.)

11. Do you feel as an Iraqi woman that life is different here for you? Are there aspects of freedom/restrictions that are different here in Canada?

12. What do you consider the role of women to be in the future of Iraq?
Figure 3: Toronto Email Questionnaire

Instructions
Please answer the following questions in your own time, giving only as much detail as you feel is comfortable for you. All information will be kept confidential and will not be shared with a second party, and all information will be used for academic purposes only.

You can type your answers directly onto this question sheet and return the answers either by email or by mail. Please also include a signed consent form, which protects your right to remove any of the information at any time. You will find the form attached to the question sheet.

Thank you in advance for taking the time and patience to help me with this research.

Interview Questions

1. Please briefly give your name, age, and occupation.

2. Where do your family originate from in Iraq originally, and did they move to another region of Baghdad before you moved to Canada or the US?

3. Please explain when and why you moved from Iraq – did you come with family, alone, etc.

4. Do you still have family back home in Iraq or do you have brothers/sisters/parents living in Canada or the US?

5. Please explain your religious/ethnic background.

6. How do you identify – as Iraqi or as Assyrian/Chaldean/Muslim/Kurdish? Please explain why and what factors you believe are important to the way that you identify yourself (for example: religion, culture, food, language, traditions, dress, etc.)

7. Are you an active member of the Iraqi/Assyrian/Chaldean/Kurdish community? If so, please explain why and how you participate in activities relating to the community.

8. Please tell me about your occupation – what you do in your job, why you chose this work, if you had any difficulties with qualifications in Canada, etc.

9. Through your work, what has been your experiences with Iraqis in Toronto/Detroit – either recently or over the past twenty to thirty years?

10. Are there any changes that you see in the types of Iraqis are now migrating to Toronto/Detroit? If yes, please explain these differences.
11. Do you feel that Toronto has a strong Iraqi community?

12. Is there a sense of unity across religion and ethnicity between Chaldeans, Kurds and Muslim Arab Iraqis in Toronto? I am interested here in your own personal experiences in socializing or working with Iraqis.

13. Please tell me a bit about the role of women in the Iraqi community here in Toronto (in terms of social gatherings, special events, charity, professional ties, children’s organizations, women’s groups, etc.)

14. Do you feel as an Iraqi woman that life is different here for you? Are there aspects of freedom/restrictions that are different in Canada and America?

15. What do you consider the role of women to be in the future of Iraq?

16. What is your opinion of life in Canada/US for Iraqis?

17. How do you feel that the next generation of Iraqi children will be able to maintain their ties to Iraq and their ethnic culture?

18. Do you feel that there are challenges that are unique to Iraqi women in Canada/US? If yes, please explain.

19. Do you aim to stay in Canada/US, or do you have plans to return to Iraq to live in the future?

20. Will you encourage your children to go back to Iraq to live? Please explain why in your own words.